

Fathers Provoking Children

The Vital Role of Fathers

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Fatherhood is in serious danger here in America, and frankly it is in danger all over the Western world, and that is because how the media has presented fathers on television and movies. People just do not have very many good role models of good fathering, good parenting. So, our TV shows and movies do not present Robert Young from *Father Knows Best*, but instead we get an incredibly lame incompetent boob like Homer Simpson, or Al Bundy.

Sometimes in our movies and on TV they are just plain bad dads—they abandon or ignore or beat or corrupt their kids one way or another, whether they are in a horror flick or an adventure flick, it does not matter, these dads just do not come out looking very good. And with such mediocre role models, the average American father does not have much to live up to, and so generally he does not even try.

Of course, there is feminism that is alive and well in America. Many feminists, the likes of *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd and others like her, clearly proclaim that men are essentially worthless and unnecessary, especially to the modern woman. They actively tell other women that they should go out in the world, have their career, and if she wants a child when she gets to be in her late thirties or early forties, well she should go and do that. Have a baby out of wedlock with no intention of marrying the sperm donor, because he is not really a father—he is just a sperm donor. They think that by that time they have got what it takes to rear this one child by themselves without a father, because fathers are essentially worthless. They do not need them, and they convince themselves that women do not need a husband, they can do it all by themselves—probably better.

But have they really considered that the child might really need a father?

This shows, this highlights the essential kernel of feminism—selfishness. It is all for them. It is only what they want.

Last December 25, 2012 the *Washington Times* published an article entitled, “Fathers Disappear From Households Across America,” in which the author Luke Rosiak presents these sad figures:

In every state the portion of families where children have two parents rather

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than one has dropped significantly over the past decade. Even as the country added 160,000 families with children, the number of two-parent households decreased by 1.2 million. Fifteen US children or 1 in 3 live without a father, whereas in 1960 just 11 percent lived in homes without a father.

So that is 3 times the amount since 1960.

. . . The lack of live-in fathers is overwhelmingly a black problem, regardless of poverty, status census data shows. Among blacks, nearly 5 million children, or 54 percent live only with their mother. Only twelve percent of black families below the poverty line have two parents present, compared with 41 percent of impoverished Hispanic families, and 32 percent of poor white families.

So, if it is bad in the white community here in the America, it is really bad in the black community.

Here are some more statistics to boggle your mind: 70% of black children are born into mother-only households, and many of them out of wedlock altogether. In 2002, 39% of jail inmates came from mother-only households. Girls in single parent households quadruple their risk in engaging in teen sex, and more than double their risk of teen pregnancy when there is only one parent present.

Children without fathers at home are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school compared with their two-parent peers. So, it hurts them educationally as well. And finally, single-parent children are disproportionately at risk for having behavior problems in school; falling behind socially and emotionally; demonstrating high levels of aggression; acquiring asthma (believe it or not); suffering neglect or maltreatment; using alcohol, tobacco, and drugs; and even developing obesity.

All of these have been traced back to single-parent families. Of course, most of those single parent families are mother-only families, and the father is nowhere to be found, doing his own thing; or he is in jail.

Removing the father from the home, either bodily (he just is not there), or whether emotionally or spiritually, is one of Satan's greatest ploys to plunge society into confusion and collapse. When you think about the way it was at the beginning—that is

what Jesus always did: "In the beginning it was not so"—in the beginning, God made man to be the head of the house. So He placed the husband—the father—into a leadership role, placed not to be just the ultimate authority, but also to guide, nurture, and guard the family from all enemies, foreign and domestic, because what God did was model the husband-father role after Himself. God Himself fills that role spiritually in His own family. He is the One who is the ultimate authority, but He is also the One who guides, nurtures, and protects us. He gives us what we need so that we can grow up into Jesus Christ and become full-fledged members in His Family.

So, on the physical plane, without a father fulfilling that role of leadership in the family, the mother who is left all by herself is at least overwhelmed by having to fill both roles—authority figure and nurturer—or, she is totally incompetent in her ability to fulfill the male role, to provide the discipline and leadership that her family needs. And, it especially gets bad when the children start to get bigger, about the same size as their mom, and they think that they can work around her, or push her out of the way. So, when they start reaching their teen years, it gets to be a real struggle for most moms.

Now, we do not necessarily have this problem in the churches of God. In God's church, the problem of single parent families is generally not as dire as in the world. Obviously there are single parent families in the church, but hopefully the church provides the support that they need.

Most church families include the father. There is one physically present in the family. The problems that we may have is that the father does not fulfill his role properly in the family on the one hand, or that he fills it too much—that is, he is overbearing in his authority and discipline.

On the one hand, you have a neglectful father, while on the other hand you have a domineering father. There is not a balance there. Either one of these approaches can be just as harmful to children as having no father at all and the children from either type of situation end up being untaught, undisciplined, and unprotected from the cruelties of this world.

Frankly, this world is very cruel. It does not care. It will chew you up and spit you out, and children might not be prepared for it, getting hurt very badly—especially our kids, because they tend to be naïve; we shield them so much from the world. So, a strong father figure is necessary to give the kids backbone and knowledge to function in a big bad world, because God has not taken us out of this world. We have to live in it, function in it, and try to succeed in it as much as we can.

So today, I want to focus on the area that the apostle Paul highlights in his very brief instruction to fathers.

When Paul lived in that first century, when the Roman Empire was about at its height, fathers were overwhelmingly present in the family. This was a carryover from the Roman Republic. Families were very important in the Roman Republic, and this carried on into the times of the Empire, so much so that the father was *the* central figure. He was the “pater familias,” *the* authority of the family. No one could gainsay him. Technically, in theory the father (even in the times of the apostle Paul) had the power of life and death within his family—anyone, but especially the children.

If the father was displeased with a certain child, if he was not inclined to slay the child, he would sell his child into slavery, essentially on a whim. (But usually this did not happen.) That is how much power the father had in the family at that time.

So, this is the background to the apostle Paul’s comments found in Ephesians and Colossians, because the father was very powerful. It had not gotten to the point in the Roman Empire where the father’s power had been sapped to the point that it was a couple hundred years later. But society, therefore, dictated full and unquestioned obedience to the father. We have to understand that as the background for what Paul says, because the father was so very powerful. In Jewish families, it was about the same way. The father was the powerful authority figure.

So, Paul is talking about fathers in the church, whether they were of Roman, Greek, or Jewish background.

It is very much the same way today—Paul felt that fathers need help relating to their children properly, because being the father is such a powerful position. The fathers need help relating to their children properly so that they can help them mature into confident, God-fearing adults.

So, that is what I am going to talk about today; essentially Ephesians 6:4 is our text for today:

Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

That is my specific purpose statement, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord.”

Now, notice how this admonition to fathers...if you have a Bible that breaks the text into paragraphs, you will see that his instruction to fathers is actually the conclusion of a paragraph that is actually written to children:

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

What verse 4 does is balance his instruction to the children. Remember, I just gave you a pretty long spiel on the power of the father. Paul is agreeing that the father has a great deal of power, and that children should obey their parents. He is putting them into a very serious inferior position. So, he says, "Kids, if your parents tell you to do something that is right and good, do it! They have the power both to command you, and to enforce it." And Paul quotes the fifth commandment in verse 2.

Ephesians 6:2-3 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

So Paul is saying that this command to the children is backed up by God Himself. It is one of the big ten! Honor your father and mother. So kids, it is your job to honor and obey your parents. I know that this puts you into that inferior position where you have to do what they say, as long as it is right and in the Lord.

But then comes verse 4:

Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Paul realized that the child could be subject to abuse from that command. There could be a father or mother who would take full advantage and make slaves of their children; run them into the ground; bully them; or even verbally, emotionally, physically abuse their children, because they have all this power, so verse 4 balances the ledger sheet as it were so that the children are not at quite so large a disadvantage. What Paul does by saying, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath," is that he limits the power of the parents. He tells them that there are limits to what the parents should do.

It goes beyond the matter of whether it is right for them to command them a certain thing to be done, because though certain things might be "good," in the law to command

them to do a certain thing, it can get abusive to do that if it is constant and overdone. You can ask your kid to make your dinner for you once in a while according to need, but if you have them make your dinner every day while you sit there in front of the TV, you are making them do all the work, you are making them into a slave. This is a “right command” taken to an extreme.

Eventually that child is going to react to their enslavement. So, there is a limit to what a parent should do in terms of making their children obey certain things. This is not an easy concept, I know, but Paul recognized that he could not give parents full authority to shape their children’s lives in such a negative way. He had to caution them to be careful of how they used their authority.

Even though you have the authority you should not use it abusively so he tells them not to provoke their children to wrath, because they could use their authority as a poor parenting method. There are other and better ways to do that. He is essentially telling them to be careful how they use their authority.

Now, we do ourselves a disservice if we limit this “provoking” merely “to wrath.” Wrath is just a hot anger. You can do that easily to a child. If you keep on them, and keep on them, and continue to be so demanding, they will break out in anger against you. They finally get provoked to an emotional outburst, which is not good.

But, anger—wrath, rage—is only the most common reaction to a domineering parent, or a neglectful parent. Even though it says fathers, it could be a mother who does it. It is just as bad, and they are just as responsible. Fathers are more likely than mothers to provoke their children, but it could be the mother as well.

Not all kids will react the same way to either a domineering or neglectful parent. Some kids, most kids, will probably break out in some form of anger. That is an easy out, easy release for a child to break out in anger against the abuser. But, not all do.

Some kids clam up and hold it all inside. That anger just builds and builds. Others become depressed (anger turned inward). Some kids hurt themselves. Lately some kids have been going around cutting themselves, because they live in an abusive family, or are neglected. Some act out in rebellion. This is the one we often think of.

We either neglect our kids and become very permissive, or we domineer them causing them to flee away as soon as possible and “raise some Cain” out in the world, because they were never able to do it at home, and have any “fun” (they think).

Some kids smolder and plot revenge. “I’m gonna get you when I get the opportunity.” Some have a smart mouth, and they sarcastically blurt out something as a way of dealing with their parent’s heavy hand.

It could be most anything. Kids have a myriad ways of expressing themselves.

What I am trying to get at is that anger is just one of them, maybe the most common. Generally, and in more modern terms, Paul is telling parents not to be the cause of their children’s behavior problems and psychoses. Or, we could say, “Fathers, don’t give your children cause to distrust you or to hate you or to want to kill you.”

Let us turn to Colossians and see how Paul rephrases it there. Colossians and Ephesians are very much alike, though he started differently, he ends up similarly. The parallel begins with Ephesians 5:22 and the wives, on through Ephesians 6:4. In Colossians it is chapter 3, verse 18 with the wives again, on through verse 25.

Colossians 3:20-21 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord [Ephesians 6:1-3]. Fathers [Ephesians 6:4], do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

So this time, he did not say, “provoke your children to wrath,” but he said, “lest they become discouraged.” Now we see the spectrum of his teaching opening up here—from depression (extreme discouragement) on one hand, to wrath and all the emotional responses a person can have be one becomes angry. Your children will react somewhere within that spectrum between wrath and discouragement.

So we can see that Paul was not limiting it just to anger or rage. He was thinking more broadly of about most any sort of negative reaction that is caused by a father’s overbearing or neglectful parenting skill (or the lack thereof). So he is saying, “Fathers, you have an incredible responsibility here, because you’re going to make or break your child and his character.”

Before we get to that, I just want to let you know that the word that is translated as “discouraged” in Colossians 3:21, is *athumeo*, which means, “disheartened,” or “dispirited,” or “discouraged,” as it is used here. This means that not only could it be mere disheartenment or discouragement or depression, but it also could be that the child lacks confidence—he does not have any spirit, as we might say. Or, that he has no enthusiasm. He is just like a bump on a log—he does not want to do anything, because he is afraid of making a misstep. He has been beaten down so much throughout his life

that he does not want to do anything because he will likely get the back of a hand because he cannot please his father. It could also be that the child just simply lacks a positive outlook on life, that he thinks that life is bad; a downer; does not end well. There is nothing to look forward to.

Now I think sometimes that we get trapped within the actual wording of the translations we have, and we need to expand it out a little to get the idea of different ways that it applies. This could mean that the child is dejected, has a defeatist attitude, or is apathetic—he just does not care. There is no hope in his life. He is just going to take whatever is given, because it has all been beaten out of him.

As I mentioned, he might just be negative all the time; sullen; holding it all within; does not talk; does not want to engage others; arm's length with everyone. Or lazy, lethargic—does not want to do anything.

So, we can see that a parent's attitude and manner toward his children can affect them in a lot of ways—more than just making them angry, more than just making them discouraged.

The danger that Paul is warning them against is provoking a negative reaction of any kind through unwise childrearing practices. That is it in a nutshell.

Now if we do not take anything else from the instruction today, we should take away from this the fact that we as parents have a huge—*monumental*—impact on our children's attitudes and their behavior. We can make or break them. We want to *make* them. We do not want to break them. But, we have the power to do either. We have to make sure that authority that we have been given is used properly.

Think of this: Children, especially when they are younger (and it does not completely fade away as they get older), look up to us as parents in the same way that we look up to God as our Father. Like I said, this will diminish, but it never goes away. The parents are in the place of God in the family structure. And, when a child is young, and he does not know God, does not have the ability to have an abstract concept of what God is, he thinks of his father and mother like God. They are the ones that have authority over him. They are the ones who tell him when to wake up, when to eat, when to play. Whatever it is, they run the child's life completely.

I do not know if you have ever thought of it this way, but *a child completely trusts the parent*. They give themselves over totally to those parents. They do not know any better. That is just the way it is. And so, this idea of parents in the place of God continues

throughout their lives. It fades. It does not go completely away either. If it is done right, the child, no matter how old he is, always honors and respects the parent for what they have done—the example they have set, the discipline they have given, the teaching they have made, and so on. These are the same things that we honor and respect our God in heaven for.

So, our moods, attitudes, and actions are what they see, what they model (copy), and what they are going to pass onto their children.

So this awesome ability to influence their personalities and characters is a huge and vital responsibility. We can almost think of it as a burden. We should not though. It is just that it is very weighty. We parents need to think about it a lot more than we do, and we need to prioritize our parenting a great deal higher than we do. It is something that we do all the time, because they are watching all the time.

If you want to put it into perspective, our children are our legacy. What are we going to leave behind us? Will people remember us? Maybe. But, they will see our children, and they are going to say, "Their parents did a _____ (fill in the blank) job with these kids." What kind of legacy are you leaving in your children?

I want to turn to the life of King David. Please turn to I Kings 1. Today, I come here not to praise David, but to criticize him, because David was not perfect, not by any means, even though he was a man after God's own heart. David made a lot of mistakes. But, one of the good things about David was that he once he figured out what his mistakes were, he repented of them fully and completely. We do not have very many instances where he ever did anything like that again. He was one of those people who once things were pointed out to him, he totally left them behind. He was a man who was gung-ho about God, and wanted to do what was right. He was not perfectly educated, and he had to learn—we all have to learn. But in this area of childrearing, David did very poorly. This next passage will give us the gist of it all:

I Kings 1:5-6 Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king"; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. (And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, "Why have you done so?" He was also very good-looking. His mother had borne him after Absalom.)

Adonijah was the fourth oldest son of David, by his wife Haggith. All verse 6 is saying is that Adonijah was younger than Absalom, who was the third in line.

Verse six also tells us about David's childrearing practices. It specifically gives us two stated problems, and one more that we can infer—it is implied and you have to “read between the lines” to see it. But, I think it is pretty clear. First of all we will get to the two stated ones that are mentioned here about David's childrearing practices. And Adonijah is just one of the examples today. Eventually we will get to five examples, and we will see that none of them get “gold stars.”

The first thing that is stated is he did not rebuke his children. The word rebuke is interesting there; it is important. The Hebrew behind that word is literally the word, “pain.” He did not pain his children. Pain is used as a verb. It could also be translated as “rebuke,” “hurt,” or “grieve.” So, David never picked up the paddle. David never gave them any kind of physical discipline. As a matter of fact, it really does not have to be physical discipline, because the word “rebuke” is spoken discipline. He did not call them down when they were bad. He never corrected them. So he did not give them any discipline at all.

The second thing is that he never questioned their actions. That is, instead of contradicting them when they said or did something wrong, and showing them a better way, he simply let it go. He *indulged* them. He let them have their way. They could go around pillaging Jerusalem for all he knew, and he never said, “What are you doing?” He effectively said, “Go ahead.”

Now I do not think it ever got quite that bad, there is no record, but whenever they did anything wrong, he shrugged his shoulders and let it go. It is just one of those things where he was a doting father; he never called them down; he never questioned them; he just simply let them grow up.

This is how we get to the third deficiency of David's childrearing practices—the implied one. And that is, he was in all likelihood an uninvolved, neglectful, remote, and all too-busy dad.

Clearly his children were not a priority. He loved them, I am sure he did. He probably got a lot of pleasure seeing them grow up. He had at least two fine, strapping, good looking, young sons—Absalom and Adonijah. I am sure that Solomon, and all the others were probably good looking too. Remember his own brothers when Samuel comes in to anoint a replacement for King Saul, and he said, “Ho Ho! This one must be the one, he's so tall, and looks like the perfect king.” No, and then he went to the next, and the next, and finally little David, who was young, and grew into being a good looking man himself, which he was. So he had a lot to be proud of in his children.

But his own manner of dealing with them was not good. It says right here in I Kings 1:6 that God did not approve of the way that he reared his children. He neglected them, and he indulged them. At the very least, his children were not a priority to him, and they knew it. His priority was his throne, his army, and his kingdom.

They probably loved him. I am sure they did. Most kids love their parents. It is natural. But, they probably loved in him the sense like a boy loves a hero that he reads about in a book. They probably did not see him often enough to really have a good relationship with him. I think that they probably barely knew him, especially in those early years because David was on the run from Saul—this is when his kids were born—and he was taking his wives around with him. They were going here and there, but their dad was out on the front lines looking for caves to hide in. It was up to the mothers to keep the children, and to rear them.

So, they—Absalom, Adonijah, Amnon (his firstborn) too—did not get the fatherly presence of David in their lives when they were young in those impressionable years. (I am sure that Amnon was good looking too. There are indications that he was. And, he was the presumptive heir.)

So we have these three: He did not rebuke his children; he never questioned their actions; and he was in all likelihood uninvolved, neglectful, remote, and very busy during their childhood. He was winning his throne; he was fleeing from Saul; he was ordering his kingdom; he was putting down rebellions; he was probably having to fight schemes trying to knock him off the throne, or to take this bit of land, or to do this or that; he was totally involved in the running of the kingdom, and so he probably had very little family time. He probably saw them at the Feast of Tabernacles, and probably Passover time, but that is about it. He was off doing his kingly duties.

So, to put this in the best light possible, although David was a man after God's own heart, we can say that his childrearing style was at best *benign neglect*.

Now, for the remainder of today's sermon, let us consider the record of David's parenting style as it is recorded in Scripture. We know enough about five of his children to be able to make a case that he provoked his children to negative attitudes by his benign neglectful parenting style.

The five we are going to look at are Absalom, Amnon, Tamar, Adonijah, and Solomon. We will get a thumbnail history of each so that we can see their reactions to his parenting—the way they turned out.

ABSALOM

Absalom's story runs through the middle part of II Samuel. He really comes on the scene in II Samuel 13, and he ends up being killed in chapter 18. Today, we will not read the scriptures.

The Bible describes Absalom as handsome, talented, personable, charismatic, attractive, courageous man full of leadership skills; someone the people loved. He was attractive to them in a way that you would expect of a prince. He was the perfect prince. With Amnon dead, Absalom seemed the perfect heir to the throne.

He had it all. His curls—his locks he only cut once a year. He wore his armor really nicely, and he could command. He was just the kind of guy that people liked. He would be there at the gate, kiss the babies, and do all the things that was expected of him. Everybody liked him.

But we find out that God tells us in the record that he was vain—he had this thing about his hair. And, he was vain about his looks. Then we find out that he murdered his brother with subterfuge. Obviously, Amnon deserved it (he killed the heir of the throne, by the way), but he killed his brother for raping his full sister. But it was not Absalom's place to do it; it was David's. And he, again, succumbed to benign neglect. He did not jump in there and do what he should have done.

But Absalom also connived and plotted to wrest the throne from his own father. Obviously, he did not feel much for his father if he was willing to do that. He eventually rebelled, overthrew David, took David's concubines as his own, and went to war against him. And he ended up getting his lovely locks caught in a tree, and Joab came by and slew him. And that was the end of Absalom.

What a nice guy he was, was he not?

He might have had all those exterior qualities that seem so nice and good, but inside he was rotten to the core. To put a label on him, I would say that he was a narcissist—an absolute narcissist—power hungry; wanting everything for himself.

AMNON

What about Amnon? He was David's firstborn, and the presumptive heir to the throne. But, if we were to go through his story in II Samuel 13, we would find that his life was one of unbridled lust, cunning, deceit, rape, and hatred. He doggedly pursued his own

half-sister, who was beautiful. But still, she was his half-sister! Her name was Tamar. She tried to keep him at arm's length. But he finagled to get her alone in his own bedroom, and he was not really sick. He was as strong as he ever was, and she had no chance. So, he took her, and raped her. It says there in the Bible that once that "thrill" was passed for him, he hated her more than he had "loved" her before. But that is in quotes, because it was sheer lust.

Another nice guy, eh?

To put a label on Amnon, I would say that he was a sexual predator.

We are 0 for 2 here.

TAMAR

She is a rather pitiable figure in Scripture. I can understand that. She was the victim of Amnon's lust. She had to experience rape. She was an innocent by all account. She must have been fairly young. I suppose that she was somewhere near her mid to late teens. Typically young women were married off in their mid to late teens. They were too valuable for alliances.

It also shows her to be obedient. Part of the story is that Amnon connived to get David to ask Tamar to go to Amnon's house to help him while he was sick. So she naively obeyed. "Dad says to go to Amnon's house, so I'd better go." She went, and that is where she was raped.

But, do you know that once the dirty deed was done, did she run to David for help? I get the feeling she did not have a good relationship with her father. She was willing to do what he told her to do, but when push came to shove, she ran to Absalom, her brother—not to her father. This begins to reveal some things about the relationship that they had. David was not her high tower, or her refuge, hero, or protector. She evidently thought that if she went to David, she would not get the comfort that she knew she would get from her brother Absalom. He was much better to her than David was.

The last we hear of her, she remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house. We do not know how long that lasted. She may have ended her days there. That is almost the indication that you get. In a way, she retreated.

You can understand that, too—the psychological hurt that she must have experienced from the rape would have caused anybody to snap or withdraw, and have psychological

problems from then on out. Evidently, she withdrew from everyone, and turned inward; a broken woman. At best, maybe a recluse and a loner.

And David bears some responsibility for this.

ADONIJAH

Adonijah was a mixture of Absalom and Amnon, because he had the same sorts of problems these two had. He was desirous of both David's throne, and Abishag, the woman found to warm David's bed when he was old man.

So like Absalom, he wanted the throne; he wanted to be king. And, like Amnon, he had a lust for a young woman. He was very good looking, it says, where we read that in I Kings 1. It also says, and I had passed over this earlier, in verse 5, that he exalted himself. He thought he was the cat's meow! He was good looking; he had all these chariots and horsemen; he had 50 men to run before him, calling out, "Hey, here comes Adonijah! Isn't he good looking! Bring your babies out and your young women."

But, he had all these bad character traits that his brothers had. They were kind of like triplets; they all ran wild. They all thought themselves the "big man on campus," as it were.

He never got as far in rebellion as Absalom, but he never stopped scheming. Even after Solomon was put on the throne by David himself, after David died Adonijah was still whispering in Bathsheba's ear, "Hey, get me Abishag; I really need Abishag," because it was going to help him politically.

I have probably told you this before, but having sexual relations with the former king's concubines was a way that they could claim the throne at that time. That is what Absalom did, at Ahithophel's advice, after he rebelled against David. He claimed David's concubines, and did it in the sight of all Israel. Here, Adonijah is angling through Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon. Solomon gets wind of it, and basically said that he signed his own death warrant. Then Solomon sent Benaiah out, and had him take off his head.

Adonijah was a foolish, grasping, ladder-climber. He wanted to be on top in everything.

So, this is certainly 0 for 4 for David so far.

SOLOMON

Solomon is a mixed bag. Perhaps we could say he was the best of the bunch. And he probably was. God gave him the throne, He did everything from that point out through Solomon. But, he was still flawed, and perhaps very deeply. He asked God for understanding while he was a young man, and that was a good thing, and God commended him for it, and He told him that He would give him all these other things that he did not ask for, because he asked wisely.

But, when you look at his whole life, it turns out that he was a megalomaniac. This is one who grasps for power; he wants to control everything. He was a workaholic. He never stopped. He built building, palaces, temples, gardens, water courses (and that was before 10 am!); and then he had time for collecting exotic animals, and bringing all the different plants (by this point we are into the afternoon); and he wants a drink, so he tastes all the beers that have ever been made (and claims that he still has his understanding); so now, let us have some dancers, and other entertainments...you can read all this in Ecclesiastes 2. He was a man of insatiable appetites.

He was an extreme collector of things. "Go down to Africa, and get me an elephant; and a giraffe; and a baboon; and whatever else you can find; and all the gold from Ophir." I get the impression that he was like some of those hoarders you see on television, with all his stuff in the hallways; he just has to have everything! He gathers it all to himself.

Beyond his understanding and eventual wisdom—well, I do not know if you can say eventual wisdom, because he ended up doing some really stupid things—we can at least say that he was terribly self-indulgent, a lot like his brothers, because David had never said "No! Why are you doing this? There's a better way."

But, David just gave in, and he would give things, and give, and give to these boys, and they came to think that they should have everything. It got to the point in Solomon's life that it included wives, and concubines—700 wives and 300 concubines? And, they were the ones who later turned his head to other gods.

So, even though Solomon gave Israel peace, which was really God's doing, and they lived through a wonderful Golden Age, it was at a hugely steep price.

Do you remember that when he was dead, the people pleaded with his son to give them relief? "Your dad was whipping us! And, taking all our money, and making us work. Can we please rest for a bit?" And Rehoboam, having grown up under Solomon, said, "No! I'm going to make it worse! If you slaved for my dad, you'll slave for me!" But, how did this end up? In rebellion! Rehoboam lost all the tribes but Judah. Benjamin and Levi came back a little later.

So, we have an 0 for 5 situation here.

The children of David which are presented in Scripture did not do very well. And certainly we cannot lay the sins of the children at the father's feet, but we can see that David bears some responsibility for the way that their lives turned out. His neglect and lack of discipline of his children produced some pretty horrible results.

We had two rebels; a woman withdrawn; a megalomaniac; and a sexual predator. This is not real good at all. It is not something that you want to put on your family tree.

So, we need to make sure that we are more involved, and that our involvement is not provocative, because we are trying to find the balance between these two points. David showed a great deal of neglect, while other people tend to be overbearing and domineering. We have to find that fine line between those, and walk that as best as we can.

So I have seven points to quickly go through.

How do we as fathers provoke our children?

- *By being absent—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—any one, or combination of them.* Children want their fathers around, and not only to be there and give them some time, but they want them to be involved, interested, encouraging, and helpful in what the child is doing. They do not want you to just stand there and watch them. They want you to be there doing whatever it is that they are doing, or want to do, or what they want to learn how to do. They want their dads to be there. They want to relate to you, and you to relate to them. It is a two-way street with real communication going on. So, give them time and make it profitable for them, because as we found with David, neglect drives children wild, because they will do whatever they want to do, and it is not good.
- *By being little more than a spanking machine; an angry despot.* Fathers, I believe, should do their share of the discipline. But, they should have more than one dimension—they should not be the ones who have the paddle at the end of his hand, and all he does is smack them. You do not want your kid to know you only from that. "I never saw anything of my dad except the paddle coming my way." You do not want that. You want your children to have a multidimensional view of you, as a real person who loves them. So, fathers need to be displaying their full

personality and talents with and to their children so that they can observe them, emulate them, and appreciate them for what they can do. If all we are is the disciplinarian, or the angry father, then we will breed anger into them.

- *By taking more than giving.* A lot of fathers seem to engage their children only when they want something from it for their own pleasure, rather than for the kid's own good, and what they need. What I am saying is that sometimes a father approaches his children only on his own terms, and thinks nothing of what the children may need, but rather only what he can take from them for whatever the reason. Sometimes, a father needs to let "his hair down a little" and play on the kids level. Have some fun! Enjoy them at the age that they are, and let them enjoy you at the level that they can understand. Do not always be trying to get something from that relationship. Make sure that it is almost all **giving** to them. Now this could go too far, and become indulgent. So, find that fine line between the two.
- *By criticizing more than encouraging.* This is sort of tacked on to the previous one. An atmosphere of constant criticism will deflate a kid quicker than anything. Sure, kids need instruction, and they need help to do things better, and to improve their skills, but there are ways to teach them without being harsh, nitpicking, or showing constant disapproval. "Ah, you didn't do right! Move over! Let me do it!" You just do not need to do that. Show some patience and let them make their mistakes. Encourage them to do it better. So, do not criticize. Encourage them. Make them want to do better, and to receive the praise that a good job will bring. Let them know that they can do it, whatever it is.
- *By publicly humiliating them.* Yes, sometimes kids do things out in public, and they need to be disciplined. But, it should not be done in front of their peers, or in any public place. Private is best. Take them aside, where no one but you can see them, and then do what you need to do. But shaming them just breeds hurt and resentment. And, this can start pretty early. Do not think that your kids are stupid. They are not. They are very smart.
- *By being stingy; by not giving them things occasionally; by withholding things from them; by taking their money.* Withholding gifts, time, money, even conversation from your children, makes them feel worthless, and without value. But on the other

hand, when you are generous with your children, it teaches them generosity. And it teaches them a giving spirit. Is that not what God is? He is a giving Spirit. His one great attitude, one great way of living is of outgoing concern. He gives Himself to everyone. And that is what we need to teach our children by being that way ourselves. Pull over to a Baskin-Robbins ice cream store and give them an ice cream cone. Just do something unusual to show your generosity to them—for nothing. Not because they mowed the grass, or because they painted the eaves, or whatever. Just for no reason at all give them some of your generosity, helping them to learn to be generous. If you really cannot afford it, make the sacrifice so that you can afford it, because we need to give good gifts to our children, just as James 1:17 tells us that God does for us. It is almost impossible to imagine all of the good gifts that God gives us. And we do not deserve any one of them! He is a generous Being, and He gives, and gives, and gives!

- *By not admitting that we have done wrong; by putting ourselves up as the paragon of virtue.* This is not the case for even the best of us. We are all carnal human beings who still sin, and make mistakes. If we never apologize, if we never admit faults for things that we have done wrong, we are hypocrites. And you know? Kids have a built-in hypocrite finder! They know when you have told them to do something, and you do not do it yourself. Oh they know! And they will tell you too.