

The Wise Man Who Became a Foolish Father

Lessons Learned from Solomon and Rehoboam

They're Your Kids . . . Be Their Dad – Part II

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Recently, I read the story of a first-time father named Michael Bryson. Michael surprised his wife on her first Mother's Day, by bringing their six month old son, Jason, to the hospital where she worked as a nurse. After the balloons and the laughing and the sharing was over, Miriam returned to her post and her two men returned to the car for the trip home.

You can imagine that getting all the stuff back into the car was not an easy job. Michael balanced the baby carrier on the roof of the car while tossing the candy in the front seat, arranging the flowers on the floor, and wrestling the balloons out of the wind into the backseat. Finally, he got everything arranged and headed home. Suddenly, other drivers began to honk at Michael and flash their lights. He could not figure out what was happening, until he hit about 55 miles per hour on the highway and heard a scraping sound move across the top of his car. Then, Michael watched in horror through the rearview mirror as the baby carrier – and Jason – slid off the roof, bounced on the trunk, dropped to the road, and began to toboggan down the highway behind the car.

The driver in the car behind Michael's had spotted the baby carrier and was prepared. He screeched to a halt behind the car seat to shield it from oncoming traffic. Michael slammed on his brakes, ran back to Jason, and discovered the baby had only minor scratches. Then, as the waves of fear, guilt, and relief hit him, this new father began to sob

uncontrollably on the highway, while holding his son in a tight embrace.¹

I imagine most fathers would do the same thing, if they had placed their child in such a dangerous position. I wonder, however, how many fathers are committed with great passion, to strapping their children in for the ride of their lives. How many fathers check to see that their children are safe; that they have what they need physically – food to eat, clothes to wear; that they get a good education and have plans for a good job, without ever thinking about their spiritual safety and their eternal soul?

If you wanted to find, in the word of God, an example of that kind of failure as a father, it would be very easy. In fact, you would have to look ten times harder to find a success story than to find a story of failure as a father. Moses, Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David, could give more information on how to do it wrong than how to do it right.

Perhaps, of them all, the classic example is the wisest man who ever lived. He was a man who became perhaps, the most foolish father who ever lived as well. This man never strapped his son in, spiritually, for the ride of his life.

I want to challenge every father today, from the life of a man who was applauded as a very wise man, but became an incredibly wayward father.

Solomon – Wise Man

If I were to ask you, apart from Jesus Christ, who was the wisest man who ever lived, your answer would be, “Solomon.”

In II Chronicles, chapter 1, verse 7, we read that, . . . *God appeared to Solomon and said to him, “Ask what I shall give you.”*

Can you imagine being given one wish?!

I was driving through a nearby state recently, with my wife and one of our girls, and I saw a billboard announcing that the state lottery had reached 113 million dollars. Several miles later, my wife asked me, “What are you thinking about?”

I said, “Well, to be honest with you, I am in the middle of imagining how I would spend 113 million dollars.”

In my mind, I could see the finished church campus, another campus for the seminary, the new ministry departments, the outreach possibilities, the giving to global missions, and, okay, in the driveway of my home, a fully restored 1930’s pick-up truck with whitewalls and chrome hubcaps and shiny wooden sideboards . . .! Man, that would be living!

One wish! I would be tempted to say, “Lord, 113 million just might do it.”

Do you remember Solomon’s wish? He replied, “I wish for wisdom.”

God granted Solomon wisdom, and with it, came everything else.

Solomon’s life could be summarized with two statements. He was:

- a man who had it all;
- a man who tried it all.

Solomon had it all!

1. Solomon had it all!

Solomon had wealth, fame, adoration, a powerful kingdom, and much more. Solomon’s own house “spoke volumes”. Although the construction of the temple of God during Solomon’s reign was vast and expensive, the building program for his own personal home took twice as long! In fact, there was something telling about that. Solomon’s home was called the “House of the Forest of Lebanon,” due to its massive pillars made from cedar trees.

Marsha and I traveled to the Biltmore Estate and were “wowed” by the extravagance of this home that was built by a millionaire in 1895. There were thirty-four bedrooms, forty-three bathrooms, and sixty-five

fireplaces covering four acres of land. We went through the estate tour with our mouths hanging open. There was an indoor winter garden, a dining room with beautiful tapestries from Europe, and dining room chairs that replicated the splendor of those of Great Britain’s monarchy.

I have news for you however, the Biltmore Estate would have been nothing more than a guest room at Solomon’s house!

Solomon’s home was so lavishly furnished that everyone who came to eat in his dining room, ate and drank from nothing other than solid gold settings. Every three years, ships came to his estate bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. Solomon had one magnificent room called “The Hall of Judgment” and another called “The Hall of the Throne,” from which he could adjudicate regal affairs. Remember, this was not his palace, this was his personal home.

II Chronicles, chapter 9 reveals the wealth of King Solomon. Look at verses 22 through 24.

So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth were seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. They brought every man his gift, articles of silver and gold, garments, weapons, spices, horses and mules, so much year by year.

That reminds me, when my wife and I ate lunch at the Biltmore Estate, we ate in a restaurant on the grounds that had originally been the horse stable. In fact, our booth was a former stall for one of the horses that had been so fortunate as to belong to the Vanderbilts. We were amazed to note the tiled walls, the ceramic sink, the running water, and the ornate tiled floor – all of which were original. We thought, “Man, talk about spending money – these stables are nicer than homes! The Vanderbilt’s kept their thirty or forty horses stabled in comfort and splendor.”

Listen to II Chronicles, chapter 9, verse 25,

. . . Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots and 12,000 horsemen [three trainers for every horse], and he stationed them in the chariot cities . . .

In other words, Solomon owned so many horses and chariots and employed so many trainers and horsemen, that he had to build a city, not just a nice stable, but an entire city just to house them!

The text goes on to record, in verse 27, that Solomon,

. . . made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem.

Read his autobiography, called Ecclesiastes, to discover that Solomon had everything anyone could ever want. He wrote in Ecclesiastes, chapter 2, verses 4 through 9,

I enlarged my works: I built houses . . . I planted vineyards . . . I made gardens and parks . . . and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water . . . from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. . . . I collected . . . silver and gold and the treasure of kings . . . I provided male and female singers . . . I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. . . .

That is another way of saying, “I had it all!”

Solomon tried it all!

2. The second phrase that would characterize Solomon’s incredibly blessed life would be, “Solomon tried it all”.

Solomon held back from nothing. He tried pleasure, business, recreation, sport . . . any thrill. You name it, Solomon did it.

There is a company called Thrillseekers Unlimited that offers, what they call, an “adrenaline vacation”. The owner promises a week of skydiving, bungee jumping, paragliding, and rock climbing for the “not so faint of heart”.

One of the vacationers chose bungee jumping as his “adrenaline sport”. What made this vacationer so unusual was that Mr. S. L. Potter was one hundred years old! He evidently lived with the same kind of adventuresome spirit as Solomon.

Mr. Potter celebrated his one hundredth birthday by doing something he had always wanted to do – bungee jump. His two children strongly protested. One of them was sixty-eight and the other was seventy-four. They said, “Dad, please don’t!”

However, this man would not listen and he safely jumped from two hundred feet. After his jump, he said to his family members who crowded around him, “Okay, whoever I gave ‘em to, give me back my teeth!”

Man! How would you like to keep up with him? “Here, hold my teeth and my cane, I’m gonna go bungee jump.”

There was nothing that Solomon could not try . . . and it seems that he tried everything.

By the way, Solomon was the one who wrote verse 10, in Ecclesiastes, chapter 9, that says,

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might . . .

Solomon had it all . . . and Solomon tried it all!

Solomon – Foolish Father

All did not end well for Solomon, however. The wise man became a foolish man . . . and saddest of all, a foolish father.

Perhaps the most fitting epitaph for Solomon would be the words of an author who said, “In this world, there are two tragedies; one is not getting what you want, and the other, is getting it.”

At the end of Solomon’s life, his failure to walk in wisdom as a middle aged and older man would come to light.

The grand temple that Solomon built was overshadowed by temples to false gods that he built for his pagan wives.

Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, who would begin his reign after Solomon’s death, had a reign that would simply be described as “Rehoboam’s reign of folly”. In other words, the foolishness of Solomon now became enthroned in the folly or foolishness of his son.

Solomon’s son would ascend the throne, living out nothing from the book of Proverbs. Rehoboam reflected nothing of godly wisdom and cared nothing for the ways of God. And, after a few arrogant and foolish decisions, he would basically preside over the funeral ceremony for a nation that will never be united again – until Jesus Christ comes again!

A few years after Solomon died, in fact, the Temple of God would be destroyed. However, the pagan temples, shrines, and altars, built for his pagan wives, would stand for three hundred years!

The personal legacy of Solomon is not wisdom . . . but folly.

Application

How could this happen? How could a man who was tutored in his youth by the godly prophet Nathan; who began as a young man with great wisdom from God that emerged in sacred writings such as Proverbs and the Song of Solomon, become spiritually blind and morally comatose?

More importantly for us, how do we avoid the failure of Solomon?

Two things godly fathers are convinced of

There are two observations I want to make and then apply. Let me give at least two things that men who are godly fathers are totally convinced of.

Shepherding in the home is better than succeeding in the world

1. First, godly fathers are men who are totally convinced that shepherding in the home is better than succeeding in the world.

Let me quickly say that there are, on the other hand, foolish fathers who considers material provision a greater priority than spiritual direction. In fact, if you ask the average father in the churches of America, "Are you providing for your children," they would never think you were talking about spiritual leadership. They would say, "Sure, I've got the best car seat in town!"

However, have these fathers strapped their children in for the ride of their lives?!

Fatherhood is more than conceiving a child, feeding a child, putting clothes on his back, and making sure he does his homework so he can get into college. Fatherhood is more than helping him learn how to manage money and to stay out of jail.

In the book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom wrote these perceptive words,

*Fathers and mothers have lost the idea that the highest aspiration they might have for their children is for them to be wise . . . competence and success are all that they can imagine.*ⁱⁱ

Wisdom is seeing life from God's perspective and applying God's truth in everyday life. And, that is simply not the ordinary passion of the average father who attends church.

Solomon, in his earlier years when he walked with God, wrote to his son, as recorded in Proverbs, chapter 23, verses 15 through 16a,

My son, if your heart is wise, my own heart also will be glad; and my inmost being will rejoice . . .

He wrote further, in verse 24,

The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who sires a wise son will be glad in him.

A father's conversation with a son or daughter should be:

- "I want to be a doctor."
- "That's great, but will you be a wise doctor?"
- "I want to be an artist."
- "That's great, but will you be a wise artist?"
- "I want to be a mechanic."
- "That's great, but will you be a wise mechanic?"
- "Will you, in whatever endeavor you pursue, fulfill your duty and your calling with God's perspective?"

Solomon challenged his son by telling him in chapter 24 of Proverbs, in verse 13,

My son, eat honey, for it is good, yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;

I like that. Solomon is telling his son of the sweet things that there are to eat. I would translate this by saying, "My son, eat the chocolate covered ones, they're the best."

Then Solomon adds, in verse 14a,

know that wisdom is thus for your soul; . . .

In other words, just as your taste buds love sweet things to eat, so your soul longs for wisdom. The mouth of the soul waters for sweet wisdom.

Solomon adds, in verse 14b,

. . . if you find it [wisdom], then there will be a future . . .

How many fathers tell their sons and daughters, "Listen, you need to know how to handle money and repair cars and purchase clothes and handle a credit card and a bank account. If you get all this stuff down, you'll have a future."

Solomon says, in verse 14b,

. . . if you find it [wisdom], then there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

The average parent today, is convinced that a good education is the foundation for a life that matters. Ladies and gentlemen, and especially fathers, an education without godly wisdom, will only make your sons and daughters intelligent failures in life.

Listen to this:

Since 1955, knowledge has doubled every five years; libraries groan with the weight of new books . . . in fact, our generation possesses more data about the universe and human personality than all previous generations put together. High school graduates today have been exposed to more information about the world than Plato, Aristotle and Benjamin Franklin. In terms of facts alone, neither Moses nor the Apostle Paul could pass a college entrance exam today. But by everyone's standards, even with all our knowledge, society today is populated with a bumper crop of brilliant failures . . . men and women educated to earn a living who do not know anything about handling life itself. Let's face it, knowledge is not enough to meet life's problems. We need wisdom, which helps us encounter life with godly skill.ⁱⁱⁱ

If wisdom can be simply learned from a book, Rehoboam needed nothing more than to read his father's book of Proverbs.

Perhaps Solomon, like many fathers today, pat themselves on the back because they have the same address as their children. Fathers might be tempted to think that coming home every night from work means they are the shepherds dispensing wisdom.

The problem is that even while the home address may be the same – and, by the way, for forty percent of the children in America today, the address is not the same – the Family Research Council reported that the average father in the home spends only eight minutes a day talking with his children. If the mother works too, the number drops to four minutes a day.^{iv}

One author summarized that the absent father (whether in the home or not) is increasingly recognized as a strong (if not leading) contributor to the cultural, moral, and spiritual meltdown of our nation.

Former U.S. Attorney General William Barr said, "If you look at the one factor that most closely correlates with crime, it's not poverty, it's not employment, it's not education; it's the absence of the father in the family."^v

From that vacuum, all sorts of theories have been inserted into the family. For thirty years, our culture has bought the feminist agenda that men are overrated and even unnecessary.

Now, the data is finally coming in that God knew what He meant when He gave the father the awesome responsibility of moral example and spiritual guide.

The Southern Baptist Convention recently revealed the conclusion of research that they conducted on the influence of fathers in the salvation of their children. The data is staggering. Research revealed that if a child is the first person in a household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5% probability that everyone else in the household will also become Christians. If the mother is the first to accept Christ, the percentage goes up to 17%. But if the father is the first to place his faith in Christ, 93% of all households follow his conversion to Christ.

Let me ask the fathers something, if your child's responsiveness to God and hunger for the word and love for serving in the church was a reflection of yours, what kind of Christian would you have on your hands?^{vi}

The absence of the father as moral guide and godly standard gave rise to another theory called the sexual revolution. This was a revolution that brought incredible devastation. In fact:

- Today, one out of every five Americans are infected with a sexually transmitted disease.
- Every year, there are twelve million cases of sexually transmitted diseases; eight million of these cases involve people under the age of twenty-six.
- Every day, six thousand teenagers are becoming infected with sexually transmitted diseases.

The message is still being announced that what everybody needs is more education about birth control. *No, what we need is self-control.*

The logic of our world is to take a teenager, put him out in the middle of the interstate, and then teach him how to dodge the cars; rather than teach him to stay off the interstate.

The *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which in the past has gone along with the politically correct message of our generation, published a powerful editorial that actually read,

This was the age of over-indulgence . . . of tolerance for anything and anybody . . . of anti-celibacy . . . it was the age when homosexuality came out of the closet . . . abortion was on demand . . . of Chlamydia and herpes, and it was the age of AIDS. The editors concluded: This is a great time to practice monogamy.^{vii}

What a brilliant idea!

Solomon himself warned his son about sexual immorality when he wrote, in Proverbs, chapter 5, verse 11,

. . . you groan at your final end, when your flesh and your body are consumed

Who better to teach the value of fidelity and the safety of monogamy than the example of a father who has chosen to love his wife and remain faithful to her, the mother of their children, for life. Who better to teach that no matter what the world says about you, what your wife and children know about you is the most important thing.

I had two points and there is hardly room for one more. The first point was, godly fathers believe that shepherding in the home is better than succeeding in the world.

Being an example is better than simply giving instruction

2. Secondly, godly fathers are convinced that being an example is better than simply giving instruction.

This is where Solomon eventually failed. He became the fulfillment of the unsatisfied, immoral, unhappy, discontented man that he wrote about in Proverbs.

Solomon had written earlier, in Proverbs, chapter 5, verses 22 and 23,

His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin. He will die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.

Rehoboam saw it happen. His father became “exhibit A” for the truth that “actions speak louder than words”!

God’s word through Moses, forbade the accumulation of horses and silver and gold – even specifically condemning going to Egypt to get the horses. II Chronicles, chapter 9, verse 28, informs us,

. . . they were bringing horses for Solomon from Egypt . . .

Rehoboam saw his father doing that very thing!

God’s word commanded, as recorded in I Kings, chapter 11, verse 2a,

. . . You shall not associate with them [foreign women], . . . for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.

Then, verses 2b through 3a , tell us,

. . . Solomon held fast to these in love. He had seven hundred wives . . . and his wives turned his heart away.

And Rehoboam was there all the while, watching and saying to himself, “My dad doesn’t really care what God says, so why should I care what He says either?”

Most fathers think, “If I throw a Bible in the car seat, that’ll be all I need to do!”

No, that son, or daughter, wants to know if you buy it!

A godly father is convinced that:

- shepherding in the home is better than succeeding in the world;
- being an example is better than simply giving instruction.

Three additional things a wise father believes

A wise father believes three additional things. He believes:

- his children’s greatest development will be spiritual development; not academic; not social; not artistic; not economic – although development in all of these areas is good;
- his children’s greatest deeds will be finding and fulfilling God’s will;
- his children’s greatest passion will be a hunger and thirst for God.

Two encouraging thoughts for fathers who desire to shepherd their children

Fathers, what should we do about shepherding our children? Let me encourage you with two thoughts.

It is never too late to start

1. First, it is never too late to start shepherding your children.

Begin with your own relationship with Christ. Ask yourself:

- Where do I stand?
- What do I need to change?
- What would I never want my children to find out (begin confessing at that point!)?

Pick up the word of God and start to evaluate everything in your life and the life of your family in the light of God's word, not the opinion of an ungodly, immoral, needy, wandering world.

It is never too late to start. This is true even if your children are grown and gone – your grown children still need godly counsel. Godly grandfathers happen to be needed too. It is never too late to start!

It is always too early to quit

2. Secondly, it is always too early to quit.

Some of you are daily pursuing the face of God – attempting to lead your sons and daughters in the knowledge and wisdom of God's word – and there is little or no fruit. Keep it up! Do not quit! Stay the course! Do not abandon your shepherd's staff and rod, no matter how ineffective your leadership may seem. You do not know what is happening and what it will take.

One of my favorite commentaries on the book of Romans (I just had to mention Romans), was written by William R. Newell. A preacher's son, William rejected his father's Christianity and was filled with anger and sarcasm for the faith. At his father's command, around 1888, he applied to Moody Bible Institute and was rejected; at his father's pleading with the president of the school, R. A. Torrey, Newell was allowed in, under two conditions; that he meet every day with Dr. Torrey and that he keep the school rules – any infraction would lead to dismissal. He agreed. Every day, William came and presented his

doubts and questions and Dr. Torrey answered them with the word of God. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months . . . then one day, William R. Newell came into the president's office, his face aglow, Torrey wrote, "like the rain on parched ground." William R. Newell had come to faith in Jesus Christ.

You have probably never read Newell's commentary, but have probably sung the hymn that he wrote as a testimonial of salvation by grace in Christ who died on the cross. The hymn lyrics are:

*Years I spent in vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,
Knowing not it was for me He died – on
Calvary;
Mercy there was great and grace as free,
Pardon there was multiplied to me,
There my burdened soul found liberty – at
Calvary.^{viii}*

The greatest desire in the heart of William R. Newell's father, whom we know nearly nothing about, was that his son know and walk with the Savior.

Dads, if you had one wish, what would it be? May it be something like this: *that we, as Dads, might walk in wisdom, and see God incorporate biblical wisdom into the hearts and lives of our children.* Could there be any greater treasure than that?!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/15/2003 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Bryan Chapell, *Holiness By Grace*, 2001, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>, 2003.

ⁱⁱ James Merritt, *Friends, Foes & Fools*, (Holman & Broadman Publishers, 1999), p. 19.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 14.

^v *Ibid.*, p. 7.

^{vi} Dr. Dan Burrell, "When Father Goes First," *The Raleigh World* (May 9, 2003), p. 12.

^{vii} Merritt, p. 65.

^{viii} Al Smith, *Hymn Histories* (Better Music Publications, 1985), p. 70.