

“Parenting by Grace”

I Samuel 2:12-17; 22-25

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
February 5, 2006

I recently read an article about a young artist, Ike Moody. Some of his sketches and drawings are selling for over a thousand dollars. This article caught my attention because I know his father. Dwight Moody and I went to seminary together and have been friends in the ministry ever since.

Actually, the article I mentioned features Dwight more than his son, Ike. There is a picture of Dwight showing his son’s drawings and talking about how proud he is of the fine work Ike is doing. The reason his son is not pictured is because he is in prison. He robbed two banks and is currently serving a seven year prison term.

Dwight’s son began his life of crime while his father was pastoring a church in a community of fifty thousand people. That’s big news in a town that size. Word travels fast. It moves pretty quickly through religious circles, too. Since Dwight is an author that has spoken in many churches, this problem did not stay in the family very long.

Recently, I attended a conference where two ministers unburdened their hearts. They broke down as they told us about their children’s addictions and other poor lifestyle choices. Their anguish and pain were immeasurable.

One thing that these minister/parents have in common is their goodness. They are committed Christians that love the Lord and enjoy ministry. They are gifted and highly respected among their peers.

While listening to them, I was reminded again that good people don’t necessarily have good children, or at least children that make wise decisions. This was certainly the case with Eli as our text reveals.

From all indications, Eli appeared to be a good man and devoted priest, serious about his faith. He took care of the priestly duties at Shiloh in ancient Israel during the 11th century and was the priest to whom Samuel was brought to fulfill Hannah’s vow.

His sons, on the other hand, were scoundrels. They were priests that did not take their faith seriously. They were greedy, immoral and corrupt. They exploited their influence and abused people. Even God had to intervene, speaking through young Samuel words of judgment upon Eli’s family. Can you feel Eli’s frustration and pain?

Perhaps you are here today burdened over decisions your children are making. You are heartbroken and worried. You are losing sleep and shedding tears.

Actually, you may be in shock. Your child is quite different from you, which has caught you by surprise. You naturally expected your child to have the same interests, desires, outlook and lifestyle as you. Their behavior and decisions have thrown you for a loop and have you scratching your head asking, “Where did this child come from? How could he make such irresponsible decisions? Where did I go wrong? What’s going to happen to her?”

Why do children of good people head down the wrong road? I think this question deserves attention as this story unfolds.

The ancient text does not tell us why Hophni and Phinehas were rebellious. Evidently they felt immune to the normal demands of moral behavior and rejected Eli’s efforts to discipline them. One thing is for sure. Eli’s sons had their own personalities, interests, desires and demons that influenced their decisions, as we all do.

When I counsel with parents whose children have made unwise decisions, I remind them of several things. Your children have a mind of their own. They come with their own neurological and DNA makeup. You do not control them and neither should you. They are free to make

decisions and will exercise that freedom at an early age. When they make responsible decisions, all is well. When they don't, conflict surfaces and tension mounts.

Some of their bad decisions may be due to immaturity and inexperience. That's understandable. Chronic misbehavior is another matter. Why do children rebel?

Perhaps they are free spirits that rebel against all forms of authority. They may be traumatized by events beyond their control, the death of a parent, divorce of their parents or child abuse and are reacting to what happened at an earlier age. They could be suffering from depression which, in children, is manifested through unreasonable behavior. They may feel favoritism is being shown to other siblings and are struggling with low self-esteem. They may feel pressure to live out their parents' dreams rather than their own. They could be prone to addictions that control their decisions. There is any number of reasons for rebellion and, if left unresolved, will influence them all their lives.

I also remind parents they are not the only influence in their children's lives. Peer influence is especially strong, which is why unhealthy friends can lead impressionable people down the wrong path. Children want to fit in and be accepted by their peers. They will do almost anything to make sure this happens.

Quite candidly, I tell some parents that good people are not automatically good parents. A unique set of skills is needed to be responsible parents, and these skills need to be learned and practiced. Good citizens and even faithful church members can be guilty of neglect, naiveté or poor parenting skills.

What do you do if your child is making bad decisions that affect the whole family?

Pray and ask God for several things.

Ask God for wisdom. No one knows enough to be the perfect parent. This is why every responsible parent must seek God's wisdom, understanding, insight and guidance.

Ask God to help you grow and mature even as you guide your children. I have told many couples that our children will teach us more about life than our parents. This will occur if we see our children as mirrors that help us see ourselves, so that, with God's help we can make changes in our own lives.

Allow the grace of God to repair, heal and liberate you so you can be a better parent and role model for your children. Don't pass on unhealthy attitudes and tendencies to them.

Ask God to help you deal with your pride. Parents feel judged or validated by their children. If children are misbehaving, parents believe others won't think they are good Christians. So, energy that should be directed toward helping a child is used to conceal the problem. Instead of seeking a support group that can help, many parents suffer in isolation and ignorance.

Ask God to bring healthy influences into your child's life. When they tune out your voice, ask Him to speak through other voices, even His own.

Ask the Lord to watch over and protect your child. Ask Him to walk where you cannot.

Ask God for the grace to hold on to your child when others let go. Ask Him to give you a vision of what your child can become with His help. Ask Him to help you believe in your child when all others have abandoned him or her.

Ask God to forgive you for mistakes you have made as a parent. Receive His grace, which will remind you that you did the best you could under the circumstances. Quit beating yourselves over the head for not knowing better.

Ask God to help you find counseling and support. Turn to those that can give you insight and understanding as well as emotional and spiritual support. Don't grieve or struggle alone.

Ask for the power to set a good example of healthy behavior before your children. I assure you that your children are watching you. Be a good role model even when you are heartbroken and confused.

Ask God to help you be a responsible, limit-setting parent. Don't enable a child to continue making bad decisions. Rescuing children from bad decisions only encourages more bad

behavior. Natural consequences are wonderful teachers. Provide a soft place for your children to fall, but let them fall.

Ask God for the strength to cope with whatever may come. Brace yourself. The road you are traveling is treacherous, filled with all kinds of dangers and risks. Prepare for the worst but pray it never happens.

At the meeting where two ministers laid their souls bare, one of them said, “If you had told me ten years ago that I would be traveling down this road, I would have laughed and said, ‘No way! You don’t know my kids. They would never do those things.’ I am here to tell you they did. I am also here to tell you that I still love them and am standing by them. With God’s help, we’ll all travel through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil.”

Perhaps you need this kind of faith and support. Smoke Rise is a place where both can be found. Let us be a part of your journey, offering hope and help. God has given us enough to share.