

**HELP!**

# MY TODDLER RULES THE HOUSE



**LIFELINE**  
mom books

paul & karen tautges

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MY TODDLER  
RULES THE HOUSE

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“We just can’t take it anymore. We’re ready to take our son to a psychiatrist!” exclaimed Caleb as his wife, Susie, nodded in utter exhaustion.<sup>1</sup> These newcomers to our church had come to visit my wife and me at our house on a Tuesday evening because they said they needed “family counseling.” It turned out that their three-year-old son’s behavior had brought them to the end of themselves. He was ruling their house. As they sat on our living-room sofa we listened. We then began explaining to them the biblical principles of child-rearing, the priority of a child’s obedience, and the means of correction prescribed in God’s Word, the Bible. After they agreed to consistently apply what we had taught them, we prayed and they went home.

Two Sundays later, Caleb and Susie approached us in the foyer of our church meeting place and declared, “We have a different son!” Caleb described the changes they were observing in their son’s attitude and behavior since they began to faithfully

<sup>1</sup> These are fictitious names, though based upon a true story.

apply the biblical principles we had taught them. They had begun to receive the Bible as the revelation of God and, therefore, authoritative for their family. And they were already seeing a difference its application was making in their home.

We assume you have picked up this booklet because either someone you know or you yourself also face the challenge of raising children in a fallen world and are in need of some help. It contains the foundational counsel that we have given to many couples like Caleb and Susie over the years. We trust and pray you will find the help you seek as well as encouragement from the practical counsel contained in its pages.

# 1

## Sad Results of Child-Centered Parenting

We live in a society dominated by child-centered parenting. A typical walk through a shopping mall or local grocery store often reveals this sad truth. The frequent occurrence of temper tantrums from children leads the discerning person to ask, “Just who is in charge anyway?” The authors of this booklet are not the only ones concerned about this epidemic. Several years ago our local newspaper dedicated almost  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a page to printing an Associated Press article: “Please, Please, Please? Nagging Has Become Norm for Many Youth.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the article was to comment on the results of a survey commissioned by the Center for a New American Dream, which “promotes responsible

2 Martha Irvine, in *The Sheboygan Press*, June 18, 2002.

consumption of resources and goods.” In other words, the center is upset by the power that advertisers have over young minds and hopes to “persuade Congress to pass laws further limiting advertising to young people.” Is this really the answer? Do we need more laws governing the advertising industry? Isn’t that like putting a self-stick bandage over a broken bone? Could there be a better solution? Could it be that the best answer is to return to one of the essential building blocks of common-sense parenting—divinely delegated authority?

We are not suggesting that every parent must believe his or her authority is from God in order to be a “good parent” in the eyes of society. We only expect that from Christians. However, it seems that, deep down, every conscience is at least remotely bothered by the idea of children ruling their parents. What is so desperately needed today is teaching geared toward parents that will help them realize that God has delegated a portion of his authority to them for the well-being of their children and that they don’t have to apologize for using it. Of course, they must also not abuse it, but nowadays almost anything that interferes with a child’s happiness is somehow twisted into a portrayal of “abuse.”

Today’s parents desperately need to be taught that

the most loving thing they can do for their children is to be in charge. Parents must be taught to just say “No.” Even Betsy Taylor, executive director of the above-mentioned center based in the state of Maryland recognizes this: “Ultimately,” she says, “it’s a parent’s responsibility to set better limits and stick to them.” “When it comes to nagging,” the article states, 55 percent of the youth surveyed said they can “usually get their parents to give in.” Additionally, 60 percent admitted they could “manipulate their parents on ‘small things’ before they started first grade.” Marian Salzman, the chief strategic officer for an ad agency, admitted that “kids are at the center of today’s households.” She’s dead right.

The polled youth were between the ages of twelve and seventeen, however, “experts say nagging is a habit learned much earlier.” I am reluctant to admit it, but for once the experts are right. The embarrassing results of child-centered parenting do not begin to show themselves in the clothing store at twelve or thirteen years old. They start at a much younger age. In fact, they begin before the crib is disassembled and hauled up to the attic. For the child-centered parent, the world revolves around that little bundle of joy. Child-centered parents reason, “We can’t go here because it may interrupt little Bobby’s naptime.”

“We can’t go there because little Sally won’t like the food.” “If we do that then Joey may fuss.” “If we go out tonight then Julie will give the babysitter a hard time.” And on and on it goes. It seems that every time junior cries, a new family crisis has begun.

Conversely, fathers and mothers who truly love their children are not the ones guilty of this epidemic of indulgence. It is those who think they love their children, but in reality love themselves far more, who are at fault. What do we mean? True love always looks toward the long-term best of the person being loved. That means it is more loving to tell a person truth that hurts than to silently watch him or her self-destruct. It means it is more loving to discipline your children so that they refrain from playing in the street than to let them get run over by a car. It means it is more loving to say “No” to greedy little children in order to prepare them to live in an unfriendly world where everything will not always go their own way. Wise parents realize this and do not use their children as personal security blankets, but steadfastly endure temporary inconveniences (like disciplining for temper tantrums) because they rightly believe that in the end their children will love them for it.

Sadly, however, this is no longer considered *normal*

parenting. The survey mentioned above found that, “even when their parents say ‘no,’ nearly six of 10 young people keep nagging—an average of nine times.” The same survey “found that 10 percent of 12 and 13-year-olds said they ask their parents more than 50 times for products they’ve seen advertised.” Experts call it the “nag factor.” And marketing agencies continue to bank on it. It is estimated the “nag factor” will be responsible for influencing a projected \$40 billion of spending for children aged four to twelve in 2010. That’s a high price to pay for lazy parenting. But what does the Scripture say? Does God’s Word provide us with reliable counsel in response to this trend? Yes, it does. In fact, it warns us against child-centered parenting for at least three reasons.

## Child-Centered Parenting Leads to the Parents’ Shame

When our children witness “shopping mall tantrums,” one of them is sure to comment on the shameful behavior. “Daddy, did you see that boy?” “Mommy, did you hear what that girl said to her mother?” When they do this we quickly remind them that they too are sinners who are in need of

correction and that if we do not faithfully discipline them, sinful anger will become a pattern in their own lives. By being too lazy to stick to the first, second, or third *No*, we as parents train junior to ask nine times. In other words, though the little child is indeed guilty, at this point the greater shame belongs to us as parents who should know better and should love our child enough to train him or her to act properly. Otherwise, the wise observer may silently ask, “What is wrong with that parent?” This is Proverbs 29:15 in action:

*The rod and reproof give wisdom,  
But a child who gets his own way brings  
shame to his mother.*

## Child-Centered Parenting Feeds Self-Destructive Lifestyles

The worst example of child-centered parenting found in the Bible is the sad story of Eli, the priest of Israel. His family’s history is a classic example of what happens when a parent respects his or her child too much. It is role reversal of the most embarrassing kind, and for Eli’s family the consequences were nothing short of deadly. God’s warning came to

Eli by the mouth of a man of God who stated that God's chastening hand was about to fall upon the priest and his sons because Eli honored them above God (1 Samuel 2:29). As a result, the strength of his priesthood would be broken (2:31) and both his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, would die tragically on the same day (2:34). What may have been only a few days later, Eli's young servant, Samuel, was awakened from sleep by the voice of God. God explained, "I have told him [Eli] 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" (1 Samuel 3:13).

Shortly thereafter, Israel went into battle against the Philistines and suffered a total loss. Thirty thousand soldiers died, the ark of the covenant was stolen, and Hophni and Phinehas died on the same day—exactly as Samuel had prophesied (4:10–11). What a tragic end! Unfortunately, the consequences did not stop with Eli. It appears that Samuel may have followed Eli's wimpy example, for when his own sons were grown they "did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice" (1 Samuel 8:3).

What was the problem? Eli failed to say *No* and mean it. That is, he relinquished his God-given

authority to lead his sons in righteousness. When he learned of their shamefully self-indulgent behavior, he did not respond with the degree of gravity warranted by the situation (2:12–17). Instead, he let them rule the house. His correction appears to have been more like a simple slap on his sons’ hands while saying, “No, no, no, the people are talking” (2:24). This response is typical of child-centered parents, as they usually do not *command* their children, but *reason* with them instead. They fear their children’s response more than they fear God. However, God-centered parenting calls for the firm use of divinely delegated authority for the sake of protecting children from their own foolishness. Jim Newheiser is correct when he writes, “Neglect of discipline is among the worst forms of child abuse.”<sup>3</sup>

## Child-Centered Parenting Is an Abdication of God-given Authority and Responsibility

King David also reaped the torrential downpour of pain that often comes as a result of child-centered parenting. On his deathbed he received word that

3 Jim Newheiser, *Opening Up Proverbs* (Leominster: Day One, 2008), 151.

his son Adonijah had “exalted himself, saying, ‘I will be king.’ So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him” (1 Kings 1:5). We would be forced to wonder what led to this behavior if the Holy Spirit had not so graciously given us the very next verse: “His father had never crossed him at any time by asking, ‘Why have you done so?’” (1:6). Adonijah was another sad product of parental indulgence. We do not mean to say his rebellion was entirely the king’s fault. David’s son was responsible for his own actions. But it is obvious from the text that Adonijah was not given the gift of self-discipline, which usually comes through the tutorial of parental discipline. Faithful correction from parents is one of God’s most effective tools for the development of self-control in the hearts of children.

Parents, our God-fearing example is of great importance, but it is not enough. It wasn’t for Eli, Samuel, or David. It must be accompanied by a proper exercise of our God-given authority. These tragic examples illustrate the fact that spoiled children often live out their self-indulgence right into adulthood. Parents, please help lower the statistics! Please love your child enough to prepare him or her for a life of self-denial by setting healthy boundaries and firmly maintaining them. Although God has a

heart for children, he never intended life to revolve around them. Please say *No* when you must. Please mean *No* when you say it. And please stick to your answer unless wisdom leads you to change it. Love your children, care for them responsibly, train them diligently, but, by all means, do not allow them to become the center of your little universe.

### *FROM ONE MOM TO ANOTHER*

One of our little ones, in particular, loves to ask for things. It may be just a piece of chewing gum from my purse. If I give the answer “You need to wait” and that same child soon asks again, I will usually say, “No. You cannot have the gum now. Mommy said you needed to wait, but you have asked me again.” By doing this, I am trying to teach self-control. Sometimes we ask God for things and we have to wait. What better time for us to learn to patiently wait than when we are children? When we grow to be adults and ask God for a new car we will be much better able to handle his answer of “Not now” if we have been learning this valuable lesson our whole lives.