

Ezekiel 18:1-2

The word of the Lord came to me: What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?

Ezekiel 18:5-18

If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right— if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not take advance or accrued interest, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between contending parties, follows my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances, acting faithfully—such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the Lord God.

If he has a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, who does any of these things (though his father does none of them), who eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, takes advance or accrued interest; shall he then live? He shall not. He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

But if this man has a son who sees all the sins that his father has done, considers, and does not do likewise, who does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, does not wrong anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no advance or accrued interest, observes my ordinances, and follows my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live. As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, he dies for his iniquity.

Ezekiel 18:30-31

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

“Should Parents Who Eat Green Grapes Grow Children?”

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Rev. Ray Miller

The reading from Scripture today is from the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel. We don't often read from Ezekiel, but we are today. 18th chapter. "The word of the Lord came to me: What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel, 'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?" "'As surely as I live,' declares the sovereign Lord, 'you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son. Both alike belong to me. The soul

who sins is the one who will die. Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right, who does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel, who does not defile his neighbor's wife or lie with a woman during her period, who does not oppress anyone but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery, but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. Who does not lend at usury or take excessive interest, who withholds his hand from doing wrong, and judges fairly between man and man. He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous. He will surely live,' declares the sovereign Lord."

"But suppose he has a violent son who sheds blood or does any of these other things, though the father has done none of them, he eats at the mountain shrines, he defiles his neighbor's wife, oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not return what he took in pledge, looks to the idols, does detestable things, lends at usury, and takes excessive interest. Will such a man live? He will not. Because he has done all these detestable things, he will surely be put to death, and his blood will be on his own head. But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things. He does not eat at the mountain shrines, or look to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, does not oppress anyone or require pledge for a loan. Does not commit robbery, but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. He withholds his hand from sin and takes no usury or excessive interest. He keeps my laws and follows my decrees. He will not die for this father's sin. He will surely live, but his father will die for his own sin because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what was wrong among his people. Therefore, O House of Israel, I will judge you each one according to his ways,' declares the sovereign Lord. Repent, turn away from all your offenses, and sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart, and a new spirit."

A young couple shared their excitement with me that in eight months, they were going to be parents to a child, their first. And then the soon-to-be father said to me, "I don't know how to be a father." Several decades ago, when we were awaiting the birth of our first child, I remember thinking that, although I don't know that I said it, thinking, "I don't know how to be a father." It seemed a scary thing. Sometimes, even after many years and decades, I still find myself saying "I don't know how to be a father." Things change in the relationship of father and children. Someone wrote something, it's titled "Father," it goes like this: Four-year-old says, "My dad knows everything." Seven-year-old: "My dad can do everything." Eight-year-old: "My father knows almost everything." Fourteen-year-old: "Father? He's so old-fashioned."

You know someone has said that if you're going to be a parent of a teenager you have to know that you're going to be hated. And someone else said adolescence is God's way of preparing you to celebrate an empty nest. Twenty-one-years old: "Oh, father is so out of date." Twenty-five years old: "Well, father knows a little bit." Thirty years old: "Maybe I will talk to my dad about this." Fifty years old: "Well, Dad knew more than I thought he did." Sixty-five years old: "I wish I could talk to my father about this."

You know, being a parent, whether it's a father or a mother, is not an easy thing. And especially when our children are between the ages of zero and 25, we often don't know where we are in this particular evolution of relationship. Sometimes I don't even know that with my children, and they're in their forties. Let's be honest. Not all of us have perfect parents. Some of us were abandoned by our fathers. Some of us were rejected, neglected, abused. For all of us, we did not have models in our biological parents. Some of us never heard our father say to us, "I love you." So here is this strange, ancient Hebrew saying. "The fathers eats sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." What in the world does that mean? The father eats sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. It means that we tend to repeat in our lives that which we experiences in our relationship with our parents.

When I was growing up, I had a father who was a strict disciplinarian. When something didn't go the way Dad thought it should go, Dad applied discipline, and he applied the only kind of discipline he knew to apply, which was the way in which he was disciplined by his father. Dad would grab something nearby, a stick or something or other, and apply that as a way of disciplining. Well, I have to admit, well I think, anyway, that I probably needed to be disciplined sometimes. But when my dad applied the kind of discipline my dad applied, it was very hard for me to feel his love for me. I determined that when I became a parent, that I was going to adopt a different kind of discipline, so that my children would know, even when I was disciplining them, that I loved them. But I inherited my father's temper, and once in a while, my temper got the best of me, and I would resort to that which I had experienced in my childhood, not to that extent, at least I don't think I did, my kids might see it differently, and then I tried to express it through love. My kids got more hugs and more kisses and more words of affirmation than I had experienced in my life, because I wanted them to know that. I know my dad loved me, by the way. My dad just had another way of expressing that love.

So. Here are some things I believe can help parents and grandparents to fulfill their God-given roles with their children and grandchildren. First of all, our children need something to believe in. Parents and grandparents have a unique opportunity to give our children, to help our children to find faith, and to know the love of God. Especially with younger children, they're ready for something to fill their lives, and what better to fill their lives with, than the love of God expressed through the relationships that we have with them? And this is true not only for parents, but for grandparents.

You know, we have this thing, Pastor Charles really likes this, it's a Build-a-Sermon blog on the internet. He got me to get on there this week, and I'm glad he did, because I got one response, and I want to share it with you. Someone named Rosa. "Each of us has the ability to grow and change throughout our lives. Even though we may sin, God grants us the opportunity to turn away from our sins and follow God's way and our sins will be forgiven. We do this not only for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren. We are living examples of God's word. My own grandparents served as stronger examples of God's way than my own parents, maybe because they understood what was right, or maybe because they had learned more by life experience. I will never forget my grandfather bowing his head in silent prayer during a noisy meal in a crowded

McDonald's restaurant. It was his moment thanking God, and it served as a silent example that spoke louder than the crowd around us."

One of the things our children need is, they need to be given something to believe in. Another thing that our children need from us is, they need for us to listen. They need our attention. My wife's cousin in Illinois, he has a lot of grandchildren. One of his daughters produced twelve grandchildren. I don't know how many he has in total, but one of the things he does is on each grandchild's birthday, he spends that day with that grandchild. They go out for lunch or dinner. He takes them shopping to buy their birthday gift. They have his full attention. Our children love to have our attention, not all the time, we can't do that. But to have our attention, and for us to listen to them.

A little girl was standing by her father's desk, he was working, and he finally realized she was there, and so he reached into his pocket and handed her a quarter and went back to work. She was still there, so he went into the desk and got out a piece of candy and handed it to her, but he realized she was still there, and finally he said, "Honey, what do you want?" And she said, "I just want to be with you." Children have that need.

The third thing that I want to share today is that your children are children. Be someone to be their fan. You know that I like the Calvin and Hobbes comic strip, and I'm so sorry it doesn't appear any more, but you can buy books on it, which I have done. Here's one of them. Mom says, "Calvin, get up. I'm not going to call you again!" He's lying in bed, and he thinks, "I bet." "You're going to miss the bus. Now, get out of bed!" At school, he's at the blackboard with a math problem. The teacher says, "You don't know the answer? Then sit down." A bully picks him up and says, "Hey, Twinkie, want to see if there's an afterlife?" He's at home, and he hears his mother's voice again. "No, you can't go play until you finish your homework." And at dinner - "Just eat your food. You don't need to play with it." And then, later that evening, "Stop stalling and get into the tub. No, you can't stay up a little longer. Go to bed." So he goes to bed. His mother comes in, gives him a kiss, and she says, "Have a good night's sleep. Tomorrow's another big day." And Calvin goes, "Uhhhh."

A girl comes home from school, she has all Cs on her report card. Her father says to her, "You should be getting all Bs." So she goes back to school and she works really hard. She comes home and she has all Bs, and her father says, "You should be getting As." So she works hard, hard, harder. She comes back and has almost all As and he says to her, "You must have some easy teachers." Where's the affirmation in that? Another scenario. Parent is at a soccer game, the daughter is playing soccer. When the game is over, the parent says to his daughter, "I wish I could play soccer like you." Our children need affirmation, encouragement, support.

None of us will ever be perfect parents or grandparents, we all make mistakes. We all often do the things that we have determined we would not do. But we can get a new heart and a new spirit. We aren't condemned to repeat what we have experienced. God will set us on our feet, and God will help us to be the parent and grandparent God has called us to be. Amen.

