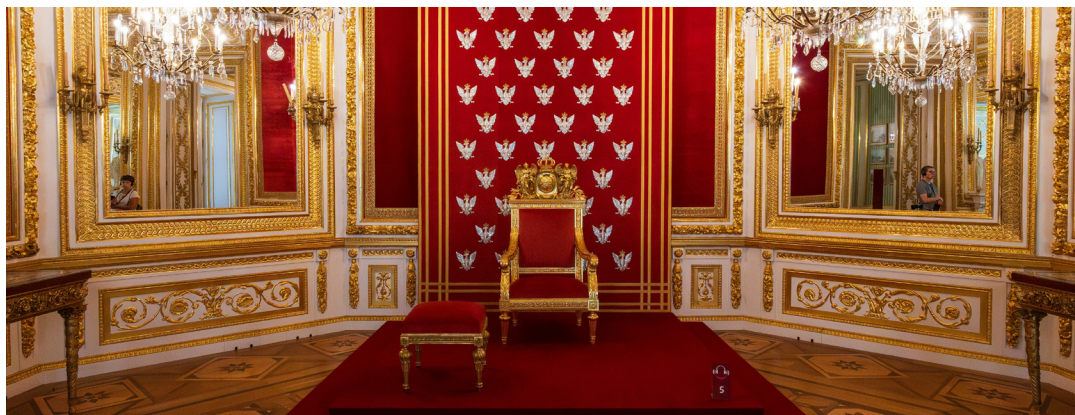


WHO'S IN CHARGE?

BY: WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



Scripture has a way of punching us in the gut, doesn't it? It's amazing how God's unchanging Word is able to expose not only the spirit of the times (or as Paul calls it, "The course of this world"), but it exposes and addresses our individual issues while also pointing us to correctives which can set us back onto the "course of the Kingdom." That's certainly the case for those of us who are Christian parents.

I've been around long enough to see how we've shifted in our North American approaches to parenting. Yes, we are well-intentioned, wanting to do the best possible job so that we might lead our kids into the best possible adulthood. In recent years, the postmodern turn, the trend towards individualism and narcissism, and the move from living under God's sovereignty to living under our self-sovereignty are reflected in parenting. On the one hand, parents have gotten wrapped up in their own pursuits, which for many reduces time and focus on both our kids and the job of nurturing them in the faith. In addition, as we focus on the pursuit of our own happiness, we believe that we should also make it a goal to facilitate the happiness and "success" of our kids.

"Our kids need parents who will bring them up in the nurture and discipline of the Lord."

It's not only my culture-watching that has me thinking about this, but the Old Testament words that remind me that in all things, including parenting, there's really nothing new under the sun. Go ahead and read the first chapter of I Kings, with a focus on verses 5 and 6. King David is old, and it's time for a new king to take his place on the throne. While the first few chapters of this book speak of the reign of David's successor, his son Solomon, there's a little blip in the succession plan that pops up in relation to another of David's sons, Adonijah. And this is where we see that verses 5 and 6 could have been written today.

First, Adonijah "exalted himself." He saw an opening for his own advancement to kingship, and he took it. Second, and very quickly, we realize that there's a connection between Adonijah's exalting of himself, and the fact that he had not been parented well. In verse 6 we read that "His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, 'Why have you done thus and so?'" In other words, Adonijah had been indulged by his father David, a father who we learn more or less forsook his calling to raise his son in what we now know is the discipline and nurture of the Lord. Rather, Adonijah learned early on that *he* could do what *he* wanted, and that *he* was the ruler over *his* own self. You can go on and read the rest of the account, but for now, take note of the way that the passage shows us an *effect*, along with a *cause*.

Being raised like Adonijah was not my own personal experience. There were, for sure, many times when my young and foolish self wished that it was so. But every time I can remember issuing a verbal protest regarding my parents' meddling in my affairs and upbringing, I was told that a hands-off parenting approach on their part would be a clear indication that they really didn't love me. In addition, it would have been wrong.





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The words regarding Adonijah and how he was (or was not) parented jumped out at me as I was reading Abigail Shrier's 2024 book, ***Bad Therapy: Why The Kids Aren't Growing Up***. While Shrier calls out a variety of influences that have undermined the present and future well-being of our kids, her chapter titled "The Road Paved By Gentle Parents" is especially disturbing, yet helpful. Yes, parents with the wrong kind of influence, even though driven by good intentions, wind up being a bad influence. There's an anecdote she shares that I think in some ways captures the David/Adonijah parent-child relationship. . .

*"In September of 2021, I attended a dinner of five couples, all young and upper middle class, denizens of an affluent West LA neighborhood. One father, I'll call him 'Alan,' excitedly relayed a parenting fail his wife had witnessed at the playground. A young, well-heeled mother was struggling with a recalcitrant six-year-old son. 'Please be a good boy,' the woman had said to her son. 'If you're good for just five minutes, when we get home, I'll let you do anything you want. What do you want?' The little boy looked his mother straight in the eye, 'I want to punch you in the face,' he said. We dinner guests laughed uproariously, shrill with worry that we, too, might be raising little Pol Pots. But then Alan said, 'I don't care how many experts we have to consult or how much we have to pay, I don't want to end up with that.' Here, finally lucid, was the dastardly trap of modern parenting. The woman at the park, straining to be gentler than her parents likely ever were with her, met by her son's contempt; Alan, believing that there must be some expert who can assert the necessary authority to control his own child. Moms like the one at the park are everywhere practicing expert techniques of positive incentives, devising the proper consequences, pleading with kids to behave, afraid of the kids they are raising."*ⁱ

Gentle, non-judgmental parenting is not good parenting. Have you read Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6? We are to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, teaching them God's will and way, and issuing corrective/loving discipline when they fall into sin.

Shrier tells us, *"What actually makes for miserable kids? Placing them in charge. Failing to hold their behavior to high standards and not punishing them when they deliberately allow it to fall short. . . . And what else makes for an unhappy kid? Parents behaving in a consistently affirmative manner toward the child's impulses, desires, and actions."*ⁱⁱ She also relates what immigrant parents have observed regarding the American style of parenting: *"The problem with American parenting*

*is that we do not assert our authority with our own children. We do not make it a priority to pass down our values to our own kids; we seem to expect the culture to do this for us."*ⁱⁱⁱ

Little sinners that they are. . . just the like the big sinners we are. . . our kids need parents who will bring them up in the nurture and discipline of the Lord. Left to their own devices and whims, they will be committed from childhood and into adulthood to "exalt themselves" . . . which is the very thing that got our first parents in trouble back in Genesis. Self-sovereignty never functions or ends well. It's a disobedient path through life that shirks our calling to deny ourselves and live under the gracious sovereignty of our Creator.

And so, as you parent, you don't need to always ask your kids to weigh in on choices you should be making. It doesn't need to matter what they think, desire, or want. You aren't called to be their friend. Don't issue directives followed by the simple little question, "Ok?" Say it, mean it, and lovingly direct them. Be a parent who is willing to displease your kids by asking them, "Why have you done thus and so?"

I can still hear my Dad's voice echoing to this day as he would say, "That's utter foolishness!", "No, you're not doing that," "Immediate obedience," and "Right now, you don't have to know why." He wasn't being abusive. He was being loving. While I didn't like hearing those things in the moment, I smile as I think about them now. . . and truth be told, when I hear my kids saying these same things to their kids!

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ⁱ Abigail Shrier, *Bad Therapy: Why The Kids Aren't Growing Up*, p. 169-70.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 190.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p.193.



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