

FATHERS AND CHILDREN

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God has made the man the head of the family (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-6). And God has given *fathers* the responsibility for training the children properly. God says, “And, ye *fathers*, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Sadly, many men forsake their God-given responsibility and the consequences are disastrous for their families, even for generations (Exod 34:7).

Mothers and fathers

Mothers have a vital, indispensable role in the bringing up of the children (Prov 1:8; 6:20; 29:15; 30:17; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Tim 5:14). But fathers are the ones who are ultimately responsible and will be held accountable for how the children are brought up. That obviously means that there will have to be a great deal of planning, coordination and communication between the two parents so that the house is not divided (Matt 12:25; Mark 3:25; Luke 11:17). The bottom line is that the father must take the leadership responsibility and directly train the children when he is there, and make sure that the proper training is taking place when he is not there. Fathers must instruct (Prov 1:8), and command (Prov 6:20) their children, and “*bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Eph 6:4). God says, “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*” (Prov 22:6). This is the father’s job.

Abraham as a father

Abraham is an excellent example of training his children as God commands. Concerning Abraham, God said, “*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*” (Gen 18:19). Later, Abraham made sure that his son Isaac married a righteous woman (Gen 24), and Isaac in turn did the same for his son Jacob (Gen 28). Fathers (along with mothers) must diligently teach the word of God to their children, when they are sitting in the house, walking by the way, when lying down at night and when getting up the next morning (Deut 6:4-7; 11:18-19). The proper training of children in the ways of God is a continuous, ongoing process during all waking hours. God commanded fathers to teach His law to their children “*that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God*” (Psa 78:1-8).

King David as a father

This is exactly what king David did. David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), and David diligently trained his son Solomon. David said, “*And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever*” (1 Chr 28:9). It is no accident that young Solomon valued wisdom and understanding to the point that that was what he asked God for when God gave him the opportunity to ask for anything (1 Kgs 3:3-14). This was a reflection of Solomon’s training by his father David (Prov 4:3-7). David

FATHERS AND CHILDREN

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taught Solomon in the way of wisdom and led him in right paths (Prov 4:11), instructing him not to turn either to the right hand or the left (Prov 4:12-27). All fathers should do as David did (Prov 23:22-25).

Love and discipline

God sent John the Baptist before Christ in order to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children” (Mal 4:5-6; Luke 1:17). The souls of the children should be a father’s utmost concern. The apostle Paul compared the way in which he exhorted, comforted and charged the Thessalonian brethren to walk worthy of God to the way “a father does his children” (1 Thes 2:11-12). A loving father will also administer correction and physical discipline as his children need it (Prov 3:12; Heb 12:7-11). This is for their spiritual profit (Heb 12:10). The rod and reproof are the necessary combination to drive the foolishness out of children (Prov 13:1,24; 15:5; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15). But this discipline must be administered consistently and fairly and not arbitrarily or abusively (Heb 12:9-10). Isaac and Jacob showed partiality as fathers (Gen 25:28; 37:3-4), and this caused problems in their households. Fathers must not provoke their children to anger or spiritually discourage them (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21).

When the children are grown

It is also vital to understand that a father’s responsibilities never completely end. It is true that when the children are grown, they get married and become their own household, no longer under the direct authority of their parents (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-5; Mark 10:6-7). But fathers must continue to advise, guide, and even rebuke their grown children. Noah rebuked (and actually cursed) his son Ham for dishonoring him (Gen 9:20-27). Ham was a grown man with a wife and son when this happened. Jacob rebuked his grown sons, Simeon and Levi (Gen 34:30). The good father in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son offers love, training and instruction to his grown sons (Luke 15:11-32). This is where the high priest Eli went wrong. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were doing wickedly with God’s sacrifices (1 Sam 2:12-17), and Eli evidently said nothing to them about that. God sent a prophet to ask Eli, “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people (1 Sam 2:29)?” When Eli heard that his sons were committing fornication with the women who came to the tabernacle, Eli did at least rebuke them for that (1 Sam 2:22-25). But Eli had the authority to do more, though he neglected to. As high priest, Eli could have removed his sons from being priests, but he chose not to. God prophesied destruction against the house of Eli (1 Sam 2:27-36; 3:11-14), because “his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1 Sam 3:13). By either keeping silence in the face of his sons’ wickedness, or offering nothing more than a verbal reprimand, Eli was guilty of honoring his sons above God (1 Sam 2:29). In contrast to Eli, king Asa of Judah removed his own mother as queen when she set up an idol (1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Chr 15:16). And Abraham certainly passed the test of whether he loved his son Isaac above God (Gen 22). The Lord must always be our only Master (Matt 6:24; 10:37; Luke 14:26; 16:13).