

Raising Timothys, Not Absaloms

By John R. Gibson

“O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!” 2 Sam. 18:33

As my Bible reading has recently taken me through 2 Samuel I have been struck again by the heartaches David’s sons caused him. From Amnon defiling David’s daughter to Absalom’s revolt and adultery with David’s concubines to Adonijah trying to usurp the throne, this one who was in many ways the model king suffered so much because of his sons. It is painful to watch David weeping at the death of Absalom, but, unfortunately, he was not the last to weep over the death, whether physical, spiritual, or both, of a rebellious child.

I don’t pretend to have all the answers and every situation is different, but there are some clear Scriptural guidelines to help us bring up children who are more like Timothy than Absalom. We are not talking about being able to force our children to do right, for people are born with freewill and just as the children of sinners can turn to the Lord, those who have been shown the way of righteousness by their parents can turn from it (2 Pet. 2:20-22). We cannot take away our children’s freewill, but that does not mean we are unable to impact the course they choose.

And before I go further, let me speak to those whose children have gone aside or will go astray in the future. The parents of a “prodigal” should never condone sin and should follow the biblical pattern for the restoration of the erring for the good of the child and others (Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:19-20; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thes. 3:6-15). But remember that as long as there is breath, there is hope. When the word has been implanted (James 1:21), it may yet save their souls. Continue to pray that you may one day say with the father of Luke 15:24, “for this my son was dead, but is alive again; he was lost and is found.” It is appropriate that we mourn in such a situation, but we ought not despair of hope.

Be an example of faith to your children. When Paul wrote of calling to remembrance the genuine faith of Timothy, he noted that it “dwelt first in [his] grandmother Lois and [his] mother Eunice” (2 Tim. 1:5). The counsel Paul gave Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:12, 16 about being an effective evangelist can also be applied to parents—“be an example...in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity...Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine [teaching—ESV].” When I think of David and what might have gone wrong my mind immediately goes to 2 Sam. 11 and his lust, adultery, attempted deception, and eventual murder of a loyal servant and soldier. This man truly walked by faith in so many aspects of his life, but what a tragic failure this was. We must strive to avoid being the one our children can point to as the justification (actually, excuse) for their failures. Let’s put God first and seek to so live as to feel that if our children imitate us they will be on the right path. And do we need to add that part of that good example will be a steadfast desire to continue growing, willingness to acknowledge our mistakes and sins, and then seek to overcome them? (See 2 Pet. 1:5-11; 1 John 1:5—2:6; et al.)

Then be sure that like Timothy they know the Holy Scriptures from childhood (2 Tim. 3:15). It is our responsibility to bring up our children in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) and it

would help if we heeded the instructions given in Deut. 6:6-9 to first have the words of God in our heart and then commit ourselves to teaching them diligently to our children when we lie down or rise up, when we sit in the house or we walk by the way. Because of his multiple wives and children being in separate households, it is highly likely that David failed in being able to speak so often of the law with his children. And as parents today we must realize that the move away from an agrarian society means fathers and their children no longer work the fields together, thus eliminating those many hours of teaching opportunities, but we can still find time to teach and exhort if it is a priority with us. Car rides and dinner conversations need not be limited to spiritual things, but that which matters most should certainly be part of it.

While the **Bible classes** we conduct congregationally were never intended as and must not be treated as substitutes for parental instruction, **don't neglect or waste this opportunity**. Have your children present and prepared every time. Talk with them before and after class about the lessons so that you might both aid them in the learning process and further impress them with your concern for their knowledge of God's word.

In addition to your example and instruction, **know that the peaceable fruit of righteousness can only be produced when discipline is provided** (Heb. 12:5-11). In its collection of wisdom, Proverbs often speaks of the need to correct a child, even to point of applying the rod to them. Please take the time to read Prov. 13:24; 19:13; 22:15; 23:13-14; et al. It goes against all our present culture would tell us, but good parenting requires being a good disciplinarian. And when it comes to discipline it is important that the "father's command" and "the law of [the] mother" be in harmony (Prov. 6:20). Parents, seek to work as one in the correction of your children. Discipline is a necessary part of parenting, but on this point it would be good to remember what Paul said to the church of the Thessalonians in 1 Thes. 2:7, 11. "We were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her children...as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children." Good discipline strikes a balance between gentleness and sternness, praise and punishment. Each child and each situation will be different, but we should always be striving to find that appropriate balance, for one extreme leads to a spoiled child, while the other provokes resentment and discouragement (Col. 3:21).

We began with David's dreadful lament, but let's close on a brighter note and all seek to follow God's pattern for parenting that we might say with the apostle, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 1:4).

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