

Dads, Your Children Need You

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When the inspired apostle spelled out the sort of men who would be the elders for our congregations, he told us to pay attention to the kind of father a man is (1 Tim. 3:4-5). And, of the 16 qualifications, there are three that the Spirit saw fit to explain: An elder can't be a novice, because a novice would be at risk of "being puffed up with pride" and soon "fall into the same condemnation as the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6, NKJV). He must be a man who enjoys a good reputation in his community, "lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:7, NKJV). The third of these has to do with his observable skill as a dad: "...one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Tim. 3:4-5, NKJV).

Occasionally brethren will disagree on the practical question as they select their elders, "If a man was a good father before his children left home, has he met this qualification even if his children have left the faith as adults?" I believe the answer is no, and to answer the question otherwise misses the point Paul is making. There is something about how a man governs his home that should indicate to us whether or not he has the necessary skill to

govern the church. What we really need to know is this: Has he, in his parenting, shown the ability to successfully guide people to heaven? Some of this skill in rearing children to love the Lord and His church is intangible and can only be seen later, **after** the children have left home. In fact, I doubt we really know that a man has this qualification until his children have left his roof. Titus 1:6 gives an additional statement on the matter, "...having faithful children." This passage doesn't say that **all** of his children must have grown into adulthood and are faithful Christians, but it should be most. We must be able to say with good reason that he has shown in his childrearing the quality of being able to successfully guide to heaven those who are in his charge.

There are compelling statements about a father's leadership in Hebrews 12:5-11. I suggest you read that passage now, then you'll be ready to read the rest of this article.

⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,

Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

⁶ *For whom the Lord loves He chastens,*

And scourges every son whom He receives."

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (NKJV)

This passage is filled with assumptions about good dads. The writer's point is that we should be faithful despite the fact that Christianity, and life itself, comes with hardships, and he discusses growing up with a good dad.

The only way this passage worked in the minds of first century readers is because there was

a consistency—a predictability, if you will—in the kind of fathers most children had among God’s people. A dad’s firm, loving discipline implies he pays attention to his children’s lives. He may not have the same intuitive senses that Mom has, but he’s involved and shoulders his role and his children know it. He is on the job of training them all the time. By teaching, encouraging, loving, and of course, chastening. He doesn’t enjoy punishing them, but he does it. He knows it’s essential if they are to learn self-discipline.

The word *chastening* or *disciplining* is the same Greek word as found in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the **discipline** and instruction of the Lord” (emp. added). Discipline isn’t just punishment. It’s punishment in the context of careful, thought-out grooming and direction. The Greek word for chastening, *paideia*, refers to “whatever adults do to cultivate the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing passions” (*Strong’s*). This is the word translated “chastening” in verses 5, 7, 8, and 11.

A good dad understands the kind of values his children will need to live good/holy lives after they leave him. So, he is going to make sure his daughters dress modestly when they go out of the house. He’ll make sure chores are done well. He’ll teach his children to respect people’s property. He’ll make sure his family is ready and present at all worship assemblies. He’ll never sit idly as his children sass their momma.

Verses nine through eleven explain the goals in the heart of a Christian father, and every good dad should adopt them in his soul: Respect, and a happy Christian life:

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, **and we paid them respect**. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward **it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it.” (Heb. 12:9-11, NKJV, emp. added)

Why should a dad practice serious, loving discipline? There are two reasons given in Hebrews 12 and if your discipline isn’t focused on these two objectives, you need to reevaluate and change. One of these is with short-range goals in mind, the other with long-range goals.

First, to build reverence and respect (vs. 9). This is the immediate goal and pictures

Dad as a discipliner. He teaches obedience. The ability to say “No” and make it stick is perhaps the greatest gift a parent has (Prov. 29:17). Will our children grow up with Biblical, moral convictions or with moral relativism? That largely depends on you, Dad. The way your children will learn to reverence God is by respecting his dad and mom (1 John 5:3).

Here are suggestions to teach/maintain your children’s respect:

1. Try not to shout at your children, and never use foul language. Teach them to obey your word because you are saying it, not because you are saying it loudly. It is better to bind your children to you by a feeling of respect than by fear.
2. Never permit your child to challenge your position/authority as a parent without correction.
3. Don’t make hollow threats of punishment. Unless you learn mitigating circumstances, deliver the spankings you said you would. Otherwise you are sending confusing messages.
4. At an early age make the consequence of obvious rebellion unpleasant. How do small children learn not to poke themselves in the eye with objects? Sometimes by doing it, learning it hurts. Simple. Same with training them about other things too. How do we react to tests of will?

Second, our goal is to produce “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (vs. 11), or a joy in Christian living. This is a long-term goal. One observation before we dig deeper into this: Dads sometimes get it wrong, even when doing their best, but your Heavenly Father **never** gets it wrong. God gets the love right, the mercy right (Psa. 103:8-14), and the discipline right. Dads sometimes get it wrong, but take heart—the Holy Spirit knows that, acknowledges that, and yet still uses us as comparison to God and His discipline. Hebrews 12 is actually not looking at the perfect God to understand the imperfect daddy better. This is looking at the imperfect daddy to see God, who is always perfect, better.

The text continues, “No chastening for the present seems joyous, but painful but grievous.” Notice that the “grievous” aspect of discipline results in the “peaceable fruit of righteousness.” **Grievous.** I never liked it as a child. “Meet me in the bathroom” (that’s where my father preferred to administer spankings) were chilling words. I took some chewing gum once that didn’t belong to me. My father found the evidence and I got one swat for every wrapper. I remember that, and today I’m not a thief and not really tempted to steal. What if, instead of my stealing resulting in a spanking, it resulted in a positive

experience? In Lads to Leaders we like to say, “In kids, what gets rewarded gets repeated.”

When I was about twelve, I went with a friend to a carnival. I shouldn't have done it, but I listened to the carnies shouting out to play their games and what you could win, and I spent some time and money in one of the gaming booths. It was early in the day, and that man rigged it so that we won every time we played (he wanted us to be his unwitting advertisement). I had an arm full of stuffed animals, and when someone asked me where I got them, I told them about that easy game over there, and he should go win some too! I naturally went back later that day to get more, and I lost every time. It's good for kids if doing the wrong thing turns out badly. That's largely Dad's job.

Some dads put the need for discipline/training of their kids on a sort of credit plan. That is, they will either pay now, or pay later in the interest called **grief**. The Simple English translation is interesting here, “All punishment seems terrible at the time. It is painful. But, for people who have been trained by it, it pays off with a peaceful crop of righteousness,”

Not all parenting skills passed down from generation to generation are good. Remember, child abuse is from hell. Loving discipline, in appropriate measures at appropriate times, is from heaven. Consider marks of a successful dad:

A great father is hard as a rock about some things. Utterly inflexible. He believes lying is a serious infraction and will never let it go unpunished. God's name will never be taken in vain. No child sasses his/her mother without exciting Dad's wrath. We dress modestly when we leave this house. We treat all people with respect. We provide things honest in the sight of all men. When we realize we've done wrong we respond every time with the big three: humility, apology, and restitution. We attend the worship assembly every time. We pray together regularly. A great dad's Christian values are just part of who he is. A poor dad has weak, undependable values, and sometimes he'll teach one thing and do another.

He prioritizes family time. A poor dad is **always** working late and is **always** too busy for what seems like mundane time with his family. Meals are the perfect time to connect with family. A weak dad is great “yes man” at work. His boss needs something? Great, he'll do it—and he neglects his children. Dad, there are things at home that are vastly more important than playing video games with friends once a week, or immersing yourself in some selfish hobby. Don't collect regrets for your old age. Spend time. You have a daughter who likes playing with Barbie dolls? Is that too silly for you? Have a son who plays with Mattel cars or blocks? Is that too boring for you? Talk to your children, and begin the practice as soon as they learn to talk. Ask them questions that lead to conversation. Connect, connect, connect. Do you even know your daughter's favorite color?

He says the important things to his children. He praises their good qualities. A poor dad over-emphasizes correction while neglecting approval and gentle love. One middle-aged man opined, "My dad believed in raising me in the nurture and admonition. But mostly admonition." Don't neglect to say things such as, "I love you." "I love your mother so much." "The most important thing in this world is fearing God and being a genuine Christian." "You can choose whatever vocation you want in life so long as you are a faithful Christian, and I'll support you." "You must value your name. A good name is to be chosen above great riches."

He takes time each day to teach his children God's word. A weak dad assumes the spiritual training his children get in Bible classes is enough. There's a business I frequent, and I have gotten to know the clerk. Referencing her little 6-year old she said, "You know, she's at that age where she's trying to decide if she believes in God or not." Did you know that there are a great number of children who get to be 10 and don't know how to pray? Among other things, that's evidence of a poor father.

The Scripture provides instruction for every good work you'll ever do in life (2 Tim. 3:17), including your parenting as Dad. God bless you for what you're doing if you're a godly father. Children have always learned best about their heavenly Father by observing a good earthly one.

"As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psa. 103:13-14, NKJV).