



by Alan Patterson

I. UNDERSTAND WHAT WE ARE FACING AND AIMING FOR

- A. Each generation has the prospect of at least beginning (if not continuing) a godly heritage.
- B. Let's be clear on *the goal* = *that the son love God's Word and God Himself*. If that happens, then we will have few concerns. Put another way, we are aiming for the outcome of seeing and hearing that our children walk in truth. There is no greater joy (*3 John 1:4*).
- C. Raising such children IS A BATTLE and young men face numerous dangers. "Young man, you're on the road that has more byways to hell than any other stretch of highway you'll encounter throughout your days on this earth. With every breath you draw, you are developing the habits of mind, heart, and body that will shape who you will become in your adult life and that will shape your eternal destiny. And everything in the world is against you. . . . To top all, your greatest enemy is within the gates. Your own flesh is eager to sell all to the world and the devil." (Douglas Bond's *Stand Fast*, pp. 24-25)
- D. The family is under attack from every angle – the media, the broader church, and even the government.
- E. Some good Christians are relying too much upon church and school to train their children for them. Some fathers are not thinking much about how to utilize the time off work to train and teach their families – family altar is not important for many.
- F. Fathers must be careful about the heroes we present to our children.

- G. We are not being careful enough with our use of entertainment and amusement. We are amusing ourselves to death.
- H. We must acknowledge our failures and do all in our power to meet our parental responsibilities but also know that some of the best of men have had wayward sons. “Godly parents have often been afflicted with wicked children; grace does not run in the blood, but corruption does. We do not find that David’s children imitated him in his devotion; but his false steps they trod in, and in those did much worse, and repented not. Parents know not how fatal the consequences may be if in any instance they give their children bad examples.” (Matthew Henry)
- I. Fathers are IMPORTANT – Murray says they are a “means of grace.” “The family is the great institution for this object; a believing and God-devoted fatherhood is one of the mightiest means of grace.” Andrew Murray in *The Children for Christ*, p. 27.

II. APPEAL (CALL) FOR THEIR HEART (*Prov. 23:24-27*).

A. Note the power for joy that a child has.

1. Joy comes from having a “*wise son*,” one who accepts biblical wisdom, one who loves the Word. **THIS IS THE KEY ASPECT OF A CHILD’S CHARACTER.**
2. Note the change here to direct address. Speak to the child, at the right time, with direct appeal. Consider a somewhat parallel passage in *1 Thess. 2:11*, which says fathers *exhort* (call alongside, encourage, comfort), *encourage/comfort*, and *implore* (“*testify*”, here to make an earnest and solemn appeal).

B. Note what we are battling for – the heart of the child.

Others are battling for it as well = the world, self, friends, immoral people, the devil himself.

1. The giving of the heart is an act of the will, and though it ought to be natural, it requires decision by the son.
2. The evidence that the son has done this is that he “delights” in the father’s “ways.” He adopts the father’s lifestyle.

C. The question is how the father can get his son to give him his heart.

1. Starts with the father’s testimony of wisdom. The father must have a consistent testimony before his son.

2. Then the father appeals to the son.
 - a. Shows him the dangers of the alternatives (here, in this context, the adulterous woman).
 - b. Looks for the right time to appeal – family devotions is a good time if the son is responsive.
 - c. The father tries to help the son establish a consistent devotional habit that gives him a love for and confidence in the Word.

D. John Paton is an example of a son who had given his heart to his father. *“The appearance of my father, when we parted – his advice, prayers, and tears – the road, the dyke, the climbing up on it and then walking away, head uncovered – have often, often, all through life, risen vividly before my mind, and do so now while I am writing, as if it had been but an hour ago. In my earlier years particularly, when exposed to many temptations, his parting form rose before me as that of a guardian Angel. It is no Pharisaism, but deep gratitude, which make me here testify that the memory of that scene not only helped, by God’s grace, to keep me pure from the prevailing sins, but also stimulated me in all my studies, that I might not fall short of his hopes, and in all my Christian duties, that I might faithfully follow his shining example.”* (John Paton’s Autobiography, p. 26)

III. AVOID THE ERRORS OF THOSE WHO HAD UNGODLY SONS.

- A. Abraham with Ishmael** (*Gal. 4:29-30*).
- B. Isaac with Esau.** (*Heb. 12:16*)
- C. Jacob** with many of his sons. Joseph about the only godly one among the twelve.
- D. Aaron with Nadab and Abihu**, who were judged for offering “strange fire” (Num. 3:4; Lev. 10:1-2). **Eleazar** and **Ithamar** seemed to have been godly men, with Eleazar becoming the high priest (Deut. 10:6).
- E. David**
 1. **Amnon** (raped Tamar)
 2. **Absalom** (rebelled to become king)
 3. **Adonijah** (also rebelled and tried to become king).
- F. Solomon with Rehoboam** (2 Chron. 12:1). Evidently, Solomon’s appeals to his son went unheeded.
- G. Samuel with Joel and Abijah** (*1 Sam. 8:1-3, 5*)

H. Eli with Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam. 2:12; 22-24; 29-30, 34-35)

1. These words are critical not only of Hophni and Phinehas but also of Eli the father.
2. **What were Eli's failures regarding the sons?**
 - a. **Lack of instruction:**
 - 1) They did not "know" the LORD (1 Sam. 2:12).
 - 2) This is their personal decision but the phrase also suggests that Eli did not teach them about the character of the LORD. He failed in his instruction.
 - b. **Discontent:** the terminology is that they "*kicked at God's sacrifice*" (2:29; cf. Deut. 32:15).
 - 1) This suggests an ox kicking out at its owner and provider. Israel was well fed and fat and yet kicked at the LORD (see Deut. 32:15). The term suggests discontent with the abundant provision of the LORD.
 - 2) Feeding the discontent was the impatience of these men. They would not even wait for the meat to finish boiling before taking their more-than-authorized portion.
 - c. **Greed:** (Note Eli's participation in this greed in 2:29)
 - 1) He set an example of greed as he participated with them in the extortion of the best portions of meat, contrary to the law which specified that they received the heave-leg and wave-breast and that only AFTER the fat portions had been burned on the altar (see Lev. 7:30-34).
 - 2) Is this lack of discipline why Eli was so "heavy," even in his old age? (See 1 Sam. 4:18).
 - d. **Tolerance of evil (indulgence)** in the sons (2:29-30).
 - 1) God Himself states that Eli honored his sons more than he honored the Lord. The first problem is that Eli tolerated the evil abuses of the priesthood that his sons were practicing.
 - 2) We know the sons were unteachable (see 2:25 – "*they would not listen to the voice of their father*") but this text blames Eli for allowing the evil.

- 3) What should Eli have done? Immediate banishment of the sons from the priesthood and possibly even capital punishment for adultery and blatant disobedience to a parent.
- 4) Another text says that Eli's house will be judged precisely because he knew of the "iniquity" of his boys and did not rebuke them (3:13).
- 5) *Les Olilla* – "It is not what you teach but what you tolerate."
- 6) Note: Eli became judge at the age of 58 and judged Israel for 40 years (1 Sam. 4:18). Later his children are spoken of as young men (2:17), so they were the children of his old age. Was this part of the reason for his indulgence?
- 7) Eli was *inconsistent*. He was "hasty and severe in reproving Hannah, but slow and mild in reproving his sons." (Pulpit Commentary)
- 8) **Learn:**
 - (i) Fathers must sometimes not only reprove but also do what they can to end a son's evil practices.
 - (ii) Fathers, no matter their natural disposition for or against it, must rule their homes.
 - (iii) Fathers should beware of being indulgent with children who come along in later years.
 - (iv) Fathers who do not stop what is in their power to stop become complicit in the evil themselves (cf. 1 Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 1:6).
 - (v) The judgment that comes on fathers and their families for complicity in evil is sobering. (1 Sam. 2:31-36).
 - (vi) For a father who is having trouble maintaining his authority, let him have few rules but enforce those few.

e. **Despising God**

- 1) Not only did Eli honor his sons above God, but the further explanation is that he actually "despised" God (2:30).
- 2) The word means to *disdain, treat as worthless, hold in contempt*. Gen. 25:34 – Esau despised his birthright. 1 Sam. 17:42 – Goliath despised David.

- 3) **Learn:**
- (i) Our view of God comes out in our attitudes and actions in God's house and also toward God's specific commands.
 - (ii) If we hold God up high in the esteem of our children, then God will honor us.
 - (iii) God's judgment will come upon a father and family that put family, food, and finances before God. He preferred "'my boys' to 'my God.'" For Eli, blood was thicker than fidelity." (Davis)
 - (iv) Do not think that softness and simply being "nice" to your children will please God, when He expects correction and rebuke.
 - (v) Sons can be godly -- Hannah and her son Samuel provide a great contrast to Eli and his sons.

IV. FOLLOW THE BIBLICAL EXAMPLES WHO DID A GOOD JOB OF RAISING THEIR CHILDREN.

*We have little information about most of these, but some merit further study (e.g., Joseph as a father).

**These are fathers who had more than one godly son.

A. Adam—Abel and Seth (but also Cain)

B. Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth (*Heb. 11:7; 2 Peter. 2:5*)
[though all three were evidently believers, yet Ham was a poor example of a believer]

C. Joseph and Mary—James, Jude, Jesus

D. Zebedee—the apostles James and John

E. Amram and Jochebed—Moses and Aaron (and Miriam)
(*Heb. 11:23; Acts 7:20*).

1. **Learn:** The early years (ages 1-5) are absolutely critical for a child's spiritual preparation.
 - a. Moses learned virtually everything he knew about the Lord from his parents during those years at home before he was weaned – around 4 or 5 in that culture.

- b. Note: he could not have found a Bible in Pharaoh's library for Bibles were not yet written. So before he left home he apparently knew who the people of God really were, that while sin offers pleasure it only lasts 'for a season,' that the Messiah was coming, that heavenly rewards are of greater value than earthly treasures, and that the invisible God could protect him from the anger of an all-powerful earthly king. He had the character to do what was right no matter what it cost him. (Quoted in John Stormer, *Growing Up God's Way*, p. 46).
 - c. Take advantage of those early years (see 2 Tim. 3:15).
2. Learn: Example is key for training children.
- a. If we do right the likelihood is high that the children will be blessed from choosing to do right themselves. (see Deut. 4:40)
 - b. Children are made in our likeness, so it is no surprise that they follow our ways. (see Gen. 5:3).
 - c. The statement in the 10 commandments suggests that children often follow in their parents' sins. (See Ex. 20:5).
 - d. For our encouragement, note too that our obedience also brings blessings upon the children. (see Ex. 20:6)
3. Learn: Fathers must enforce their teaching with training.
- a. "*Teaching* instructs a child in what is right and wrong. Teaching spells out what is acceptable behavior and what is not. *Training* combines such teaching with requiring the child to always do what he has been taught. Training involves applying penalties whenever he does wrong. This takes so much time.
 - b. Teaching without training really tells the child, 'What I am teaching you is not really important because if it were, I would require you to do it.' **Teaching without training is hypocrisy. Teaching without training results in sullen, mixed up, insecure rebellious young people.**" (John Stormer, *Growing up God's Way*, p. 30).

V. CONCLUDING QUOTES AND APPLICATIONS.

- A. Piety in youth is pleasant and not restrictive and sad as many think. “Jonathan Edwards, the consummate Puritan – who in fact preferred swallowing chocolate to prunes, loved to go outside during thunderstorms, and enjoyed going for long horseback rides, and found great pleasure in the wife of his youth – argued that ‘if you become pious while young, it will tend to make your youth more abundantly pleasant.’” Douglas Bond’s *Stand Fast*, p. 43.
- B. We should pray as Manoah did for wisdom to know how to raise a child for the Lord. (*Judges 13:12*)
- C. We should pray as Job did for children who are now adults. (*Job 1:5*).
- D. Seek to be a Jonadab, the progenitor of Rechab. We need more Rechabs, for not only his sons, but his grandsons honored him.
1. See *Jeremiah 35* where we read that Rechab’s sons kept the command of their father (note that the Bible did not command that people abstain from all wine and that they live only in tents).
 2. The progenitor of this family, Jonadab, had probably lived around 300 years earlier (see *2 Kings 10:15*), so the command had been kept for centuries.
 3. His commands went beyond what the Bible requires, but his sons and his grandsons honored his command and God honored them for doing it!
 4. Learn: Okay for fathers to determine that certain practices are not good for his family under their circumstances, regardless of whether there is an explicit command.
- E. Let’s pray *Psalms 90:16-17* for our children, especially that the “*beauty of the LORD*” (KJV) would be “*upon them.*”