



On Father's Day, naturally you would want to look for fatherly wisdom from the Bible. I'd love to walk you through a long list of great fathers in the Bible and tell you to model yourself after them in every possible way. That would be like hitting the EASY button. The only problem is that it's really hard to find good examples of fathers in the Bible. Should we look at Jephthah who had to sacrifice his own daughter to fulfill a rash vow? Should we go back to Genesis and see how Jacob's two wives and two concubines created one of the most dysfunctional families you will ever know?

So instead of spending countless hours scouring the Scriptures for nothing but stellar fathers, I've decided on a simple premise for this message: Bad Dads in the Bible and What We Can learn from Them. In taking this view, I am not saying that there aren't any examples of good fathers in the Bible. I am just saying I don't know of any! Obviously, the Bible's teaching on the responsibility of parents to raise their children in love and godliness is very clear. We are familiar with all kinds of good principles in the Bible but we are not familiar with all kinds good fathers. You might be able to find the occasional half-decent dad, but they are few and far between.

Think about the implications of this. The Creator of the universe has revealed himself through His word and supremely through his beloved Son. We have a perfect heavenly Father who loves His son with a perfect, infinite and eternal love. Yet he has left us with hardly a single example of a great father in all of Scripture. What do you make of that?

Here's a thought. It is meant for our encouragement. Yes, it's sort of a "misery loves company" idea, but on one level, the Bible honesty is refreshing and relevant. Now be careful. Don't even think of using this as some kind of twisted excuse. "Well, there aren't any really good fathers in the Bible, so that lets me off the hook." Please don't do that. But here's how we can be encouraged. Every father is a sinner. Every father fails. And the Bible doesn't try to whitewash this.

But what does Romans 8:1 have to say about this? "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." If you are in Christ Jesus, your sins and your failures do not bring condemnation. Now you might feel condemnation, but that does not come from the Lord. What's the best way for the devil to destroy a family? To attack the dads. Satan wants to topple fathers and leave them in a pile of rubble. But God doesn't want you there. Guys, if you have failed, then repent and move on. Make things right. Do whatever it takes to repair broken relationships. I have heard of fathers mending hurt relationships decades after the problems surfaced. I love when that happens, so men, do whatever it takes. But don't let yourself feel condemnation. If there aren't any ideal fathers in the Bible then there won't any in our day. We are not striving for perfection but a steady growth in Godliness.

So let's look at the bad dads in the Bible and see what we can learn from them. I plan to look at 3 bad dads and pull out two character qualities that they were lacking.

## **DISCIPLINE**

The first bad dad is Eli the priest. Here is a description of his home life.

*Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD. 13 The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, 14 and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. 15 Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw." 16*

*And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force." 17 Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt. (2 Samuel 2:12-17).*

OK, this passage is not really about bad dads but rather about bad kids. You can't get much more clear than the first verse: *Now the sons of Eli were worthless men.* These were not your ordinary run of the mill rebellious boys. They were bad news. But the key question is what did their dad do about it?

*22 Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 23 And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. 24 No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. 25 If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.*

OK, that seems like pretty good parenting, don't you think? The sons were doing horrible things and the dad tried to talk them out of their evil deeds. What more can you do, right? After all, these are not five and six year old boys making mischief in the house. These are grown men with will of their own. But apparently it wasn't enough, for this is what God spoke to Eli through the

young boy now living with him named Samuel. Samuel was literally lying near to the ark of the covenant when he received this message from the Lord.

*And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them (1 Samuel 3.13).*

Sometimes it's hard to understand God's decisions. Sometimes he seems to go easy on bad people and other times he seems to treat good people harshly. I am not saying that God is not fair, just that his reasons are not always completely clear to me. And at first glance, this seems to be one of those times when God seems a bit strict. Because Eli was not able to restrain his sons, God was going to punish his family line forever.

How many of you have tried to give advice to your adult children but they didn't heed your advice? Maybe it wasn't great advice or maybe they were just being stubborn, but if you have adult children, you know how this can play out. Eli tried to turn his sons from evil but they refused to listen to him. So why is that Eli's fault? It was Eli's fault because, under the circumstances, he should have done more. He was the lead priest and should have removed his sons as priests. The buck stopped with Eli and he refused to make the hard call and fire his sons. More than that, under OT law, they both deserved to be put to death.

Ironically, one of Eli's sons very well may have been named after a very godly priest, Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron. This Phinehas not only was a righteous man. he was honored for punishing unrighteousness.

*And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. 7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand 8 and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped (Numbers 25:6-8)*

Note that the sins that Phinehas put a stop to were the exact same sins that Eli's sons were guilty of. the exacts same ones. Now please hear me. This is not one of the key points of my message! I am not advocating killing anyone not am I advocating any hint of physical abuse. But the Bible honors men like Phinehas because he took the holiness of God seriously. God honored Phinehas because Phinehas honored God. God did not clearly state that Eli should have put his two sons to death, but it does say that he should have done more than he did. I can confidently say that he should have at least removed them from their priestly duties. Now here's a key point--God holds fathers accountable for the discipline of their children. And in Eli's case we can take it a step further. God hold fathers accountable for training their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We don't have to wait until Paul says that in Ephesians chapter six to know that it is true.

Dads, how holy is God to you? While your children are young, are you doing your best to shield them from evil? If they are older, are you setting good boundaries and offering wise counsel? More than that, are you modeling a life of God-honoring holiness or are your children walking in your clumsy footsteps?

Another irony about bad dads in the Bible is that the very next bad dad should have known better for his name is Samuel. Samuel was raised by Eli in the house of God. As we have already seen, the first time Samuel ever heard the voice of the Lord it was in regard to a prophecy against the house of Eli because of his worthless sons. He knew firsthand the evil deeds of Hophni and Phinehas. Second only to Eli himself, Samuel knew that God held fathers responsible for restraining their sons. Nevertheless, he also had two sons who did great evil.

*When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. 2 The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. 3 Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah 5 and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." (1 Samuel 8:1-5)*

The interesting thing about this story is that the elders of Israel did not blame Samuel for the wickedness of his sons. They didn't rebuke Samuel for being a bad dad. They merely used the wickedness of Samuel's sons as evidence in their pursuit of having a king. They justified the sinfulness of Samuel's sons in order to justify their own sin. Have you ever done something similar? This demonstrates the darkness of the human heart. When it comes to defending and justifying our behavior, each of us is a highly skilled attorney.

Now here's the puzzling thing about this story. There is no evidence that Samuel attempted to rebuke or restrain his sons. Maybe he did, but we are not told so. At the very least, he should have removed them as judges. You can't deny culpability here. When confronted about his sons' behavior, Samuel did not try to play politics and spin the story. He never said, "Really? My boys are doing what? Why didn't anyone ever tell me this? I never knew." He was responsible. He was the judge of all Israel but he did little to nothing about their wickedness.

Even more troubling is that he was not rebuked for not restraining his sons as Eli was. Why was Samuel seemingly given a free pass when Eli was judged so strictly? I think Eli himself answers this question. *If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?* His sons were judged for a greater sin because they sinned against God.

Christians like to say that all sin is the same in God's eyes. Now all sins separates you from Christ, so in that sense, all sin is the same. But there are many places in Scripture where Jesus speaks of "greater" sin or someone who will be judged more harshly. There are greater and lesser sins and there are greater or lesser consequences to our sin.

Samuel wasn't all bad, not by any means. He was a man of God who judged rightly and consistently all his life. After Saul was anointed king, Samuel made this announcement.

*Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it*

to you.” *4 They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man’s hand.”* (1 Samuel 12:3-4)

He was blameless and upright. Nevertheless, he did not restrain his sons. I don't share these "bad dad" stories to make you feel bad, fathers. But these are details in Scripture that were laid down for our benefit, even in all of their imperfection. Paul explicitly said so.

*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it* (1 Corinthians 10:11-13).

We have one last bad dad to look at and he's may be the worst of the bunch. I am referring to King David. Most of you know his failures in regard to sexual immorality and murder but we tend to forget his immense parenting failures. His son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar and what did David do about it? *When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry* (2 Samuel 13:21) That's it! That's all he did. There were no consequences whatsoever for Amnon.

But another of David's sons, Absalom, took action. he arranged for Amnon to be killed. What did david do about this crime? *And the spirit of the king longed to go out to Absalom, because he was comforted about Amnon, since he was dead* (2 Samuel 13:30). He certainly got over Amnon in a hurry, didn't he? I wonder if David had taken action with Amnon it may have prevented Absalom from taking action. Maybe Absalom would never have tried to steal the throne away from David. maybe Absalom would not have plotted to kill David and rule the kingdom. If David had exercised basic fatherly discipline, maybe Joab would not have thrown a spear through the heart of Absalom.

But let us not forget Adonijah. David had just declared that Solomon would be the next king when Adonijah decided that he wanted to be king instead. *Now 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. His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?”* (1 Kings 1:5-6)

Amnon raped his half-sister and David did nothing. Absalom killed Amnon and David did nothing. Adonijah attempted to steal the throne away from Solomon, the rightful heir, and David did nothing. And the thing about the Adonijah story is that it came at the very end of David's life. He should have known better by then. He was seventy years old and had been a king for forty years by then. Moreover, he knew all about Eli's and Samuel's parenting failures but he took his own failures to the next level.

The other crazy thing about David is that he was this great warrior and military leader. Any good leader needs strong discipline or else he could never lead. How could he lead a nation but not lead his family? If the Bible merely described the wickedness of his sons then maybe we would not lay blame upon David. But in each case, we are specifically told that David did nothing. He was a passive participant in these evil deeds.

All of these bad dads lacked discipline. They were not engaged with their families. What we can learn from them is to see that this pattern is always destructive. This parenting style is very prevalent among our generation. Parents might not like to admit it, but they really want their kids to be their friends. These parents don't like conflict and they'd rather give in than stay the course.

Dads need to be careful disciplinarian but they need to discipline for the right reasons. Anyone can get well behaved children on the outside. Anyone can have compliant children if you apply enough force. In other words, anyone can keep the peace if they use strong arm tactics.

Before it was decommissioned in 2005, the US had an arsenal of Peacekeeper missiles. That's an interesting name for a powerful weapon of war, isn't it? The Peacekeeper was a MIRV missile; a multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle, it could carry up to 10 re-entry vehicles, each armed with a 300-kiloton warhead. Each of these warheads were twenty times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>i</sup>

Some dads are like this peacekeeper missile. They enter a room and all ten warheads go off at once. The collective force levels everything and everyone in the room. When the dust settles, the kids are quiet and no one dare breathe lest dad let off another warhead. Anyone can keep the peace with force.

Sadly, I have done this more than once. Have I ever told you my "buckle up" story? This happened many years ago when all 3 kids were young. The four of us all piled into the van. I don't think Karen was not with us this time. They were having one of their Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Days and it was happening all at once. Well I had reached my limit for the day so it was time to bring out the Peacekeeper missiles. Here is what I said at the top of my voice: "Buckle up and shut up!" Boom. You could have heard a pin drop. I had established peace--for the moment--but at what cost? Unfortunately, my kids still give me a hard time about that one. I am kind of a safety nut in the car so every time I say buckle up the kids remind me of my failure. But that's OK. It keeps me humble. I think that's one story my kids will tell their kids. "Do you know what grandpa said to us when we were little?" ;-)

So guess what dads? I am one of those bad dads I am talking about. This is why every dad also needs gentleness to accompany his discipline. You can't be an Eli a Samuel or a David when it comes to parenting but neither can you be a nuclear warhead. Discipline and gentleness need to be two sides of the same coin.

The classic text for this is Ephesians 6:4. *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* I have often said that no one can make you mad. But we use this excuse all of the time when we say--or think--"You make me so mad!" Can another person actually make you mad? let me ask the question another way. Anger is a type of explosion, so what two things do you need for an explosion to occur? You need fuel and a spark. For example, my car has been in the shop for over a week because it has a spark but the fuel shuts off as soon as the engine turns over. So you need both a fuel and a spark for an explosion. The fuel of an angry response comes from within you and the spark comes from

without. If your heart has a gas leak, you will explode and the slightest spark. But if your heart is not leaking gas, then the sparks all around you will not cause an explosion.

Here's how this relates to the verse in Ephesians. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. Now in one sense, no one can literally *make* you angry-to actually force you to be angry. However, young children have hearts that leak gas and as their father, you provide the spark by your lack of gentleness. You provoke your children to anger. Young children lack the maturity and self-control and are therefore, more easily provoked to anger. So dads, when come into the room with one of your nuclear warheads--or even something less explosive than that--you provoke your children to anger. "But my kid doesn't get angry when I blow up" you say. A child may not get angry in response to your anger, but you something has happened to them. You have closed their spirit. You put them into shut down mode. And when that happens, how can you possibly do the other half of the verse? *but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*. Ahh, there's that word discipline again. The word discipline here really means training, which really what parental discipline is all about. discipline is punitive but rather formative. It is not meant to punish and hurt but to form and train. So a lack of gentleness provokes your children which shuts down any possibility for discipline and training.

So dads, ask yourself this question. How is your balance between discipline and gentleness? Which side of the fence do you most often fall to? Are you fairly gentle in your demeanor but lack discipline and engagement with your kids? Or do you tend to discipline harshly without much gentleness? Every father is imbalanced to some degree, however small or great.

Does that make you a "bad dad"? Maybe not, but here's what it does do. It gives you the opportunity to continually share the gospel with your children. What does this look like? When you apologize to your kids, when you are truly repentant, what you can tell your kids is "Your dad needs Jesus just as much as you do." Even our fatherly failures can be redeemed and become a opportunity to train your kids in godliness.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGM-118\\_Peacekeeper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGM-118_Peacekeeper)