

Responsibilities and Blessing

1 Samuel 3:1-10, Genesis 48:1-49:1, Genesis 49:1-26

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Strangely enough, Father's Day was started in America by a lady! In 1909, one hundred and twelve years ago, Sonora Dodd was sitting in church listening to a sermon on Mother's Day.

As she listened to the message, she decided it was only fair to have a day for fathers. So, in 1910, she arranged a special church service to say 'thank you' for her own father.

Eventually the idea caught on and in 1972 President Nixon made it an official day of recognition, declaring it to be celebrated on the third Sunday in June.

Today, Father's Day is observed all around the world to say 'thank you' to dads and encourage them in their parental responsibilities.

An old English proverb says: *"A father is more than a hundred schoolmasters."*

While Mark Twain stated, *"When I was a boy of fourteen my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to twenty-one, I was astonished how much he had learned in seven years!"*

When Rob Parsons, founder of *Care for the Family*, asks the question, *"What's the most important gift a father can give to his child?"* He always gives the same answer, *"It's his unconditional love and acceptance."*

The key to a child's heart is to let him or her know they're loved regardless of what may have or will happen. There's no more powerful force on the face of the earth than unconditional love.

Every parent should do their utmost to motivate their children and help them achieve their best.

In other words, love without strings. You must understand that children see our love and acceptance of them in our words and our time.

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Did you know that most of our communication with our children involves catching them doing something wrong and criticizing them for it?

That's why we need to work on acceptance. Acceptance means we'll strive to find the good in them.

It's like the woman who was remembering her rebellious teenage years and struggling to find an answer to why she acted the way she did.

Finally, she was able to put it into words: *"The fastest way to get my father's attention was to do something wrong."*

That's why it's imperative that we catch our children doing something right! We do well to remember the awesome power of praise.

There's hardly a person on the face of the earth who doesn't respond to it. Most of us know how effective it is in the work situation, but for a child, it's like rain in the desert.

Of course, there's two sides to every coin. Children, like all human beings, have a built-in desire to do what they want to do, which could be the beginning of the downward slope to wrongdoing.

It's all part of the fallen nature of humanity. That's why part of parental responsibility is to provide loving discipline. The book of Proverbs gives some sound advice.

Proverbs 22:6 says, *“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it,”* but this is also subject to free will.

The writer goes on to concede in Proverbs 22:15 that *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child.”* That’s why in Proverbs 29:17 he urges his readers to: *“Discipline your son, and he will give you peace.”*

This is illustrated in the life of Eli, a priest of Israel, who lived about 900 years before Christ. He had two sons, but he failed to establish discipline over them.

When they grew up and followed their father in priestly functions, they weren’t only evil in their personal lives, but they flagrantly disregarded the will of God as they served as leaders in Israel’s worship.

Even when their father confronted them, they refused to repent. This led to God’s condemnation and not only their downfall but the nation, too. So, how do we strike the right balance?

Well, children see that we love them when we give them our time. When children are growing up it’s often the time of life when the parents, especially fathers, are heavily involved in their work and careers.

It’s too easy for the family to live separate lives, and the children to grow up without their father’s involvement.

I wonder if this was the root of the trouble in the case of Eli and his sons? In our busy lives we excuse ourselves that we’re doing it *“all for them,”* but they’d be better off with fewer luxuries and more dad.

Somebody once said, *“We’re so busy giving our children what we didn’t have, that we don’t have time to give them what they should have.”*

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Our acceptance is also shown through caring love. Children have a whole life ahead of them. What we do for them when they're in their impressionable years will last them for life.

It seems that Eli was a failure as far as his children were concerned but he redeemed himself as an aged man. This is where the story of Samuel starts.

As a young lad, Samuel was placed in Eli's care by his devoted mother, Hannah.

Remember, she had prayed for a child and for years it was denied to her but when God did bless her, she dedicated her son to God's service.

And when he was still only a young boy, she took him to the house of the Lord and presented him to Eli.

Hannah said, *"I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord."*

Eli took care of him as an adoptive father but God also had a special duty for Samuel.

1 Samuel 2:26, *"And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people."*

Now, Eli's sons had gone from bad to worse. God even sent a prophet to Eli giving him a warning of the judgement that was to befall Israel for dishonoring God and the fate of Eli's two sons, but Eli didn't listen.

Then, one night, when Samuel was in his early teens, God spoke to him while he was sleeping.

Up to that time Samuel knew about God, but he didn't know Him personally. Now the Lord revealed Himself to him.

This is why we must never discount the way God can reveal Himself to young people.

All children are precious to Him. Remember how Jesus rebuked His disciples when they tried to prevent children being brought to Him.

The story then tells us that God "*called*" to Samuel. God always speaks softly; He never raises His voice or screams and shouts, He speaks personally.

Three times He called. Samuel naturally thought it was Eli and obediently got up and went to his master but was told on the first two occasions: "I did not call; go back and lie down."

But the third time Samuel came to him, it dawned on Eli that something special was happening; "*Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy.*"

This is why parents have an awesome responsibility when it comes to counseling their children. When the opportunity comes, it must be seized, or it'll be lost.

Eli acted as a faithful father to Samuel: "*So he told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."*

The Lord spoke to Samuel and when Samuel returned to Eli, Eli realized that God's words would be significant so he insisted that Samuel tell him what God had said.

Samuel faithfully reported to Eli all that God had revealed to him. It wasn't good news, as it confirmed that God was going to bring judgement on Eli's sons.

It's important that when we listen to what God's saying that we're obedient to His voice even if we don't like what we are hearing, whether we're young or old.

Being a father isn't an easy task. But it doesn't matter if we're parents or not, we all have a role in helping our young people to recognize the call of God on their lives.

We can best do this in modeling ourselves on Jesus and our Heavenly Father.

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Conclusion

When Jesus addressed God, He did so in a very personal and intimate way. He used the word "Abba," a word used by children in speaking to their father.

Paul also used it in writing his letters to the churches; that's our privilege too.

If we're Christians, our relationship with God is as close and as direct as that because Jesus gave new meaning to the idea that God is our Father.

In doing so, Jesus spoke from the depths of His personal experience while growing up in Palestine.

The Scriptures not only identify Joseph as a carpenter in Nazareth, but a descendant of David and Solomon. He had royalty in his blood.

Joseph showed great love and concern for Jesus, when He was threatened by Herod, by taking his family hundreds of miles away to the safety of Egypt.

Later on, when Jesus was twelve, He was taken to Jerusalem to fulfill the requirements of the law of Moses.

During that time, His parents lost sight of Him when He stayed behind in the temple, and, in their loving concern, travelled back to find Him.

Joseph probably died sometime between this incident and the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan.

Without doubt, the lessons Jesus learned at Joseph's side and Joseph's strong example contributed to His emphasis upon the love of God.

God is the best model of fatherhood we have. He's clearly pictured in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, as the father who's seen waiting patiently for the return of his son and to welcome him back into the family.

Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:11, as He spoke of God's love, *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

This is what's expected of fathers: our positive words, our time, our caring love, and our modelling ourselves on Jesus and our Heavenly Father.

Hearing God's voice and being willing to follow His guidance is a ministry which at the last day will receive God's commendation, *"Well done, good and faithful servant."*