

Growing Away

(April 18, 2022)

My wife and I recently asked ourselves, "*Where did we go wrong?*" with respect to our grown adult children who now have their own spouses and are in the process of raising their own children. Let me explain.

We raised our children with the habit of going to church. We were involved in church and they were involved in church. Whether it was Sunday school classes for them or AWANA groups or something else, we made sure we were in the habit of going to church and participating in it. My wife and I have always viewed going to church as something Christians should do for a number of reasons:

- our commitment to our Lord
- a visual testimony to the world
- the chance to grow in grace
- the support of other Christians
- fellowship

The above list is not exhaustive but covers the primary reasons for continuing the practice of going to church. Looking back, it is very clear to both my wife and I that we often forced ourselves to go because the teaching from the pulpit too often, was rather lackluster at best. Over the years, we've attended churches which were doctrinally correct, but lacking in a vivid reality where God is concerned. This tended to play out in me focusing on my watch during services instead of the reason I was to be there.

I can relate to the fact that finding a good, solid, biblical church where the teaching is expositional and biblically sound and the people exercise a reality in their lives that makes you want to be near them, is difficult at best. Sometimes, it's nearly impossible to find such a church.

I can recall that we ended up attending a church that seemed great in the beginning, but over time, the cracks began to show. Often, the pastor was shown to be a micro-manager who had to have his fingers on everything and had an absolute revulsion at the thought of relaxing his grip. This created a tension that rippled through the entire congregation. I've learned that pastors who take this approach end up slowly choking the very life out of that local body of believers. People try to address things and they're initially met with, "Yes, this is great!" only to eventually realize that those were only words. In reality, if the idea did not come from the pastor himself, it really was not considered worthy enough to truly be considered.

Then there are those churches we've also attended where expositional teaching is not done, though the pastor would disagree with that assessment. Topical sermons are the norm and they are often not that great. In order to properly preach expositorially (verse-by-verse), through chapter and book, a great deal of study must be undertaken by the pastor to ensure that everything is clearly within the context of God's Word.

We have been to many different churches over the years and we have only a few that have provided good memories and warm heart. They've been a tremendous blessing. There have been unfortunately,

too many churches that offered nothing except great "get togethers" where people were excited to be there - the music was great! it was exciting! - but there was always a dearth of real biblical teaching.

So we have always tried our best to make sure our children as they grew not only knew the importance of church, but were involved in it and they saw, by way of example from us, how important church is because it is something that all Christians should be involved in on a regular basis. Again, I know how difficult this can be depending upon where a person lives and what's near them. I truly get it.

But something happened a few years ago that made it extremely easy for people who were attending church on a regular basis to simply stop going and opt for online church instead. That something was of course, C-19, the scourge of modern day society globally.

We live in a state where the governor did not mandate that churches close for the "15 days to slow the spread." However, our governor *strongly recommended* it. Because of this, the church we were going to then chose to follow that recommendation. I recall being angry. I was not happy with it at all. Why didn't the pastor simply stand up and recommend that everyone who felt insecure about attending physically should simply stay home? Instead, we were being treated as though we were all potentially sick and the only real solution was to "social distance" and "lockdown."

I realize most churches in the USA did this. I recall asking our pastor then why couldn't we gather in our cars in the church parking lot and he could broadcast the service over the radio? His answer was that he was concerned that this would appear to the community as being "defiant." God forbid Christians appear to be defiant before Caesar I suppose.

So we know the story. Fifteen days turned into two years. Churches were penalized for trying to remain open (as were businesses). A few pastors were arrested and jailed for their "defiance."

But the globalists got what they wanted because a very large percentage of church-goers stopped going and have never gone back. It has become the way for too many today. Our kids, unfortunately, are among them. Now, they would argue that they have small children who take naps during the time of church service and to disrupt their children's routine is something they want to avoid. I get it. My wife gets it. In fact, since we raised our own children, we absolutely get it. However, we always found a way to be fairly consistent in attending church. The great falling away?

But even if the reasons stated have merit and I'm not sure they do, how often did (or do), my children and their spouses and children join in a service online? If you guessed zero times, you'd be correct. The plain truth of the matter is that church is no longer of any real importance to the young generation today. So in that sense, globalists garnered a major win for their side.

In the church we currently attend and are members, I recall the pastor telling us that prior to C-19, about 400 people regularly attended church there over two services. The fallout from C-19 has halved that number roughly and he indicated that according to the experts, those who left aren't coming back. I did notice this past Easter Sunday, there were more than usual in attendance, so many of the folks who used to attend regularly but no longer do have become like my dad who *maybe* attended church once or twice a year. That's it.

I read through **1 Samuel** and wonder how Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas (who were priests of the Lord), could have become so immoral? How did that happen? Probably two reasons: 1) Eli was not as firm or that much of a role-model for them, and 2) the sons made their own choices. It seems clear from **1 Samuel 1** that God already had a plan to set Eli and his sons aside with the coming birth of Samuel.

Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord.

The above verse in **1 Samuel 1:12** tells us what we need to know about Hophni and Phinehas. They were absolute scoundrels and were simply using the priesthood for their own selfish gain and empowerment. Clearly, Eli did not raise them the way he should have raised them because they did not even "know" the Lord. It was a job for them with prestige and power. That was it. So God chose to end their lives and also Eli's and no one from Eli's line would ever be a priest before God again.

Then came Samuel and he was trained by Eli. Samuel grew into a man who was committed to the Lord and walked in his ways. He eventually became a judge of Israel (**1 Samuel 7**). However, he also had a problem with his sons.

Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice.

The text above in **1 Samuel 8:1-3** points out what we need to know about Samuel's sons. There appears to be some slight differences between Eli's and Samuel's sons. The latter may have originally followed the Lord wholeheartedly but then succumbed to temptation while the former may never have followed the Lord at all. In any case, God does not speak against Samuel or deal with him for the waywardness of his sons.

My two adult kids are *not* immoral (and neither are their spouses). I believe they all know the Lord and are authentic Christians. They don't necessarily mind going to church, but to date, I don't think they see the harm in *not* attending. They'd have more friends. I've mentioned that being involved in church can translate to finding other people in their age group and enjoying fellowship with them over the common beliefs. I might as well talk to a wall, which would be less frustrating because I know the wall cannot comprehend what I'm saying.

I'm not trying to make my children and their spouses sound like ill-mannered selfish brats because they're *not*. Both spouses are loving and giving. However, it is clear that church is simply not important and I see it as an external testimony of my inner Christianity. Reading the Bible daily? There's never enough "time" apparently.

So what do my wife and I do now? We've raised our children and we now get to watch them make mistakes and grow away. Oh joy. They put up with our "advice" politely, but it's clear that they are now the parents with children and our advice doesn't have value.

It's absolutely astounding to me to experience this. All my wife and I can do is to *pray* for them constantly. I probably did not do enough of as we raised them. That's my fault and I readily admit it. I must pray that God will hem them in and impress upon them their need for church, not just for church's sake but as a vehicle to get to know the Lord better and to find fellowship with other Christians.

I just turned 65. I'm not Solomon by any stretch, but I'm finding it strange to realize that my parental advice is no longer wanted or needed. Apparently, my wife and I can't really understand. Life was different for us. What can we actually offer? I've even noticed that my daughter who has an A type personality, tends to talk to me at times as though she is my equal. I laugh outwardly but inside I ache a bit, not because she sees me as equal, but because she appears to have lost respect for me.

I used to wonder how Eli's and Samuel's sons came to be what they were and now I know the answer. Again, while my kids are not immoral like those men from the Hebrew Scriptures, my kids *have* grown away from an active relationship with the Lord. My only recourse is to pray, pray and pray some more. Only God can illuminate the darkness of their hearts and give them a heart of flesh; one that craves Him, His Presence and wants more than anything to follow Him to the ends of the earth. All my advice won't accomplish that.

So I pray. Will you join me in prayer for my two kids please? I know God wants for them far more than they have now. Thank you.

3 John 1:4 - *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth (NIV)*