

CULTIVATING CHAMPIONS FOR GOD

• JUDGES 13–14 •

“And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children. Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman, and said to her, “Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son” (13:2, 3).

Once a mother returned from the grocery store to find her older son hitting her younger son. “What’s going on here?” the mother demanded. The older boy answered, “He fell into the mud puddle, and I was trying to give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation like they taught us at school, but he kept on getting up.” With conflicts similar to this taking place on a regular basis, parents wonder if their children will ever make it to adulthood.

The story of Samson is a story of one of God’s champions. He is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as one who did tremendous things through faith.

God’s champions are not born, they are cultivated. By looking at what made Samson a champion for God, we can see what is necessary for our children and grandchildren to have to become champions in service to God. What was it that helped Samson to become a mighty champion for God?

HE HAD EXEMPLARY PARENTS (13:1-7)

Because of sin, God’s people were under an oppression from the Philistines, an oppression which lasted forty years. During this time, a

couple who lived in the Danite village of Zorah had a special visitor. “The angel of the Lord appeared” to Manoah’s wife (13:3), telling her that she would have a son who would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines (13:5). The angel told her to neither eat any unclean thing nor drink any strong drink. The child was to be a Nazirite from his birth. The law of the Nazirites is given in Numbers 6. A Nazirite was:

- (1) Not to drink wine or strong drink of any kind (vv. 3, 4)
- (2) Not to let a razor touch their head (v. 5)
- (3) Not to touch a dead body of any kind (vv. 6-12)

Although the Nazirite vow had other elements, these were the main requirements. A person took the vow to be “holy to the Lord” (Numbers 6:8).

The law of the Nazirite did not require a Nazirite’s parents to keep the terms of the vow. In spite of this, Manoah’s wife was told to keep the terms of the vow while carrying her child. Though the text does not specifically state it, the implication is that she was to continue to keep the terms of the Nazirite vow while she was rearing the boy. The question arises, Why did God require Samson’s mother to order her life according to the conditions of the Nazirite vow? Since her son was to be the Nazirite, why was the mother obligated. The plausible explanation for this instruction is that God is using parental example in rearing Samson.

The message of the conception of a child was extremely good news to Manoah and his wife. Psalm 127 says that children are “a gift of the Lord.” The writer compares children to arrows: “How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.” What joy comes to a home when children come into it! The blessing of children is a most needed lesson today when children are looked upon as a burden to the pocketbook or an interruption to our schedule! Manoah and his wife certainly did not see the conception of a son as a burden. They saw it as a unique gift from God.

As with any blessing from God, the coming of children to the family brings added parental responsibility. Paul says that parents are responsible for bringing their children up “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). The phrase “bring them up” in this passage literally means “to nurture, raise, train, or educate.” Thus, a parent is a teacher of his children. A teacher in the first century lived with his students. In this way, he could train them by using their common experiences as examples. This is what parents are to be doing as they train their children.

In order to train our children properly, *we must spend time with them*. A child is an eternal soul that has an eternal destiny before it. What a responsibility this places on the two people who brought this soul into the world.

It is being said that the quantity of time spent with children is not as important as the quality of time. The quality of the time we spend with our children is extremely important. When we are with our children, we must give them our undivided attention. However, the quality of time we spend with them does not replace the quantity of time. With eternal souls in the balance, our children must occupy large segments of our time each week. One might ask, “How can you know when you are spending sufficient time with them?” That is a good question. We may think we are spending a great deal of time with our children when they are really feeling neglected and ignored. The best way to know how you are doing with your children is to listen to them.

Bill Butterworth wrote the following article about spending time with your children:

There’s something magical about a birthday when you’re a kid. Remember the feeling? It’s a special day and should be carefully planned. Those

sentiments came through loud and clear from my son, Jesse, who is now six. He wanted a birthday cake and certainly gifts. Jesse is not the type of kid to spout off a list of gifts a mile long. Sure, he does have every aisle of Toys “R” Us committed to memory, but he is very thoughtful about his choices for potential presents. “Dad, I would like a ball to play with for my birthday,” was Jesse’s carefully planned request. “Great,” I responded, “What kind of ball do you want?” “I think I would like either a football or a soccer ball.” “Okay,” I agreed. “Which do you want more, a football or a soccer ball?” “Well-l-l, . . .” he mused slowly. I should have known by his pause that it was coming. “Well-l-l, . . . if you had some time to play ball with me this next year, I would really like a football for you and me to throw around in the backyard. But if you’re gonna be real busy, maybe you just better get me a soccer ball so I can play with the rest of the kids in the neighborhood.” He paused again. The silence was deafening. “Well, . . . okay, buddy . . . I will . . . make a choice and surprise you. How is that?” “Great, Daddy. I love you.”

I grabbed my wife and went into another room to relay the conversation that had just transpired. As I was retelling the story, my son’s message came through. He was not longing for gifts! He was longing for the giver! It took a six-year-old to remind me that relationships are more important than things. By the way, the oddest thing occurred on my son’s birthday. It was a moment that we will never forget—a grown man and a little boy embracing and sobbing tears of joy—over a dumb old football!

Children are starving to death all around us. It is not a starvation for food or water—it is a starvation for love and attention from the parents who conceived them. This hunger can only be satisfied by a meaningful investment of time by the parents. No substitutes! No short cuts! If we are going to rear champions for God, we must spend time with our children!

In order to train our children in the way that they should go, *we must teach them about life*. Our responsibility as parents is to guide our children into a closer relationship with their heavenly Father. Deuteronomy 4:9, 10 says:

Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, “Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.”

In the days of the law of Moses, God's people were to teach their children about Him. It was especially important to relate God's activities among them so that the children could learn of God.

As children are born into the world, they are like blank chalkboards. They have no goals or values of their own. These are instilled within them by their family and surroundings. Parents are the first ones to write on that chalkboard. The first things that are written are the most important because they are the longest lasting. The values we instill within our children from birth will stay with them for the remainder of their lives. They may not always live up to the standards we give them, but they will always remember them.

Bible classes and worship assemblies are certainly important in training children. However, these opportunities for collective Bible study and worship are merely supplemental to what is to be done at home. Too often parents depend upon these supplements as the primary source of spiritual nourishment for their children.

We do not have long to teach them. I recently had to replace a rearview mirror in my car. I went to the store and bought the glue that is used to stick the mirror to the windshield. I did not realize that a certain kind of adhesive was required. When I arrived home, I saw that this glue was unlike any that I had ever used before. It came in a bottle with a glass lining. Within the bottle, two solutions were separated by a thin layer of glass. When these two solutions mixed, they formed an extremely sticky mixture, strong enough to hold the weight of the mirror to the windshield. In order to mix the solutions, it was necessary to squeeze the bottle and break the glass lining within. Once that had been done, the solutions begin to mix. You only have sixty seconds to apply the glue before it dried and became solid. After using the glue one time, the bottle of remaining dried glue has to be discarded. As I was fixing this mirror, I thought how very much like rearing children this was. The training the child receives produces habits in the child's life. As years go by, those habits become a part of the child's character. The child that used to be so impressionable is now an adult who is set in his ways. It all began with the training that was given to him by his parents. Because the impressionable stage is so brief, it is

vital that parents redeem the time in teaching their children about life.

If we want our children and grandchildren to be champions for God, we must set the spiritual example for them!

HE HAD HUMBLE PARENTS (13:8-14)

Manoah and his wife felt inadequate for the task of rearing the child who was promised to them. Since they had never been parents, they had no experience to fall back on. Consequently, Manoah pleaded with God to send back the man who had talked to his wife so that he could teach them "what to do for the boy who is to be born" (13:8, 12). This request reveals the humble attitude they had concerning their ability to properly rear a child. It is reminiscent of the request made by King Solomon when God told him to ask for anything his heart desired. Solomon's response was a request for wisdom:

And now, O Lord my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. So give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine? (1 Kings 3:7, 9).

Being a parent is a job everyone takes as an amateur. No training sessions are offered and no degrees are available that adequately prepare one to be a parent. A person has to get "on-the-job" training as he goes. This fact alone should produce feelings of humility in the hearts of those who would be parents. This humility should cause us to seek God's will for rearing our children. Sadly, children are being reared in our society with no concern whatsoever about what God has to say about rearing children.

It is God's will that parents train up their children in His Word (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Ephesians 6:1-3). Popular child psychology, however, suggests that parents allow their children to make their own decisions regarding religion. It is said that if a child is forced to go to church and read his Bible, he will grow up hating the church and refusing to read the Bible. Can you imagine someone taking this view concerning a child's secular education?

Hello . . . Yes . . . Oh, you're Johnny's teacher. I've been meaning to call you . . . No, he isn't planning to be in school this year. You see, he had

so much work to do at the church—church school lessons, church services, youth activities and such take up his time; then there are daily devotionals at home and other interests, so there isn't much time left for school . . .

Well, yes, I know that school is important, and I know that you are doing a fine job with the kids in this community—and I've been intending to write a letter of appreciation to the school. I surely would hate to live in a place where there were no schools . . .

To tell the truth, Johnny didn't like school too well last year. Besides all those examinations, having to bring home a report card showing his progress was embarrassing to him. He suffered some psychological effects because so many girls were attending school, he thought it was "sissy" to go. So he decided he would not attend this year . . .

Am I going to make him go? Of course, I'm not! I knew a family once that made their child go, and he wound up hating school. I don't think his educational growth will be harmed. I will use my influence to get him to attend the football games, plays, etc., . . . When hunting season is over, his father will be able to take him. I really think the old methods of education are out of date anyway . . .

Yes, if he were to decide that he wanted to return to school, it would be all right with me. I just want this decision to be his.

Parents must insist upon many activities and habits in order for their children to develop properly. They must insist that they eat, take a bath, and change socks. Will my insistence that my children eat on a regular basis cause them to hate eating when they grow up? Will my forcing them to take a bath every night cause them to avoid the bathtub when they are adults? Such reasoning is ludicrous. If a person chooses to turn his back on God as an adult, it is because of his personal choices and priorities. How sad to see adults blame their weaknesses of character on parents who did the best they could to teach them to love God!

It is God's will that we teach our children right from wrong (Proverbs 16:25; Matthew 7:13, 14). A young girl was going through a stage where she felt the need to lie frequently. The parents consulted different sources of information, and read one article which said that such children were highly creative and should be encouraged to use their imaginations. In the opinion of that author, nothing negative was to be said to the child about the lies. The parent was told to talk to the child and express pride in him for his being so creative in his thinking. No emphasis was given to the rightness or wrongness of lying. No wonder our society is filled with people who do not know the difference between right and wrong!

It is God's will that we physically discipline our children when it is necessary (Proverbs 13:14; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13, 14). Spanking as a form of discipline is not child abuse. The modern wisdom that says spanking will do irreparable damage to the personality and psyche of a child has no support in the Scriptures.

Junior bit the meter man. Junior bit the cook.

Junior's antisocial now (according to the book).

Junior smashed the clock and lamp. Junior hacked the tree.

(Destructive trends are treated in chapters 2 and 3.)

Junior threw his milk at Mom. Junior screamed for more.

(Notes on self-assertiveness are found in chapter 4.)

Junior tossed his shoes and socks out into the rain.

(Negation, that, and normal. Disregard the stain.)

Junior set Dad's shirt afire, whittled Grandpa's pine.

(That to gain attention. See page 89.)

Grandpa got a slipper and yanked Junior across his knee.

(He's read nothing but the Bible since 1893.)

How egotistical it is for man to think that he can improve on God's plan for rearing children!

“If champions for
God are to emerge from
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HE HAD CONCERNED PARENTS (14:1-3)

As Samson grew to adulthood, he began to develop his own interests. One interest that he had throughout his life was women. One day Samson went to Timnah, a Philistine village approximately fifteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. While there, he fell in love with a Philistine woman. Samson requested that his father arrange for his marriage to this Philistine woman.

Samson's parents expressed their strong concern about Samson marrying someone other than an Israelite. They asked "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" (14:3). Though Samson was old enough to make his own decisions, his parents believed they still had the responsibility to be involved in his life.

If champions for God are to emerge from our children, they will only come from children whose parents are concerned enough about them to be involved in their lives. From Manoah and his wife, we learn that a parent must be concerned about whether he serves God or not, whether he worships or not, who he dates, where he goes, and who his friends are.

In Deuteronomy 7:3, 4, the people were warned about mingling with the idolatrous people of Canaan:

Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you.

In those days when parents arranged their children's marriages, God's instruction was that they not allow marriages with idolatrous people. No longer are marriages arranged by parents. Children are free to make their own decisions. However, does this mean that parents should not try to exert a godly influence in this and other vital matters? A welfare worker fell in love with a little boy who was born crippled. The worker was acquainted with an orthopedic surgeon who agreed to attempt to help the child through surgery. The surgery was performed and turned out to be a success. The boy grew up with the ability to walk just like all of his friends. When the boy was grown, one might think that he would become a doctor, a minister, or a great humanitarian of some kind. But the child grew up to become an inmate in San Quentin Penitentiary with a life sentence for murder. While effort was spent in teaching the child *to* walk, little effort was spent in teaching the child *where* to walk.

We dare not make this mistake with our children. If our children and grandchildren are

to grow up to be champions for God, we must be concerned about the major areas of their lives.

After we have done what we can do as parents, children will still have a will of their own. Samson's parents tried to be good examples as he grew up. They sought to be guided by God's will in rearing Samson. When Samson was grown, they continued to express what they believed was right in an effort to prevent him from making serious mistakes.

What lesson is in this for us? Parents must never abdicate their parental influence. Throughout the years of child rearing, special care must be taken to see that they grow up under God's influence. Once that has been done, a parent can continue to exert a godly influence on their children even though they are adults. If the children are rebellious to God in spite of the parents' best efforts, they should not be consumed with guilt. Samson turned out the way he did in spite of his parents' influence, not because of it.

CONCLUSION

Champions for God are not born, they are reared. The story of Manoah and his wife rearing Samson from his earliest years is proof of this truth. Samson grew to be the champion he was because of his parents example, humility, and concern. These traits will help all of us to grow champions for God. Carolyn Hooper has a prayer that all of us need to pray:

O, God, You are the perfect parent. You know my children so well—so much better than I.

You know their inner needs. You watch them growing and truly understand them. You care deeply for them and love them unconditionally.

For these reasons, I ask Your help in raising my children. . . . No, not Your help—more than that. Lord, You bring them up—I hand them over to you. Just don't let me get in Your way. Don't let me interfere with Your parenting.

But dear Lord, when You need human help—use me. When they need to hear words of love—use my voice. When they need comfort—use my arms. When they need teaching—use my mouth. When they need understanding—use my heart. And when they ask about You, use my faith, so that they will come to know You as a perfect parent.

May this be the prayer of each parent as we attempt to rear champions for God!

—Craig Tappe