

THE KNIGHTSVILLE LAMP

The Strong-Willed Child

Of Eli, God said *"For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them"* (1 Sam. 3:13). The context clearly shows that Eli failed to restrain his sons when they were older – and the likelihood is he failed them as children too.

Child physiologist, **Dr. James Dobson**, wrote *"Just as surely as some children are naturally compliant, there are others who seem to be defiant upon exit from the womb. They come into the world smoking a cigar and complaining about the temperature in the delivery room and the incompetence of the nursing staff and the way things are run by the administrator of the hospital. They expect meals to be served the instant they are ordered, and they demand every moment of mother's time. As the months unfold, their expression of willfulness becomes even more apparent, the winds reaching hurricane force during toddlerhood."* Dobson is describing a *"Strong-Willed Child."* These children must be restrained lest they grow into sons of Eli.

While God does not have a chapter devoted to this subject, his word does give us some insight into handling this potential "landmine of parenthood." *"Train up a child in the way he should go,"* (Prov. 22:6). This word *"train"* translates a word meaning *"to narrow."* Narrowing suggests throttling or hindering. **This implies restraint!** Parents must be willing to throttle a child's impulses and behavior. Also, God directly addresses fathers (wives hand this article to your husband) *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord,"* (Eph. 6:4). Fathers are responsible for the rearing of their children. This doesn't indicate mothers have no role. Instead, we learn that under his headship, **fathers** and **mothers** are to be actively involved in the raising of children.

Today, however, during the first two years of a child's life, the typical father is little more than a parenting aide. He serves as mom's assistant, carrying out her child-care instructions and relieving her when she needs a break

from almost constant service to the child. Often it is mom who is involved with the child during infancy and early toddlerhood. Therefore, it is mom who is most often on the "firing line" when dealing with a budding self-willed child.

Training must "evolve." Between a child's second and third birthdays (or thereabouts), mom must transform herself from caretaker to an authority figure, from servant to teacher of social values. Moms as well as dads must train, nurture and discipline. Parents must understand the need to throttle a child who is argumentative, stubborn, disrespectful, and demanding.

The modern mantra of motherhood says that mom is not ever to change her job description. Let me illustrate this by "dredging up the past." Mothers of previous generations knew every child was a born narcissist. Furthermore, she knew her first two years of motherhood had convinced her child the world revolved around him. She nurtured and cared for him. She answered his every need, but she also knew this could not last. So, during her child's third year, she changed. She transferred responsibility to him, began expecting him to stand on his own two feet, fight his own battles and stew in his own juices. Before long, he was no longer a toddler. He was a growing child. Serving stopped and suppressing began. Training was well underway!

Today, by contrast, child psychology has encouraged mom not to transform herself on schedule into an authority figure. Child nurturing books today tell mom to "serve" the child for two years, but then, instead of changing her job description, she keeps right on finding new ways to serve. **Today's ever present strong-willed child is a child stuck in toddlerhood.** He is never forced to face the truth that the world does not revolve around him after two **stuck in toddlerhood.** He is never forced to face the truth that the world does not revolve around him after two years. The behaviors associated with this (tantrums, laziness, reclusiveness and poor work ethics) can be traced to mothers and fathers who are afraid to make him upset and who desperately longs for him to "like" them. This is the sort of thinking that causes parents to become "cowed." This is what causes parents to fail to restrain their children. These parents will be heard complaining about a child's disobedience but will do nothing about it.

The way Joseph and Mary raised Jesus can serve as a pattern for parents today. *"Then he (Jesus) went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them . . . And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."* (Lk. 2:51-52).

In order for a child to be subject to his parents, those parents must assume responsibility. Parents must throttle disobedience, rebellion, mischievous and generally unruly behavior. Rules must be set, boundaries drawn and regulations imposed, and children must not be permitted — with impunity — to go beyond them. Parents must never lose a battle, because the stakes are too great.

If a child misbehaves, punishment must be swift, sure and consistent. Parents must stop jumping through hoops for children and begin to impose upon those children guidelines that will govern their lives. Feeding a crying two-month-old when he is hungry is far different from submitting to the tantrum of a four-year-old who might want a "Happy Meal" from McDonald's.

As a result of Jesus submitting to parents, who "took charge" he *"increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."* That is, he developed mentally, physically and spiritually. But he also developed socially, he increased in favor with his fellow man. He was not a misfit nor an outcast. Children learn their "social skills" at home. Kindness, manners, sharing, interactions with others and the ability to get along are things a well-adjusted child learns at home.

Don't listen to the contemporary view of child raising. Pay no attention to those who would tell you that the best parent is the one who serves the child the best and the longest. Do not believe those who tell you the best parents are the ones who are permissive and who make excuses for "typical childhood pranks." The bible tells us the best parent is the one who is willing to *"Train up a child in the way he should go,"* because *"when he is old he will not depart from it."* (Prov. 22:16).

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