

# THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

## CIRCLES AND ARROWS



### *Scripture:*

**John 6:28-38**

<sup>28</sup>Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ <sup>30</sup>So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?’ <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ <sup>32</sup>Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ <sup>34</sup>They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’

<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. <sup>36</sup>But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup>Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; <sup>38</sup>for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.



### **FATHER'S DAY**

Today is Father's Day. I sent three pictures of father activities to the office, and the staff selected my favorite for the bulletin cover. It shows a father and child together at the seashore, having an adventure together.

Boys, many of them, become fathers. Fathers, many of them, become grandfathers and great grandfathers. It is the circle of life. For me, this day celebrates not one time, but all time: Adventures that extend far beyond childhood, and love and respect across generations. My experience may not have been yours, but I am grateful for everyone who has a part in the circle.

### **FATHER OF THE JEWS**

Abraham was the father of the Jews. That makes him father of the Christians, and Muslims as well.

Simply put, Abraham is the man who took culture from the world of circles to the world of

arrows. Abraham is the nomad who became a city dweller. His descendants cultivated agriculture that made food more predictable than the hunters and gathers who preceded them.

The world into which Abraham was born was a world of no beginnings and no endings; it was a world of circles that was based upon days and the seasons, the crop cycles, and the human and animal reproductive cycles, to name just a few.

What he left the world was a world rooted in growth, destiny, development and time. So that is why I say he is the man who took us from the world of circles to a world of arrows.

It seems strange to promise a man that he would have descendants as plentiful as the stars, when his wife had never born children. But Abraham followed the Lord, Sarah did conceive and deliver children, and the descendants of Abraham indeed are the Jews, the Christians, and the children of Islam.

## ABRAHAM REVEALED THE GOD OF HISTORY

Abraham gave us a history, and this story is as good as any to make the point. His family became all families, and his place became all places in all times. The earth and people were created in six days, or periods: First this day, and then this day, and on the sixth day, the creation of people.

The single most important contribution of Abraham is that he broke out of the endless circles, and gave us a view of life rooted in history, with a past and with a future.

### MODERN WRITERS SAY THAT LIFE CONTINUES TO BE A CIRCLE

*Everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the power of the world always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation . . . Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves.*

- BLACK ELK

*Unless there is a new mind there cannot be a new line, the old will go on repeating itself with recurring deadliness: without invention nothing lies under the witch-hazel bush.*

- WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS



### SO IS LIFE A CIRCLE OR AN ARROW? BOTH.

So what are the things that are circular? What is it that comes back to where it started?

- The seasons.
- The cycle of a woman.
- Legends that are told again and again.
- Culture. Things will always be just the way they are.
- Fate. There are no surprises. People are part of a predictable cycle of life. There is no need of hope; what will be will be.
- People are not necessarily unique.
- And the cycle of life, or so it would appear, is circular.
- Life is a circle lived around a hub called death.

### WHAT IS LINEAR?

And what are the things that are directional?

- A journey.
- Something new that is not exactly like what has gone before.
- Time and history.
- Generations and ancestors and off-spring.
- Personhood, uniqueness, and vocation are directional.
- Progress, adventures, and surprises are new.
- Culture – we grow upon the lessons of the past.
- Faith, hope and justice are linear. They build upon each other.
- And of course, evolution itself is the belief that the future is a mutation of the past, and where the mutation is good, then so is the future.

**Abraham did more to change the concept of God in his lifetime than anyone before or since. Before him, gods were amulets and statues. They were gods of fertility, and seasons without end; Abraham's was the God of history.**

### WHY IS HISTORY IMPORTANT?

Ours is the God of History -- your history and cultural history. To confine God to one period of time, to confine God to one person, one group of

people, one place, and one faith is to forget the first lesson of Abraham. We are part of a circle of life. If one part of the circle is damaged, if one part of the circle is broken, then the circle is damaged. And to be content with no progress is to forget the lessons of Jesus Christ.

### ***THE CIRCLE OF LIFE***

Nowhere is the circle of life better explained than in a children's song, from *The Lion King*.

From the day we arrive on the planet  
And blinking, step into the sun  
There's more to see than can ever be seen  
More to do than can ever be done.  
There's far too much to take in here,  
More to find than can ever be found.  
But the sun rolling high  
Through the sapphire sky  
Keeps great and small on the endless round.

It's the Circle of Life  
And it moves us all  
Through despair and hope  
Through faith and love  
Till we find our place  
On the path unwinding  
In the Circle  
The Circle of Life.

*The Lion King*  
Music by Elton John, lyrics by Tim Rice



**SENA**



We had a great Vacation Bible School and learned some great lessons about families and other cultures. And one of the great surprises was Sena who taught us to drum with Ghana drums. She was able to teach preschool and elementary children to drum in unison, and we have posted some great pictures of the children from all over our city working and making music together.

When I saw how well the children worked together, I thought of Father's Day and the dads in our church. Sena is going to teach the dads to drum on authentic Ghana drums to the African music of the Lion King. (Ten men of the church joined Sena in the chancel area where beautiful drums from Ghana were awaiting. Sena then proceeded to teach these gentlemen some rhythmic sounds on the drums to accompany the song, The Circle of Life from *The Lion King*.)



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