

Manhood Begins With “M”

They’re Your Kids . . . Be Their Dad – Part I

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Today is Father’s Day and I want to spend time exploring not only the subject of being a godly father, but the broader subject of what it means to be a biblical model of a man. I am convinced that manhood begins with the letter “M” in more ways than one. In true biblical manhood, the man stands for modeling; that is:

- modeling godly character;
- modeling godly convictions;
- modeling godly commitments.

Have you ever thought about the fact that no one has ever been given the opportunity to choose their father? God decided that. Some of you had fathers who modeled biblical manhood – godly character, convictions, and commitments. Many of you, I would dare guess, did not have that.

Beyond the fact that no one chose who their father would be, since the conceiving of a child is attributed in Scripture to an act of God’s design, no man really chose to be a father. God arranged that too.

And, standing in that delivery room, holding that newborn baby, as I did several times, you probably had the same sensation sweep over you, at some point, that I did. You found yourself saying, “What in the world do I do next?!”

You probably did not say that out loud, however, as you did not want your wife to panic.

Learning how to be a father occurs through on-the-job training. By the time you have a few things mastered, the subject of your experiments is gone.

The truth is, being a godly man is a goal and, in general, is not completely achievable. It is more like a passionate pursuit. Even the great apostle Paul, whom we would say, without hesitation, was a model of godliness that is worth imitating, once wrote, in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 12a,

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on . . .

Today, I want to address the men who want to press on. I want to preach a sermon to all the men. And all the women say?? “Amen!”

Modeling Biblical Manhood

What does it mean to put the “M” back into manhood? What does it look like to model godly character, godly convictions, and godly commitments.

Obviously, this is a series, not a sermon. That is why we will spend four Sunday mornings and evenings soon, addressing the subject of a godly heritage. Consider this sermon an introduction.

I want to introduce the subject of modeling godly manhood by telling the tragic story of a man who should have been a model, but was not. He was considered to be the most spiritual man in Israel. He was the man who should have been voted, “Most likely to be a godly example,” not only to his children, but to his entire generation. His name was Eli.

We catch our first glimpse of a looming family disaster in the book of I Samuel, chapter 2, just after Hannah and her husband hand over little Samuel to serve under Eli. After the young boy, Samuel, is deposited into Eli's care, the Bible pulls back the curtain and reveals terrible corruption.

Notice verse 12.

Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the Lord

Eli's sons were priests, by occupation. They spent their days handling the offerings and the sacrifices. But, the text announces bluntly,

... they did not know the Lord

In other words:

- they managed the things of God, but they did not know God;
- they could talk about God, but they did not care about God;
- they could find their place in the Word of God, but they did not listen to God's Word;
- they could lead people in the worship of God, but they did not love God.

People would have said that the sons of Eli were important to God, but God says, in this verse, that the sons of Eli were worthless to His cause. In fact, they had been modeling ungodly manhood for years.

Areas of ungodly manhood modeled by the sons of Eli

The remainder of this paragraph in I Samuel, gives us a detailed account of at least two different categories of ungodly, sinful living, instead of spiritual living.

The sons of Eli modeled greed and dishonesty

1. First, the sons of Eli modeled greed and dishonesty.

Look at chapter 2, verses 13b through 14.

... When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

According to the Law, the priests were to receive the breast and shoulder of the animal as their portion *after* it was ceremonially waved before the Lord. In a very real sense, the meat was the priests paycheck! Because of the steady flow of worshippers, they had more than enough to eat.

The sons of Eli, however, sent their servants out to the pot and, while it was still boiling, they stuck a huge fork into the pot and took whatever meat they wanted. In addition to that, the fat was considered the best portion and was therefore burned on the altar to God. Verse 15 tells us what Eli's sons did with the fat.

Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw."

And, what if the worshipper refused on biblical grounds? Continue to verse 16.

If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force."

Eli's sons had converted the priesthood into a form of organized crime. The priest's servants were serving as the "hit men".

The sons of Eli were modeling greed and open, corrupt dishonesty. Notice verse 17.

Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for the men despised the offering of the Lord.

The Hebrew verb "despised" does not mean "to hate," but "to ignore; to treat with utter disregard; to ignore its value".

By the way, most men do not hate the Bible; in fact, they probably have their own copy. They instead, just ignore it; they do not revere it; they hardly ever read it. That is the idea in this verse.

The sons of Eli modeled immorality and arrogance

2. Secondly, the sons of Eli modeled, before the people, immorality and arrogance.

Look at verse 22.

Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how

they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

I would rather not even talk about this! How utterly corrupt and disgraceful this is. How tragically, openly hypocritical these sons were.

They knew the Word! They were serving God! And yet, they were involved immorally with women who worked with them.

That is another way of saying, “Who you really are is measured by who you are in the dark.”

What you do behind closed doors says more about your character than what you do in public.

My youngest brother is a financial planner. Before starting his own business, he, for a time, lived in a small town in Georgia. While there, he and his wife joined a small Baptist church and got involved in serving. They soon discovered that it was a church where a wealthy layman had dictated to and dominated the church and every pastor in its history of nearly thirty years. My brother told me that half the people in the church believed that anything he said was the gospel. The man had even told my brother, with a measure of pride and arrogance, that he had been able to cheat the government out of the full taxes he owed to them for years.

This man led the worship services; he opened in prayer, and yet, he was a fraud. Like the sons of Eli, he was a model of arrogance, dishonesty, and greed.

Areas of ungodly manhood modeled by Eli

The question that I automatically ask, after reading these verses about such ungodly sons, is, “Where was Eli, their father?!”

You are about to discover that Eli was there all along, but he was also modeling at least two ungodly characteristics.

Eli modeled spiritual apathy

1. First, Eli modeled spiritual apathy.

Look at verse 22 again.

Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel . . .

The Hebrew verb “heard” indicates that he heard it time and time again. In other words, Eli had been hearing about his sons immoral, greedy, corrupt behavior over an extended period of time.

So, he finally speaks. Continue to verses 23 and 24.

He said to them, “Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the Lord’s people circulating.”

Eli should have defrocked them; that is, stripped them of their role as priests. In fact, according to the Law, he could have had them stoned to death, before the elders, for their mockery of God and His Law. But, what does he do instead? He continues to allow his sons to steal from people and fornicate with women, while the whole nation suffers.

The truth is, Eli has closed his eyes for decades. He has consistently refused to discipline his sons.

Would you note that I did not say, “Eli refused to discipline his sons consistently,” but rather, “Eli consistently refused to discipline his sons.”

No parent is consistent. The words “parenting” and “consistency” should never be in the same sentence. Part of the reason is that it takes so much time and that every situation is different, as well as the fact that children begin to need to be disciplined at a very young age.

Your little toddler toddles over to that shelf where you have a little curio. He reaches out his pudgy little hand, and you say, “No, no.”

Then, he looks back at you, directly into your eyes, and grabs it. He has already decided that you are not tough enough to take him on. He will show you what he thinks of your, “No, no.”

No wonder Mark Twain said, “When your child turns two, put him in a barrel and feed him through a knothole.”

He went on to say, “And when they become a teenager, plug up the hole.”

He must have had kids.

The truth is, Eli never really tried. You get the feeling that all he ever did was say, “No, no,” and, when his sons grabbed it anyway, he said, “Well, boys will be boys.”

Look at chapter 3, verse 13, where God says,

For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.

God held Eli responsible, but for what?! For his sons sinning?! No! For refusing to confront their sin.

The word “rebuke” could be translated, “restrain or confront”. It is the same word given to every father today, by Paul, in Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 4, when he writes,

Fathers . . . bring [your children] up in the . . . instruction of the Lord.

The word “instruction” is the same word as “rebuke”. Instructing children means confronting sin, restraining evil, and challenging disobedience.

A number of years ago, a member of the Royal Family visited America for the first time. Upon returning to London, after the lengthy visit, a reporter asked him to name the most amazing thing he saw in America. Without hesitation, he said, “The way the parents obey their children.”

The godly father who refuses to model apathy and instead, models godly character, convictions, and commitments, is a man who is willing to:

- set the standard,
- enforce the standard,
- model the standard,
- confront when the standard is violated, and
- confess when he himself fails to meet the standard.

Eli failed to confront his sons. He was given three warnings, or opportunities. Three times, God sent a message to Eli that he was failing to model biblical manhood. And all three times, Eli responded by covering his ears and eyes.

Three warnings to Eli about spiritual apathy

- The first warning came from the public in general.

We have already read that the people were talking about the scandal. Some of the people had evidently, been slipping up to the old priest and saying, in effect, “Have you heard what your sons are doing? They’re hurting the nation. The name of God is suffering, as well as your own integrity as judge and high priest.”

Eli’s response was to, “See no evil, hear no evil”!

- The second warning came from an unnamed prophet who even predicted that Eli’s sons would be killed on the same day, as an act of God’s judgment.

Eli’s response was to, “See no evil”!

- The third warning came from little Samuel, after God came to him in the night and delivered the verdict against Eli and his sons.

Eli’s response was to, “See no evil”!

Robert Lewis, in his book, *Raising a Modern Day Knight*, defines biblical manhood by saying, first of all, that a godly man resists passivity. That is, he:

- gets involved with his world, his family, his children, his church,
- refuses the urge to be a spiritual couch potato; a spiritual dead beat, and
- shuns apathy, the very thing Eli modeled as he refused to confront his wicked sons.

Eli modeled hypocrisy

2. The second thing that Eli modeled, and perhaps this was the most devastating thing to his sons, was hypocrisy.

One of the most insightful passages related to Eli’s failure is found in I Samuel, chapter 2. Look at verse 29, where God is speaking to Eli.

Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?

Did you catch that? Guess what? Eli was eating the meat that his sons were bringing home.

Do you know why his sons disregarded Eli, their father? Because, while he was saying, “No, no,” he was, at the same time, also saying, “Pass the meatloaf.”

He was saying, “You boys shouldn’t be taking this meat. Hey, that’s my favorite kind.”

While he should have returned the meat to the tabernacle for sacrifice, instead he ate it along with his sons.

Listen, dear friend, perhaps the reason your son:

- does not respect authority is because you are always criticizing your own boss behind his back;
- does not respect girls is because he sees how you belittle your wife;
- has a foul mouth is because, although he hears you pray at supper time, he hears you curse, under your breath, during the ball game;

- is among the sixty percent of teenagers who attend church but are sexually involved because you do not even grunt a disapproval at a movie where sex outside of marriage is glamorized in living color, so he knows that you really must not be all that concerned;
- does not care about the things of God because you do not.

Larry Crabb, a well known counselor and author, conducted a seminar in Colorado Springs. During the seminar, he asked three hundred fifty men if their own fathers were godly role models. Less than ten percent could raise their hands.

Was your father a godly role model? Are you?

The bottom line, in this tragedy, is that Eli was no different than his sons – and his sons were no different than him.

Application

I want you to know that our nation is in desperate need of godly men who will put the “M” back into manhood; who will model godliness for all of us to see.

That is one of the reasons that, the older I get, the more grateful I am for my own father.

I called him last night to wish him an early “Happy Father’s Day”. I knew I would be in meetings nearly all day today and tonight. I said, “Dad, I’m going to be preaching tomorrow on godly men. I’m going to mention that none of us got to choose our fathers, but I want you to know that I’m glad God chose you to be mine.”

Hallmark could not have said it better.

I told him, “The older I get, the more grateful I am that I had a godly example of manhood – not just a good provider, not just a good man, but a godly model.”

And, I added how much I wanted to be more like him.

Do you want to be like that too? Let me give you a couple actions that we can take that are the opposite of Eli’s ungodly model.

Modeling biblical manhood means –

Modeling biblical manhood means:

- when you are tempted to dodge the assignment, you refuse;
- when you fail to measure up to God’s standard, you repent;
- when you are offered the opportunity to communicate value and truth, you respond.

For you who are fathers, what would it mean to your child for you to communicate spiritual challenges, events, and dreams in your own life? What would it mean for you to share not just your beliefs, but your battles?

Do you remember that company party? Your clients were there and you had to be there. You tried to be polite, as you refused the offers to drink. You slipped away from more than one conversation in order to avoid the dirty jokes. Do you remember how you felt? Like a relic from the Victorian era; out of sync with the world; a “holy Joe”.

Have you ever considered how powerful that story would be to your son or daughter; to that person you are discipling; to that new believer; to people in your world who happen to be facing incredible peer pressure, at school or in their own career, to blend in with the crowd and keep their Christianity a secret? There is incredible pressure to talk, act, and live like the world.

Modeling requires communication – telling others what God is doing in your life.

It is time for men who know Jesus Christ to put the “M” back into manhood – modeling godly character, godly convictions, and godly commitment to relationships in their families and in their world.

The very things that Eli failed to model in his generation are the things that we must model to ours, as we pursue, with passion, a lifestyle that brings honor and glory to name and cause of Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/16/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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