



FAITH matters

January 12, 2026

Your Ancestors and Your Faith

I have never heard anyone preach a sermon based on Luke 3:23-38—the ancestry of Jesus, from Joseph (not Mary) back to “Adam, son of God.” Luke knew nothing of DNA or how genes are transmitted from one generation to another, but even ancient people knew that personal traits and character were somehow inherited. That passage in Luke 3 follows the story of Jesus’ baptism and probably there as a proof of Jesus’ being a true son of God. But I think it goes beyond that to tell us: Jesus has some of God’s DNA in him.

I don’t know how far back you have traced your ancestry or DNA, but I know mine shows that my ancestors spent the Ice Age in Spain and there are a lot military people and clergy people in my background. In 1450 one of my great grandfathers commanded an English army against the French and was awarded a nice piece of property on the Thames River for his victory. On February 29, 1703, my sixth great grandfather was captured by a band of 300 Abenakis (Pequot) and Mohican Indians and 40 French soldiers in Deerfield, Massachusetts, as a part of the famous Deerfield Massacre and forcibly marched for 30 days to Montreal, Canada, along with 218 other English people from that western Massachusetts village. His name was Martin Kellogg and he was 18 years old at the time. A year later he and 3 friends escaped back to Deerfield and at the beginning of the French and Indian War, he was recruited to be an English army officer and translator of the Iroquois language, spoken by nearly all Indian bands in New England. (The funny thing is that I attended Deerfield Academy my last two years of High School, lived in one of the houses rebuilt after being burned by Indians during the massacre, but never knew about my Grandfather Kellogg until my son did a genealogical search last year.) Add to that my great, great grandfather had his toe shot off while riding his horse during the battle of Gettysburg, my father was a Marine in WWI, and my most

definitive occupational aptitude test concluded that I should be a Naval officer and ship commander. (I guess I missed the boat on that one.)

On the clergy side, my great grandfather, grandfather, uncle, son and grandson are all in the ministry. That's six generations in a row. My ancestry also includes the Rev. Jonathan Edwards who preceded me at Yale Divinity School in the early 1700's and founded the "Great Awakening" theological movement in the Protestant Church in America with his 1741 sermon in Northfield, Massachusetts: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

I must have received a number of his genes. Why else would I have preached so many sermons that sent people home feeling I was pushing justice more than happiness? Those of you who have read Stephen Greenblatt's Pulitzer Prize winning book: "The Swerve," know how we moved from a "feel guilty and afraid of God or you go to Hell" Christian faith to a "feel good, God loves you" faith. This "pain vs. pleasure" tension has been there since the 15th century Enlightenment movement, when the emphasis was put on pleasure. Thomas Jefferson noted pleasure in the Declaration of Independence when he wrote that we all deserve to pursue happiness. Also we see this in the words of the historic Westminster Catechism, adopted in 1729 by the American Presbyterian Synod: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and ENJOY Him forever." In my life the tension has been between a military mind and a clergy mind, between fighting for the right and loving my enemy. Can I do both?

So what gifts, what struggles have you inherited from your ancestors? I hope it is a faith in God and Jesus that is always a challenge, always seeking ways to do good, to fight for justice, to live with hope and be happy. By the Grace of God, we can do it all.

~Written by Rev. Ned Edwards

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