



"JUST LIKE YOU: Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children" - 1 Samuel 2:12-4

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Jesus Fellowship of Believers
of Menomonie, Wisconsin
on Wednesday August 12th, 2015

One of the great issues that the greater church as well as *this specific church* has struggled with over the years, is the prima donna attitude when it comes to parenting. The problem is that so often no one can speak into our lives when it comes to our children, when it comes to council in the areas of discipline, freedoms, schooling, and church interaction. In fact, as a non-parent, I have a unique view of

this issue: the guy who is able to step back and look at such objectively and without the passionate, if not obstinate, responses of the average parent when it comes to this issue. From my perspective, it seems frankly that a lot of parents seem to not love their children all that much, because if they were mine, all the cards would be on the table. I would be open to all perspectives and counseling volleys, especially from those who have had a tendency toward success in this area!

Yet everyone believes that the struggles, the rebellion, the volcanic pride that has spewed forth from *other* peoples kids would and will never happen to me! "*Oh No! Not my kids!*" Again, that gamble smacks of arrogant self-involvement and a willingness to risk the eternal standing of your children for the sake of appearance and status. This of course, does not take into account the *scriptural* directives. We again, just offer up excuses why we can't...but in truth it is *why we won't* do it God's way. So apparently we have trumped even deity when it comes to our childrearing methods, so I guess maybe I shouldn't feel too bad when my counsel also is rejected! I know...you are probably sitting there thinking "*you tell 'em pastor!*" Because you think I am talking about their kids and not yours.

The priest Eli was this kind of man. What little we know about him leads me to believe that he was...*on many levels*, a committed priest and a gentle soul. But when it came time to reign in his children, there appears to be a personal "blind spot." Now, you may not realize that preachers kids are famous for their rebellion and behavior issues. I have known many through the years of my upbringing, was friends with several and finally married myself one! So let me tell you that preachers kids can be disastrous in many cases. Maybe because the pastors are too busy dealing with the church and worrying about other people's kids instead of taking care of their own. Maybe it's just a case of a more extreme spiritual warfare upon such families, I do not know. Maybe...maybe the pastors are also unwilling to seek and receive counsel in this area for the same fleshly reasons as everyone else.

The scriptural account tells us that Eli had many excellent character qualities. It seems he was a moral man. No record of terrible sin. He did not drink, steal, lie or swear. He never divorced his wife, committed adultery, or abused his children. His dealings with Samuel showed no jealousy or animosity even though he knew that Samuel would one day become the spiritual leader of Israel. When Samuel revealed God's judgment against Eli, Eli responded quietly and submissively: "He is the Lord; let Him do what is good in His eyes" (1 Samuel 3:18).

Furthermore, it is clear that Eli had a deep love for God, the ark, and for God's presence. When the ark was carried into battle, Eli's heart feared for it. And when he heard of the capture of the ark of God, he fell off his seat, broke his neck and died. Right to his death, Eli cared deeply about the things of God.

Yet Eli failed just as deeply as a parent, and such overshadowed all of his other notable qualities. He was passive and aloof. It's been said that passivity is "religion without reality." Eli was going through the motions of faith, but in fact his life was void of the real presence of God. Despite what we claim, one cannot separate our actions from who we REALLY are. A rebellious man is a rebel, a stubborn man is a mule, a man who rejects counsel is a fool. Thus behavior of laziness, self absorption, self-centeredness, pride, etc, simply says that is who you *really* are!

The big struggle for us all us to acknowledge...and I mean *really* acknowledge not just kidding, is that our kids are sinners and left to their own path, they will be wicked and self absorbed because that is our human condition and the natural tendency of us all left unchecked. How many of us have wholesale rejected the biblical directive of "raise up a child in the way he should go," or have redefined the words "train up" to fit the culture of today? So we treat our 13, 14, and 15 year old child like they're our friends, not our kids...or pretend they're "little adults" and are ok to "choose" the responses and actions according to their will. I have heard it all: *Our child is a good kid and we are just letting him or her make his or her own decisions...because we think that is best thing.* Well God didn't and God doesn't. It tells you clearly and emphatically that YOU are to make the decisions and TRAIN the child accordingly! Then there is the parent that thinks that their child is too young to discipline so by the time they get around to it if they ever do, the child has already developed a rebellious spirit. Or how about play video games and have no chores, or involve themselves in sports or other extracurricular scholastic activities that would preclude them from church and youth group and children's ministries. The list goes on, and as you can see I have formulated some keen opinions on what I have witnessed throughout the years of ministry. Suffice it to say, I don't think we are doing very well over all.

Eli no doubt lost control of his kids long before the story line opens up here in chapter 2. This kind of behavior is not born overnight. They were involved with church, but were anything but God's true children. They were physically present, but still evil to the bone. ALL of us are so born, and unless we are born *again*, we are lost....like the tens of millions who have gone on before us! We cannot just "hope for the best" with our children. We must actually RAISE THEM...TRAIN THEM, as scripture mandates.

Verse 13-17 says that they demanded *theirs* before God get's his. Now for many kids, they learned this from their parents. Whether it was money, or time, or energies...no matter, we often show our kids that it is "me first" and thus failing the "seek first the kingdom of God...." test. We tend to cry 'foul' on this matter, by saying "hey! I love Christ firstly! I love God supremely!" But please note, that's not what this verse says. It does not say "seek first God." We would still flunk that test, but specifically this passage in Matthew 6:33, Jesus calls upon us to "seek first the kingdom of God..." That would encompass His pursuits, His directives, His church, His priorities and objectives.

Chapter 2, verse 12 says that Eli's sons, "did not know the Lord." We cannot just let our children grow up neutral so that they can "decide for themselves about God." They're growing up in a world that is hostile to God. It will be a battle you will lose! We must teach our children not just the *rules* of God, but His nature and character and history. God must be more than a set of "ten commandments." He must be a person and a person of ultimate authority. If there is truly no authority in *your* house, that how will that child come to understand the concept?

Our answer to such usually revolves around excuses and reasoning's as to why we cannot at this time fulfill such marching orders. "*What about ME time? What about my need to mow the lawn and grocery shop?*" But factually it is never such issues that prevent us from such obedience. It is US! Our hobbies, our fun, our excess, our careers, our pride.

Come and talk to me when you don't own a TV anymore, and your toys are gone and we will actually begin a dialogue on this issue! But we...like Eli...by our sins of *omission*, the sins of *not doing what we are supposed to do*, cause our children to follow in our footsteps and become just like us. We make them rebellious because *we* are rebellious. They chase the world because they watch us do it as they grow up. Our priorities easily become their priorities!

Eli's failure to put a stop to this, made these boys...men really at this point, no doubt feel that they could do what they wanted...that it didn't really matter, that it wasn't a big deal, and the greatest offense is they would be led to believe that what God directed took a back seat to what **they** wanted! And that is a hellish mixture that is sure to kill them...if only eternally after a lifetime of misery, sexual promiscuity, chasing the dollar, and hurting anyone who gets in their way.

We can claim that these "men" are just that...*adults*, and that Eli was no longer responsible for them. But that is kidding ourselves and dodging the blame. Certainly there are instances where the parents and the parenting were exemplary and the kid still 'went south.' But the reality is, we cannot live a sloppy life and truthfully expect our kids do grow up different. No...these boys of Eli no doubt had a "juvi" record! No doubt there was the attitude of "you're preachers kids!" And "I'm an important man in the community" so that makes my kids important!

Eli seemed to be a good and gentle man, but he was also a *weak* man. And his weakness was his undoing. Not grave sins or manifest evil, but just the weakness to do what was right. Too weak to take a stand for God and for what He knew he was supposed to do. It's a tragedy in our age! We fail to be real men of God...to be humble, other-centered, transparent in life, and upright when not in public. We fail to grasp the call to be a godly woman, and either demand our own way and force what we want, or we take the low road and roll over in spiritual timidity...allowing our families and marriages to crumble, and claim we are "just being submissive."

This is not a matter of excessive dominance in the house. This is not about tight control as much as it is faithful example. But you can not expect that your child will place God first in their life if *you* do not! And if you let them choose what they want to do as a 'at-home-teenager' then they will ultimately do wrong. That's the bible. That's the garden of eden! TRAIN...TRAIN...TRAIN..., not tell, tell, tell. Our children are frankly little mirrors of our home life, whether we want to admit that or not. Children are incredibly observant but poor interpreters, so don't ever expect them to magically be more than you are!

Certainly rules must be given and obedience demanded. But I'm not advocating a child has no freedoms or decision abilities. But those freedoms we often give them because they're OUR kids so thus they are better than the rest, ultimately can condemn them to hell.

I always felt my father was like God in his dealing with me. He gave me opportunities, but they were based on my behavior. There was often grace...as with God, but we cannot say that God's grace means that our behavior and response to Him has no bearing on our free movement and the joys of a level of self-determination. Please note, that eventually these sons of Eli would *die* as God said because of their actions. So...as Paul said, don't confuse grace with the freedom to sin! God is not looking the other way!

My Dad was extremely supportive, honest and often blunt with his counsel, and tender, loving, and venerable. But He also practiced discipline with no compromise or apology. And maybe God is different with you, but that is exactly how God is with me. My dad was never my friend. He was my **dad**. When we make our kids our friends we are shucking our responsibility and our God-given rolls. That is truthfully more about your need to be liked and approved of than obedient to God. God is not "your buddy" either, where you 'high-5' Him and He is "cool" with how you live. No, He is your *Dad*. He is GOD. Do not attempt to make him something else. He is our example when it comes to parenting. And we can either do it HIS way or we can do it **wrong**. The choice is ours.

My God made me His child and made me a redeemed reborn human. But my dad made me a **man**.

1. Caution **new parents** - don't bow down to the *baby god*.
2. Caution parents of **adolescents** - don't bow down to the *kids-will-be-kids god*.
3. Caution parents of **teens** -don't bow down to the *but-Johnny's-parents-let-him god*
(Brian Bell)

Eli's sin was to go against the spiritual concept in Matthew 10:35-37...*"he who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* Ultimately he...and many of us, simply love **ourselves more than God OR our sons and daughters!** Dad's having baby tantrums and his children follow after him doing the same! It is Christ who...according to Luke 1:17, "turns the hearts of the Fathers to the children." Thus, when our hearts are *not* so...God is absent from the home and the heart!

Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory.

Build me a son whose wishbone will not be where his backbone should be; a son who will know Thee and that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge. Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge. Here let him learn to stand up in the storm; here let him learn compassion for those who fail.

Build me a son whose heart will be clean, whose goal will be high; a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men; one who will learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; one who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past. **And** after all these things are his, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor, so that he may always be serious, yet never take himself too seriously. Give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength. Then I, his father, will dare to whisper, "I have not lived in vain." **General Douglas MacArthur**