

Family Leaders The Character of the Christian Tim Challies

Today we continue our series on the character of the Christian. We are exploring how the various character qualifications of elders are actually God's calling on all Christians. While elders are meant to *exemplify* these traits, all Christians are to *exhibit* them. I want us to consider whether we are displaying these traits and to learn together how we can pray to have them in greater measure. Today we will consider why it's important for parents—both elders and all Christians—to lead their families in a God-honoring way.

We read in 1 Timothy 3:4–5, “[An elder] must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?” Paul likewise tells Titus that elders should have “children [who] are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” (Titus 1:5–6). So, what does that mean and why is it so important?

Quite simply, it means that a man's leadership within the home proves his ability to lead within the church. Conversely, an inability to lead within the home proves an inability to lead within the church. In this way the home rather than the office or classroom is the testing and proving ground of a man's leadership ability. Why? As Alexander Strauch explains: “Managing the local church is more like managing a family than managing a business or state. A man may be a successful businessman, a capable public official, a brilliant office manager, or a top military leader but be a terrible church elder or father. Thus a man's ability to oversee his household well is a prerequisite for overseeing God's household.”

But what, then, does it mean for a man to manage his household well? John Piper offers an illuminating alternate translation of the Greek: “leader of a well-ordered household.” He explains, “He should have submissive children. This does not mean perfect, but it does mean well-disciplined, so that they do not blatantly and regularly disregard the instructions of their parents. The children should revere the father. He should be a loving and responsible spiritual leader in the home.”

Again, if a man cannot tenderly lead and sacrificially love his own family, he must not be given the privilege and responsibility of leadership in the church. If he cannot excel at the one he will not excel at the other. Thus if a man has a family, any process of evaluating him as a candidate for eldership must involve a close look within his home. Thabiti Anyabwile warns of “men who could be too preoccupied with the affairs of the church and too little occupied with what's going on under their own roof. One thinks of Eli's hasty and mistaken rebuke of Hannah as she prayed, while simultaneously abdicating responsibility for his wayward boys (1 Samuel 1–2). An elder tends to affairs at home.”

And what about the big question of what it means for children to be believers? This is a tricky text that has been the subject of much discussion, but I find myself in substantial agreement with Justin Taylor's skillful [handling of the passage](#). He points out that the word translated as “believers,” as in “children [who] are believers,” can also be translated as “faithful.” This

translation allows the text to nicely complement 1 Timothy 3:4 with its emphasis on control, obedience, and submission. He concludes, “What must not characterize the children of an elder is immorality and undisciplined rebelliousness, if the children are still at home and under his authority.”

Now, what about Christian parents who are not elders? How do we honor the text even as we widen its application? Well, these people, too, must exhibit skill and godliness in their family relationships. They, too, must seek to be exemplary. Fathers must lovingly lead and teach their children, mothers must joyfully care for their children, exercising patient, kind authority over them. Paul writes, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4; see also Genesis 18:19; Psalm 78:4; 2 Timothy 3:15). In the *Shema*, God through Moses tells the Israelites, both men and women, “these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children” (Deuteronomy 6:6–7; see also Deuteronomy 4:9; 11:19).

Similarly, the Proverbs repeatedly portray the importance of disciplining your children. “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (Proverbs 13:24; see also Proverbs 19:18; 22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15, 17). A host of narrative passages display the danger of neglecting such care and discipline. The author of Hebrews likewise emphasizes the importance of disciplining your children as an expression of your love for them. He asks, “What son is there whom his father does not discipline?” (Hebrews 10:7). Indeed, God “disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (verse 10; see Hebrews 10:3–11 for the context).

Women specifically play a vital role in the family. Paul instructs Titus, “[Older women] are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled” (Titus 2:3–5). Again, Paul writes, “I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander” (1 Timothy 5:14).

From beginning to end the Bible places upon every parent the responsibility to teach and train children and in that way to exercise kind, caring, loving oversight of them.

Self-Evaluation

So, how about you? I challenge you to reflect on these questions below to see how you can grow in your leadership at home:

- Do you look for ways to improve in the ways you teach and discipline your family?
- When your family is in public, are your children out of control, or do they generally follow your lead and respond to your correction?
- Can you speak to your children’s spiritual state? Do you know the condition of their souls? Do you pray for them in specific ways?

- Fathers, do you lead your family spiritually? Are family devotions part of your routine? Mothers, do you teach and train your children, do you pray with them, do you lovingly discipline them?

Prayer Points

Our heavenly Father is eager to help us earthly fathers (and, of course, mothers). Consider praying in these ways as you seek to humbly and boldly parent your family well:

- I pray that you would make me a faithful and patient leader in my home.
- I pray that you would help me show my children that I love them in both tough and tender ways.
- I pray that I would display the gospel in the way I love, lead, and care for my children.
- I pray that I would have a deeper understanding of what it means that God is my Father so I can imitate him in the way I care for my children.

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