

The Fathers We Need

1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25, 27-36

When God created man He had a very specific plan in mind for how people would develop and learn. His plan was the family. God created the family, even before He created the church.

And as you and I know any organisation rises and falls on its leadership. And at the head of the family, God placed fathers. Fathers in a way have one of the weightiest responsibilities – the most important structure – the family is to be led by them.

The kind of father in a family largely determines the kind of family. It is unlikely that a family will rise above the spiritual level of the father in that home, particularly if there are boys. The kind of fathers in a church largely determines the kind of church. If you have spiritually diligent fathers, you will have a church of spiritually healthy people, because those same fathers will disciple others in the church. If you have spiritually lazy fathers, the church will be unhealthy, because the same kind of laziness and selfishness they exhibit at home, they will exhibit in church. The way they neglect their responsibilities to disciple their children will carry over into a failure to disciple other Christians.

I want to show you a negative example of a father, and then a positive example. I want you to see the terrible results of being the wrong kind of father. I also want to encourage you to be the right kind of father. This applies not only to fathers, but to grandfathers, to young married man on the cusp of being fathers, and even of young men not yet married. The principles of fatherhood do not only belong to the home, they belong to the church. That is why John refers to believers in different stages of growth as little children, young men and fathers. Understanding the heart of fatherhood will help all Christian men understand the kind of men we are to be.

Eli was a permissive father. He had two sons, who were the worst kind of unbelievers. God had given the priests a portion of the sacrifices as their meals. They were well taken care of. But what Hophni and Phineas would do was while the offering of meat was being boiled for the offerer to eat before the Lord, they would send servants with a flesh-hook of three teeth to strike it in the pot and whatever came up they would eat as well. And then there came a time when they were sick of boiled meat, so they came to the offerer and demanded the raw meat so they could go and roast it for themselves. And if the people asked that the fat be burnt before the Lord, they would threaten them and bully them into giving it.

And if that wasn't enough, verse 22 tells us they would also commit fornication with women at the very entrance of the tabernacle.

What a grievous sin before God. They discouraged the people – v 17, they defiled the people.

Now what does Eli have to do with this? Eli was the priest, and Eli was their father. Eli was responsible for what happened in the tabernacle, and Eli was responsible for how his sons behaved.

But what did he do? God tells us in 3:13. Eli did not restrain his sons. Eli was a permissive father. He permitted his sons to do whatever they wanted. He gave them permission to sin.

How do I know?

Because he did nothing to stop them. He gives a limp-wristed little lecture in 2:23-25, but you can tell from the tone of the passage it had no teeth in it. It was just a token, like a dad who sighs when his son does wrong, or shakes his head and lets him carry on. Eli was a permissive father.

Fathers, God calls on us to train our children in the nurture and instruction of the Lord. God charges you to be a trainer – a coach, a leader who works hard to develop his children into servants of the Lord.

What does that mean?

It means firstly, you are to communicate to your family what is expected.

Whether it is in everyday conversations like Deuteronomy suggests, whether it is in times of discipline, whether it is around the dinner table, whether it is during family devotions (which it is your responsibility to initiate and maintain). You must make it plain what the standard of the Word of God is – regarding our walk with God, regarding how they respond to you and their mother and each other, regarding speech, money, work, attitudes, clothing, television, music, sports, friends, the opposite sex. You must communicate that to them. If they have never heard you tell them what is required, then you are a permissive father. You are leaving them to themselves. The Bible says “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left *to himself* bringeth his mother to shame.”(Pro 29:15)

Train them up in the instruction of the Lord. You say, I don’t know enough. Then open your heart to learn. Ask others. Take in the Word as much as possible.

Secondly, you are to live that standard out before your family.

A permissive father is inconsistent.

Eli had one standard for himself and another standard for his sons. He did not do what they did, but he did not insist that they follow his example. He is like many fathers today who mouth these words, “Well, you can’t force them, you just have to try and teach them and then let them decide.” I’m sure that would be Eli’s explanation for why he had one standard and his children another.

Sometimes it is the reverse. The wife and children are diligent towards the things of God, and Dad is happy about that, but it’s not for him. He is happy they love church and the Bible and prayer, but it is not for him. This is not the Biblical pattern. God wants fathers to lead their families spiritually, not follow them!

You will always battle to have your wife and children respect your authority if it is obvious to them that you are not respecting God’s authority. Anyone who sees a leader communicate a standard to them which he himself does not keep begins to resent that leader, disrespect him and ultimately rebel against him.

God is not calling for perfect fathers, he is calling for obedient fathers. Fathers who will say to their families – this is the standard of the Word of God. I am committed to it, and my family will be also.

And you know what – it means that is the standard no matter where you are, or no matter who is in your house. If the standard is no alcohol, then even when relatives pop by, you communicate to them, that your standard is no alcohol in your house. If the standard is that you will be in church at 5pm on a Sunday afternoon, then at about 4pm you communicate to whoever had dropped by that you will be in church with

your family at 5pm and they are welcome to join you. Be a consistent father who says this is the Word of God and it for us all the time, in all places, with all people.

You remember the famous words of Joshua to the people of Israel: “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Jos 24:15)

Thirdly it means supervising the standard.

Eli was apparently so out of it that he only heard from others what his sons were doing. He was not supervising them. He was not watching to see if they would obey the standard of the Word of God.

If you are given a task at work, there will usually be something to make sure you have done it. If it is not a deadline, it is a manager, a supervisor, or even a customer. A good manager gives a directive, but then watches to see if and how it is carried out. People always know when a leader is not serious about what he calls for by how he follows through with supervision. A permissive leader feels content to just say stuff into the air. An effective leader says it and then supervises it.

A standard is meaningless if you are not serious about seeing it enforced. It is meaningless to say – this is what I expect in terms of your household chores, but never check to see if it is done. It is pointless to say – “this must be done” and not care if it is done. God does not only give us commands, He watches to make sure we obey Him. If we don't He corrects us. All of us need accountability. And fathers, you need to be the hawkeyes of your home, making sure the standard is kept.

If you do not supervise the standard, you will raise hypocrites. You will raise children who either learn to duck and dive and find ways to get their own way, or you will raise children who learn to obey outwardly, but despise it inwardly. To supervise is not only to see that you do the standard, but that you embrace it from the heart, that you do it unto the Lord.

God is not content with pouting, complaining, reluctant obedience, so we should not teach our children that we are.

Fourthly, it means correcting or praising.

Eli saw that his sons disobeyed, but he never stopped them. He never corrected the disobedience. Read what God said about his actions

V28-30.

God said that Eli was actually honouring his sons more than Him. By not correcting them, he was making a choice, and it was a selfish choice. He did not want the pain that comes from correction. He did not want to ever upset them. But in order to make your children pleasing to the Lord you have to upset them, you have to correct them, because they are not inclined towards obedience, they are inclined towards disobedience. Eli didn't want to do that. He enjoyed them having their own way.

Probably since infancy, he let his children do what they wanted. It was less hassle, less trouble, less pain than restraining them. He just didn't want the fuss.

King David fell into this trap too. It says of his son Adonijah: “His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?”

Like many fathers in our society today – they are simply lazy.

So in fact, he was supremely selfish. Refusing to correct disobedience is an act of self-love, and ultimately hatred towards those who need it. Love does not let you think that disobedience pays off. A loving father wants his children to know – disobedience to God will kill you, it will destroy you. So the sting of a hiding, or the shock of a warning are Stop signs on the road to hell. And a good father puts as many as are needed to turn his children away from the path of rebellion and selfishness.

Withhold not correction from the child: for *if* thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.
(Pro 23:13-14)

Must we correct every act of disobedience? Yes. How many acts of disobedience does God tolerate? What lesson do you send when you say – you can sin now and then, but don't sin in front of me, and don't sin in a way which annoys me. The message you send to your children is – you can get away with selfishness as long as it doesn't interfere with Dad's selfishness.

Look at the sad end of Eli's family 3:10-21

The glory departed.

But let me add, we are also to praise obedience. The Father encourages us far more than He warns us. And we are to praise obedience. We are to welcome every act of compliance. Be patient with weakness, be patient with ignorance, be firm and unrelenting with rebellion.

This is what the Bible means when it says – do not provoke your children to anger. Do not exasperate them by never praising what is good. Do not exasperate them by changing the standard from one day to another. Do not exasperate them by not living out what you require of them. Love them, nurture them. Praise them. Enjoy them.

Look at a positive example for a moment Genesis 18:19. This is God commendation of Abraham:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.
(Gen 18:19)

He would communicate the standard ('he will command'), He would live it ('after him'), He would supervise and correct it ("and they shall keep the way of the LORD')

But let me turn the tables now and speak to all who are not fathers. This applies not only to children, but to wives, to men when dealing with older men, to all of us when we deal with fathers. God also has given commands regarding how fathers are to be treated.

Listen to your father. (Proverbs 15:5; 23:22)

Fathers, God has said, if you speak, they must hear.

Listen to your father. Do not brush him off. Do not walk away while he is talking to you. Turn your attention away from the TV or computer or your book and listen to them. Ask if you don't understand. If your parents tell you to do something, and you don't understand, then you must ask.

Obey your Father in the Lord. (Proverbs 6:20, Ephesians 6:1)

If your father sets a standard which is biblical, then God expects you to obey him. . That means you must see that obeying your parents is obeying God. Even when you don't feel like obeying your parents, you can seek to please God by obeying them.

To disobey your father when he is instructing you to do something which is true to the Word of God is a very serious offence. Look in Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

God places fathers in the primary position of spiritual leadership in a home. Fathers will have a greater impact on children's spiritually than a pastor will ever have.

Honour Fathers

Do you know every thing in human life represent something in the spiritual realm? And fathers represent the Father. And if for no other reason, that is the reason to honour fathers – for what they represent.

What does it mean to honour? It means to respect and revere. It is to give the person a high place in your life.

How you speak to your father.

Speak respectfully to your father. That means not answering back when corrected or arguing. It means not being cheeky or sassy or sarcastic. It means not being rude, disrespectful or insulting. It means addressing them in the way they have taught you. It means saying please and thank you. It means asking for permission. Never curse your parents or insult them.

How you speak about father.

That means don't talk about him to others in a way that dishonours them. Don't use terms like 'my old man'. Don't belittle him or try to make him sound stupid, incompetent, ignorant or out of touch. Don't ridicule your father, or join in conversations that make fun of your father. "The eye *that* mocketh at *his* father, and despiseth to obey *his* mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." (Pro 30:17)

Above all, to curse your father in his absence brings great displeasure from God. "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness." (Pro 20:20)

How you treat your father

To honour is also to bless. It means to give them esteem, to treat them in a way which suggests you think of them highly. You say – you are the Father, the leader, the man of this home. God has placed you in this position. We honour you, we esteem you.

Do you know what happens when you treat a godly man like a godly man? He wants to be even more godly.

When God spoke to Ezekiel about the sin in Israel He said, I looked for a man who could stand in the gap. We need those sort of men in our families. We need those sort of men in our church. When a church is filled with lazy, selfish, permissive men, it is not long before the word Ichabod will be written on the church – the glory has departed. But if it is filled with men like Abraham, who communicate the standard, live it consistently, supervise it and correct it – and there will be much rejoicing. And we need wives, children, singles, and all others honouring and supporting the fathers – holding up their arms as they seek to disciple their children and others for the Lord.