

The Call to Lead the Church--Elders, Part 6

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:4–5

Code: 54-23

INTRODUCTION

Scripture places a high premium on qualified leaders. That's why in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 Paul specifies the qualifications of a true leader. The standards are high because spiritual leaders are models of Christian virtue for the congregation to follow. It's essential that they be men of great integrity.

A. The Importance of Integrity in Leadership

Integrity is a key ingredient for any successful leader, whether secular or spiritual.

1. According to Dwight Eisenhower

Dwight David Eisenhower, former president and general of our armed services, believed that the supreme quality for a leader is integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office. "The captain of such a team need only have their respect and affection: the team would follow him anywhere" (Peter Lyon, Eisenhower: Portrait of the Hero [Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974], p. 207).

2. According to John Stott

In his book *Between Two Worlds*, Christian author John Stott says, "Communication is by symbol as well as speech. For 'a man cannot only preach, he must also live. And the life that he lives, with all its little peculiarities, is one of two things: either it emasculates his preaching or it gives it flesh and blood' [J.H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), p. 93]. We cannot hide what we are. Indeed, what we are speaks as plainly as what we say. When these two voices blend, the impact of the message is doubled. But when they contradict each other, even the positive witness of the one is [negated] by the other." This was the case with the man Spurgeon describes as a good preacher but a bad Christian: he 'preached so well and lived so badly, that when he was in the pulpit everybody said he ought never to come out again, and when he was out of it they all declared he never ought to enter it again' [Lectures to My Students, Volume 1 (Zondervan, 1980), pp. 12-13]. It is at this point that a practical problem presents itself to us. Pastors are told to be models of Christian maturity" ([Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], p. 264). The credibility of a spiritual leader depends on his character. That's why Paul told the Ephesian elders and Timothy to guard their lives carefully (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:16).

3. According to Henry Ward Beecher

Henry Ward Beecher, the nineteenth century American preacher, once said, "A preacher is, in some degree, a reproduction of the truth in personal form" (Lectures on Preaching: Personal Elements in Preaching [Nelson, 1872], p. 16; cited by Stott, p. 266). That's why a spiritual leader must live a blameless life that lends credibility to his message. In so doing he can have a profound influence for righteousness.

B. The Power of Influence in Leadership

I define leadership as influence, and one's influence is a direct result of his example. That's why the qualifications for spiritual leadership in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 deal with a man's character.

The influence that leaders have on their followers is illustrated throughout Scripture. Often those illustrations are accompanied by a warning to avoid an evil influence or an encouragement to follow a godly influence.

1. Warnings to avoid evil influences

a) Leviticus 18:3 God warned the Israelites to avoid pagan peoples: "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do; and after the doings of the land of Canaan, to which I bring you, shall ye not do; neither shall ye walk in their ordinances." He knew the power of an evil influence, and the tendency of people to mimic the behavior of those around them. b) Deuteronomy 18:9 Moses said, "When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations." c) Proverbs 22:24-25 Solomon said, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." d) Proverbs 29:12 Solomon said, "If a ruler harken to lies, all his servants are wicked." An evil ruler will produce evil followers. e) Ezekiel 20:18 God said, "Walk not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols." He wanted His people to be free from the influence of wicked fathers. f) Hosea 4:9 Hosea said, "Like people, like priest." The people followed the evil example of their leaders, so God punished them all. g) Matthew 23:2-3 Jesus said, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All, therefore, whatever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not after their works; for they say, and do not." The leaders of Israel were hypocrites because they said one thing but did another.

2. Encouragements to follow godly influences

a) 1 Timothy 4:12 Paul said, " [Timothy,] in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (NASB). b) Titus 2:7 Paul similarly instructed Titus, "In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds" (NASB). c) Hebrews 13:7 The writer said, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith" (NASB). d) James 5:10 James said, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" (NASB). e) 1 Peter 5:3 Peter instructed all elders to be good examples to their congregations. f) 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." g) Philippians 4:9 Paul said, "Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you." We all influence others for good or evil. That's why Scripture deals so pointedly with the moral character of an elder. His godly example is the most important element in his leadership

3. Results of evil influences

Some of the kings of Israel and Judah illustrate the tragic results of an evil influence. a) The example of Nadab in Israel First Kings 15:25-26 says, "Nadab, the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa, king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin with which he made Israel to sin." Nadab followed his father's evil example. b) The example of Ahaziah in Israel First Kings 22:51-53 says, "Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin; for he served Baal, and worshiped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done." c) The example of Jehoram in Judah In 2 Kings 8:16-18 we read, "In the fifth year of Joram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, began to reign. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord." d) The example of Ahaziah in Judah Second Kings 8:25-27 says, "In the twelfth year of Joram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel, did Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, begin to reign. Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. "And his mother's name was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri, king of Israel. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab; for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab." The wickedness of that family was perpetuated from generation to generation. That's the

power of an evil influence.e) The example of Jeroboam in IsraelIn 2 Kings 17:21-22 we read, "[The Lord] forcibly removed Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, king; and Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord; and made them sin a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them." The influence of Jeroboam changed the course of an entire nation.f) The example of Manasseh in JudahSecond Chronicles 33:9 says, "Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the nations, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." Manasseh made God's people act worse than heathens. What horrifying influence he had!It's not enough for spiritual leaders to teach the truth; they must model it in their lives. That's what integrity is all about: living what you teach. And that's why the standards in 1 Timothy 3:2-3 relate to a church leader's moral character. His influence in the church will be tremendous, so he must be morally blameless.

Does God Curse Children?

Deuteronomy 5:9 says, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them who hate me." Many people think that means God automatically curses an evil man's children for three or four generations. Some even teach you should never adopt a child because he or she might be under a divine curse for the sins of his father, grandfather, or great grandfather.

I believe that's an incorrect interpretation of the verse. The issue is not a divine curse upon children but the power of an evil influence. Sin and unbelief can so thoroughly pollute a family, it can take three or four generations to root out and change the problem.

4. Results of godly influences

The godly kings of Judah illustrate the power of a good influence.a) The example of JehoshaphatFirst Kings 22:42-43 says, "Jehoshaphat was thirty and five years old when he began to reign . . . and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah, the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in all the ways of Asa, his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord." Even though Jehoshaphat failed at times, Scripture commends him for following his father's godly example.b) The example of AzariahIn 2 Kings 15:1 we read, "In the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, began Azariah, son of Amaziah, king of Judah, to reign. Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jecoliah, of Jerusalem. He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father, Amaziah, had done."c) The example of JothamSecond Kings 15:32-34 says, "In the second year of Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, began Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, to reign. Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; he did according to all that his father, Uzziah, had done."Other godly leaders in Israel included Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

What Kind of Influence Do You Have on Others?

Every leader has the power to influence others for good or evil through his example. That's why God requires elders to model a high standard of godliness. That's also why 1 Timothy 3 doesn't list qualifications typical of today's corporate leaders: diligence, foresight, conceptual vision, administrative skills, decisiveness, courage, humor, eloquence, friendliness, tact, diplomacy, and so on. Those human characteristics are helpful in secular situations, but the issue in spiritual leadership is modeling godly virtue.

An elder is to evangelize unbelievers, edify believers, feed the flock, strengthen families, and help the church act as salt and light in the world. Therefore the church must choose qualified elders.

Lesser men wouldn't be adequate for such a high calling.

C. The Peril of Hypocrisy in Leadership

John Stott wrote, "William Golding is a contemporary novelist who has vividly illustrated the negative power of hypocrisy. In his book *Free Fall* [Harcourt Brace, 1962] he tells the story of Sammy Mountjoy, an illegitimate child brought up in a slum, who became a famous artist. During his school days he was torn between two teachers and between the two worlds they represented. On the one hand there was Miss Rowena Pringle, a Christian who taught Scripture, and on the other Mr. Nick Shales, an atheist who taught science. Hers was the world of 'the burning bush', of supernatural mystery, his of a rationally explicable universe.

"Instinctively, Sammy was drawn to the burning bush. Unfortunately, however, the advocate of this Christian interpretation of life was a frustrated spinster who had her knife into Sammy because he had been adopted by the clergyman she had hoped to marry. She took her revenge by being cruel to the boy. 'But how,' Sammy later asked himself, 'could she crucify a small boy . . . and then tell the story of that other crucifixion with every evidence in her voice of sorrow for human cruelty and wickedness? I can understand how she hated, but not how she kept on such apparent terms of intimacy with heaven' [p. 210]. It was this contradiction which kept Sammy from Christ."

Stott went on to quote Sammy as saying that Miss Pringle's life nullified her teaching: "'She failed to convince, not by what she said but by what she was. Nick persuaded me to his natural scientific universe by what he was, not by what he said. I hung for an instant between two pictures of the universe; then the ripple passed over the burning bush and I ran towards my friend. In that moment a door closed behind me. I slammed it shut on Moses and Jehovah'" (*Between Two Worlds* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], pp. 268-69).

How many doors have been slammed shut on Moses and Jehovah because of hypocritical Christians? And when they are church leaders the potential for harm is even greater due to the breadth of their influence. That's the power of an example, and that's why an elder's character is so important.

REVIEW

We have seen that the overarching qualification for an elder is blamelessness (1 Tim. 3:2): his life must be exemplary because others will follow his example. He must be blameless in his moral character, family life, maturity, and reputation.

I. AN ELDER MUST BE BLAMELESS IN HIS MORAL CHARACTER (vv. 2b-3)

Paul paid careful attention to his moral character. He said, "I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27, NASB). He admonished Timothy to "Flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness" (2 Tim. 2:22, NASB). Anyone desiring to lead in the church must give careful attention to his moral integrity.

Are There Weeds in Your Spiritual Garden?

I don't know much about gardening, but I recently read something that caught my attention. It said that it isn't enough for a gardener to love flowers; he must also hate weeds. That's analogous to our Christian commitment: it isn't enough for a church leader to love God's Word; he must also hate sin. If anything comes into his life that is at all doubtful, he must remove it as a gardener removes anything that might distract from the beauty of his garden or hinder the growth of his flowers. That principle is illustrated in an incident I remember reading about in the life of Dr. Maltbie Babcock, former pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City. Some years ago Dr. Babcock was approached by a physician in his congregation who was concerned about his health. Handing Dr. Babcock some theater tickets he said, "Take these. You need the recreation of going to see a play." Dr. Babcock looked at them. Seeing they were tickets to a play of the kind he could not conscientiously attend, he said kindly, "Thank you, but I'm afraid I cannot take them." "Why not?" the physician asked. Dr. Babcock replied, "Doctor, it's this way. You're a physician a surgeon, in fact. Before you operate, you scrub your hands meticulously. You wouldn't dare operate with dirty hands.

I'm a servant of Christ. I deal with precious human souls. I wouldn't dare serve others with a dirty life."

That pastor understood the importance of a godly example. How about you? Do you guard your example that closely, or have you allowed some weeds to take root in your spiritual garden?

LESSON

II. AN ELDER MUST BE BLAMELESS IN HIS FAMILY LIFE (vv. 4-5)

"One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)."

An elder's home life is an essential consideration. Before he can lead in the church he must demonstrate his spiritual leadership within the context of his family.

Does Scripture Teach Celibacy for Church Leaders?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that church leaders must be celibate, but Scripture teaches that an elder must be a spiritual leader in his family.

The Catholic church was not the first religious group to advocate a celibate leadership. Apparently the same problem existed in Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 4 Paul warns about those who "shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons . . . forbidding to marry" (vv. 1, 3). They set a false standard of spirituality by advocating celibacy for those who wanted to rise above the spiritual level of others.

An elder's family is the proving ground for leadership skills. That doesn't mean only family men can be elders, but those who do have families must be godly leaders at home.

A. His Leadership in the Family (v. 4)

"One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity."

1. The nature of his rule

The Greek word translated "rule" means "to preside, have authority over, stand before, or manage." He is the manager of his home. That affirms the consistent biblical teaching on male headship in the home. Obviously there are shared responsibilities between husband and wife, and many tasks that the wife manages within the home, but the husband must be the leader. The same Greek word is used in 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor." An elder's ability to rule the church is affirmed in his home. Therefore he must be a strong spiritual leader in the home before he is qualified to lead in the church.

2. The quality of his rule

He must rule his home "well." There are many men who rule their home but they don't rule very well they don't get the desired results. The Greek word translated "well" (kal[ma]os) is rich in meaning. It could be translated "excellently" but that wouldn't give us the full meaning. To understand its meaning we need to compare it with agathos, a common word in the New Testament that means "inherently good, morally good, or practically good." Kal[ma]os goes a step further to include the idea of being aesthetically good: it is beautiful, lovely, and appealing to the eye. The idea is that an elder's leadership in the home is inherently good, and manifestly good to those who observe it.

3. The sphere of his rule

a) He's a good manager of his resources By implication a man's home includes his resources. A man may love the Lord and be spiritually and morally qualified to be an elder. He may even be skilled in teaching and have a believing wife and children who follow his leadership in the home, but let's say he has mismanaged his funds and is in bankruptcy. Somehow he can't seem to pull his finances into proper order. Since in the area of finances he doesn't rule his household well, he is disqualified from spiritual leadership. Stewardship of possessions is a critical test of a man's leadership. His home is a proving ground where his administrative capabilities can be clearly demonstrated. b) He's a good ruler of his family In addition to managing his resources, an elder must rule his family properly. (1) His

children are submissiveThe Greek word translated "subjection" is a military term that speaks of lining up in rank under those in authority. His children are to be lined up under his authority: respectful, controlled, and disciplined. That qualification applies only if a man has children. He's not disqualified if he doesn't have children. But if God has given him children, they must be under control and respectful to their parents.(2) His children are believersTitus 1:5-6 says an elder must have "children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion" (NASB). The Greek word translated "believe" (pistos) refers in that context to believing the gospel. An elder's children must believe the message he's preaching and teaching. If they are unbelievers, they rob his ministry of credibility. Before a man is qualified to lead in the church, he must first demonstrate his ability to rule his own household well. That includes the people and the resources God has entrusted to him. His children must be under control and respectful, and when they reach the age where they can make their own commitment to Christ, they must be believers. The same standard is required of deacons: "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well" (1 Tim. 3:12). That's an important issue to the Lord.(3) His children are respectfulThe Greek word translated "gravity" refers to dignity and respect. It blends the concepts of dignity, courtesy, humility, and competence. It's been described as stateliness or refinement. His children bring honor to their parents.

Is It Unfair to Disqualify a Man for His Family's Sins?

It's possible that a man who is otherwise qualified for spiritual leadership could be disqualified on the family level. Perhaps his personal life is right before the Lord but he became a Christian after his wife or children had already established sinful patterns of behavior, so his family is in chaos. In that case he is not qualified to lead in the church.

He may have children who are not favored with the sovereign electing grace of Christ. In that case he does not qualify to be an elder, but God has other plans for him. He has in no way been relegated to an inferior ministry. Church leadership is of high priority, but every ministry is important (1 Cor. 12:12-25). The key thing is for him to faithfully pursue the ministry opportunities God brings his way, and not feel that his task is in any sense inferior to another's.

In the Old Testament there were certain physical disqualifications for a priest. Leviticus 21:16-20 says, "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron, saying, "No man of your offspring throughout their generations who has a defect shall approach to offer the bread of his God. For no one who has a defect shall approach: a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a disfigured face, or any deformed limb, or a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or a hunchback or a dwarf, or one who has a defect in his eye or eczema or scabs or crushed testicles"' (NASB).

Anyone with a physical deformity could not perform priestly duties. That wasn't a commentary on the character or spiritual life of a deformed man, but simply a matter of God's selecting a certain kind of man to serve as priest. He wanted unblemished men as models of spiritual service. It's the same with church leadership. God wants elders to have an unblemished and exemplary home life.

Three Keys to Spiritual Leadership at Home

A. Authority

It's essential that a father exercise enough authority to make it advisable for his children to obey him. Where there's disobedience, there must be immediate and negative consequences. Because of the Fall, all human beings start out spiritually depraved. The only way you can train a depraved person to do what is right is to associate pain with disobedience (Prov. 13:24).

B. Wisdom

A father must have enough wisdom to make it natural and reasonable for his children to obey him. Invariably a child will question his authority: "Why can't I do that?" or "Why should I do this?" Whether you like it or not, during the entire time of raising your children you are the local neighborhood philosopher and theologian to them. That requires your being reasonable in what you expect of them.

C. Love

A father must have enough love to make it easy for his children to obey him. Your children ought to long to obey you because they would never want to do anything that would hinder their relationship with you.

As I reflect on my own children I'm confident that they have obeyed because it was advisable to do so we taught them that lesson. I hope they obeyed because it was reasonable and natural to do so. But most of all I hope they obeyed because it was a delight to do so and because they wanted to preserve the close bond we have with each other. I thank God for the wonderful relationship we all have.

The reason an elder must demonstrate authority, wisdom, and love at home is he is called to do the same thing in the church. He must "speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority" (Titus 2:15). To do that he must have enough authority to make it advisable for the congregation to obey, enough wisdom to make it reasonable to obey, and enough love to make it easy to obey.

B. His Leadership in the Church (v. 5)

"If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?"

1. The sphere of his rule

That verse is a negative restatement of verse 4. In the Greek text, "the church of God" is literally "a church of God," and refers to a local assembly. A man isn't qualified to rule any local assembly if he can't rule his own house.

2. The nature of his rule

The Greek word translated "care" is beautifully illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him" (Luke 10:30-34). In that parable "care" is a verb that encompasses compassion, medical care, transportation, and the offering of time and money. It's sacrificial giving on behalf of others, and that's what church leadership is all about. I believe there's no better place to see a man's commitment to meeting the needs of others than in his own home. Does he care about his family? Is he committed to each member? Does he work hard to meet their needs? If he doesn't, how could he ever care for the church?

Conclusion

Qualified elders are blameless in their moral character and family life. Their children love the Lord and submit to parental authority. Admittedly such men are uncommon, but God wants that caliber of man to lead his church. The standards are high because elders must be models of spiritual virtue so that their example and influence is godly.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What did former President Eisenhower say about the importance of integrity in leadership?
2. Leadership can be defined as _____.
3. What warning does God give the Israelites in Leviticus 18:3?
4. According to Proverbs 29:12, what influence does an evil ruler have on his people?
5. How does Jesus describe the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:2-3?
6. Peter instructed all elders to be _____ to their congregations (1 Pet. 5:3).
7. How does Nadab illustrate the influence of an evil example (1 Kings 15:26)?
8. It's not enough for spiritual leaders to _____ the truth; they must _____ it in their lives.
9. Does Deuteronomy 5:9 teach that God curses the children of a sinful man? Explain.
10. How does Azariah illustrate the influence of a godly example (2 Kings 15:1; see p. 8)?

11. In William Golding's novel *Free Fall*, how did Rowena Pringle demonstrate hypocrisy, and what impact did her example have on Sammy Mountjoy?
12. What was Dr. Babcock's explanation for not accepting the theater tickets offered him?
13. How does 1 Timothy 3:4 refute the view that church leaders must be celibate?
14. Define "rule" (v. 4).
15. Describe the difference between the Greek words *kal[ma]os* and *agathos*?
16. Is management of resources included in the idea of ruling one's home? Explain.
17. Define "subjection" (v. 5).
18. Can a man who does not have children be an elder? Explain.
19. What does it mean to have "children who believe" (Titus 1:6, NASB)?
20. Define "gravity" (v. 4).
21. According to Leviticus 21:16-20, who couldn't perform priestly duties? Does that mean such people are inferior in God's eyes?
22. What are the three keys to spiritual leadership in the home, and how do they relate to leadership in the church?
23. What does it mean to care for the church, and how did Jesus illustrate that principle (Luke 10:30-34)?

Pondering the Principles

1. People are influenced by their companions, whether for good or evil. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (NASB). That principle is repeated throughout Scripture. Do you choose your companions carefully? Obviously you can't always avoid evil people, but you must guard yourself against their influence. Who are your closest companions? Do they share your love for the Lord or do they regularly challenge your Christian principles? Remember, their influence may be subtle, but your companions will affect your attitudes and actions. Read these verses and ask God to give you wisdom as you evaluate the influence of your friends on your life, and be sure to thank Him for those who are godly examples to you: Proverbs 4:14-15; 12:11, 26; 13:20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.
2. William Golding's story of Sammy Mountjoy illustrates how hypocrisy can destroy our credibility and drive people away from Christ (see pp. 9-10). Conversely, a pure life brings glory to God. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). It has been rightly said that a believer's life is the only Bible some people ever read. What is your life telling others about Christ? Is the message clear or is it distorted by hypocrisy? Do you attract people to Christ or turn them away?
3. We have seen that spiritual leadership in the home requires enough authority to make it advisable for our children to obey us, enough wisdom to make it reasonable for them to obey us, and enough love to make it easy for them to obey us (see pp. 16-17). Sadly, many parents today are authoritarian but lack the wisdom and love necessary to encourage a godly response in their children. Others are so "loving" that they disregard true authority and wisdom. Does your parenting reflect godly authority, wisdom, and love? That's a big task for any parent, but God has placed us in authority over our children (Eph. 6:1), promised us His wisdom (James 1:5), and given us His love (Rom. 5:5). Our responsibility is to seek His wisdom daily through prayer, and to learn His Word and exemplify it to our children.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).