

Introduction:

In 1874, Richard L. Dugdale was chosen to inspect thirteen county jails in the state of New York. When he got to one county, he was surprised to find 6 relatives all held in the same jail. They were being held on various charges including burglary, attempted rape and assault with intent to kill. Dugdale was intrigued and decided to study this family further. He used the fictitious name "Juke" and wrote a book entitled *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity*. He traced their line back to a man he called "Max" born sometime between 1720 and 1740. The man had six daughters and two sons, some of whom were born out of wedlock. He had been a heavy drinker and sluggard. Out of the 709 members of this man's family over the intervening 150 years or so 180 were paupers, 140 were criminals, 60 were recidivists or habitual thieves and 50 were prostitutes. No doubt, these kinds of bad deeds are not genetic. But consider the family legacy started by one man who seemed to be zealous for bad deeds and the curse it seemed to place on his family for years to come. Certainly a Juke could rise above the family, but it wasn't easy. However, consider the family of another man born just a few years before "Max Juke." Jonathan Edwards was born in 1703. He became a theologian, pastor and even president of Princeton University. At least one of his sermons is still studied in modern literature classes. You may remember studying the sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" and the religious awakening it sparked in the early days of the colonies. In 1900, A.E. Winship studied 1400 of Edwards' descendants. 100 became preachers or missionaries, 13 college presidents, 65 professors, 100 lawyers, 30 judges, 66 physicians, 80 holders of public office (including 3 U.S. senators, 3 mayors of large cities, 3 governors, a controller of the U.S. Treasury, and U.S. vice president).¹ Do you see the difference a family can make?

Let me ask you, which kind of family do you want to be—Jukes or Edwards? What kind of family legacy do you want to create? No matter what your family has been, a new legacy can start with you right now. You can develop a family zealous for good deeds and watch it change your family tree. But what will that look like and how can you manage it? Let's consider those questions together.

Discussion:

- I. A family zealous for good deeds...
 - A. ...is anchored in the Word.
 1. **II Timothy 3:16-17** makes it very clear that apart from the word of God, we are unequipped for good deeds. A family zealous for good deeds, then, must be anchored in the Word. I don't care what good things you are doing, if the foundation of God's Word is not paving the way for it, then you are not being zealous for truly good deeds. Keep these verses in context. Cross reference **II Timothy 3:14-15** with **II Timothy 1:5** and we recognize that Paul's statement to Timothy was anchored in his family upbringing. Timothy had a foundation in the word because his mother and grandmother had been devoted to the word and passed that on to him.
 2. We need to remember **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**. For the Old Testament saints, everything began with the family passing the Law onto its children. They had to be anchored in the Word. Let me ask you, how often is the Word discussed in your home? I'm not even talking yet about specific Bible studies, but how often does the Word come up in your conversations? How often is it used to answer questions? How often is it used to help make decisions? How often is it part of your life at home? Do you sometimes go whole days without even talking about God or His word in your family? I know at times my family and I have caught ourselves in that predicament. We simply cannot be equipped, either as individuals or as a family, for good deeds unless the Word of God is the foundation for our family and paves the way for us. Thus, if we want to be a family zealous for good deeds, we have to be very specific and purposeful in our study and use of God's Word and quit waiting on the church to pass that on to our kids.

¹ Maxwell, John, *Today Matters*, Warner Faith, Nashville, 2004, pp 105-107 (the number about preachers came from <http://www.ravenhill.org/edwards.htm> accessed on October 18, 2008).

B. ...starts at home.

1. Before a family tries to be a force for good in the world, they must start by being zealous for good deeds in their own home. What good does it do us if we are wonderful, loving and generous to every one in the world if we are mean and hateful to our parents, children and siblings? Sadly, some of us are like this. Consider the Old Testament examples of Eli and Samuel, men who were zealous for good deeds when it came to others and their work as priests but who failed miserably in raising boys who were also zealous for good deeds.
2. **I Timothy 5:1-2** demonstrates that zeal for good deeds must start at home. It tells us to treat older men in the congregation like fathers, older women like mothers, younger men and women like brothers and sisters. Did you catch the assumption in this passage? For this passage to mean anything, we must do good works at home. What we do to others outside the home should be an extension of how we have learned to treat each other in the home.
3. Note what Paul says about who should take care of widows in **I Timothy 5:4, 8, 16**. Children and grandchildren should learn to perform good deeds for their parents and grandparents before burdening anyone else with having to do good deeds for their dependents. In fact, if we are not taking care of our own, especially those of our own household, we are called worse than infidels. This passage is not just about the husband having a job and paying the bills, this is about doing good to and taking care of our family. If we don't, we are worse than unbelievers. Did you get that? We can believe and teach the truth, lining out the doctrine of Christ, dotting the I's and crossing the T's on every point, but if we are not starting with good deeds at home, unbelievers are better than us.
4. When zealous families start at home, Dad and Mom must set the example. Consider again Timothy's mother and grandmother who set the example for him according to **II Timothy 1:5**. Think about John Mark who traveled with Paul. I know he struggled on his first trip with Paul, but how many people even made it far enough to start the trip with Paul? Yet, even with that, he became useful to Paul. Where do you think John Mark began this trek for good works? Did it start with the example of his mother as seen in **Acts 12:12**?
5. Dads, remember that training in the home is under your headship according to **Ephesians 5:22-23; 6:4**. You must set the example and provide the training to make your family one zealous for good deeds. Let me tell you what this does not mean. This does not mean you go about fulfilling your every whim and desire as you pursue your career goals and you delegate and command your wife and kids to do good deeds. If you want your wife to be hospitable, you had better sacrifice for your wife as Jesus sacrificed for you (cf. **Ephesians 5:25, 28-29**). That means helping her get the house cleaned, etc. Men, notice that one of the qualifications for eldership is being hospitable (**I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8**). This doesn't mean elders have hospitable wives. It means elders are hospitable. Again, Dads, you are the example and head of good deeds in your home. For the moms, don't forget what Paul said about the widows who can be on the church's role for care in **I Timothy 5:9-10**. A woman should not be on the church's role even if she is widowed and abandoned by her family if she was not an example of good deeds. Notice that the first good deed listed is raising children.
6. Dad and Mom, as you start at home. Make sure you are teaching your children to be good to one another. Make sure passages like **Ephesians 4:29-32** begin at home between the kids. Don't tolerate the kind of infighting, bickering and hatefulness that sitcoms portray as normal among families between your children as if it is just a phase. Train them up to begin their good deeds at home. Train them to treat their brothers and sisters properly, that way they have a basis for knowing how to treat others (cf. **I Timothy 5:2**).

C. ...take it outside the home.

1. In the last point, we find that some families can be wonderful to everyone except those within their own family. In other cases, some families are close, tight-knit, do everything together and portray a very Waltonesque picture of caring for one another and doing good deeds at home, but rarely break out to others. Families zealous for good deeds begin at home, but they do not stop there. They take their good deeds outside the home to their brethren and their neighbors. Remember, the story of the Good Samaritan that we learned

about in our last lesson was not based on the command to love our families, but to love our neighbors (cf. **Luke 10:27ff**).

2. According to **Proverbs 17:17**, a brother is born for adversity. However, we also need to learn to be friends that are better than brothers according to **Proverbs 18:24**. Further, we have noticed the assumption from **I Timothy 5:1-2** about how good deeds begin at home. But we must not so focus on the assumption that we miss the point. The point of the passage is based on doing good deeds at home but is a command to do the good deeds you learn in the home to others around you. Families zealous for good deeds treat older men and women as they have learned to treat their father and mother. They treat younger men and women as they have learned to treat their brothers and sisters.
3. Don't forget **Romans 12:10**. It says we should love each other with brotherly affection. In other words, that love we have learned to have for those within our families should be extended to those outside it. Notice in context some examples of good deeds in the surrounding passage (**Romans 12:9-18**). Families zealous for good deeds abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. We do not rejoice when someone is doing wrong or living in sin as if that is a good deed. They rejoice through all things because of the hope we have from God. They are patient in the bad things and they are constant in prayer for their family and others. They contribute to the needs of saints. They show hospitality. They support others emotionally, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. They strive for harmony with others by never thinking more of themselves than they ought. They do good even to those who harm them. This is just a sampling of the good works we should do and to which our families should be devoted as we are zealous and fervent in spirit.

II. Three keys to managing good deeds

- A. Sadly, one of the reasons many families are not zealous for good deeds is we don't manage our lives to be zealous for good deeds. The fact is we don't have to be families zealous for bad deeds to leave a terrible generational legacy like the "Jukes" family. All we have to do is only ever intend to be zealous for good deeds but not ever really get around to it. I know for my family and me, we often get caught up in the rat race and let life happen to us. We spend our time just trying to catch up with what happens to us, trying to make it through the next day. We always intend to be zealous for good deeds but often don't actually measure up. There are three keys to help us overcome this and actually get busy being zealous for good deeds.
- B. *Managing Time*: **Ephesians 5:15-16** directs us to make the most of our time. We must redeem it. We must use it to its fullest. That only happens when we strive to manage our time. If we don't plan time for good deeds we will spend all our time running from work to PTA to scouts to sports to church and never really get zealous for good deeds. It is amazing how much recreation we can schedule in. We never want for little league, football, volleyball and other fun and games and then when good deeds for others need to be done, we hold up our hands and say we just don't have the time. If we are going to be a family zealous for good deeds, we had better manage our time for good deeds. Meals don't get cooked, the sick don't get visited, the mourning don't get encouraged, the lost don't get taught, the poor don't get helped unless we plan time to get those things done. Are you just letting life happen to you and then trying to race to catch up or are you managing your time so you can get the good deeds done?
- C. *Managing Finances*: While it is good for us to enjoy the material blessings God has given us, we need to recognize God has not blessed us merely so we can have all the gadgets and gizmos we want. He hasn't blessed us materially merely so we can have a great retirement. According to **I Timothy 6:17-19**, if we are going to use our material blessings properly, we must be generous with others in good works. Look at your budget. Is there a good works category? When announcements are made about the needs of others have you made financial plans to be ready to help with that? Or are you like most Americans, up to your eyeballs in debt because you have been spending next year's money on last year's personal pleasures? By the way, I'm saying this to remind me to get my family and myself in gear. We won't accidentally be rich in good deeds. We have to plan for it financially or it won't happen.
- D. *Find Your Niche*: This third one seems a bit different. However, if you want your family to be zealous for good deeds, you need to help each family member find his/her niche for good

deeds. Consider Tabitha of **Acts 9:36, 39**. She didn't do every possible good deed out there. But she did what she could do for whom she could. The fact is, there are so many possible good deeds out there, no one person or even one family can do them all. Don't wear yourself out trying to do them all. Do the ones that fit you. Don't get me wrong, we all need to stretch ourselves and get out of our comfort zones as we are being zealous for good deeds. But, zeal comes much more naturally when we are talking about actions we are good at and enjoy. The fact is I will never be zealous for the good deeds of helping with housing or car repairs. I'm not any good at those things. My brother, Chris, on the other hand is great at car repair and can use that as a basis for his good deeds. In your family, help each member find his or her niche. Someone may be great at taking care of kids. Let them baby-sit for a young family to let the mom and dad have some needed alone time. Someone may be able to do yard work. Let them help out a widow or widower. Someone may be a great reader. Have them sit with a shut-in and read to him/her. Someone may be a great cook. Let them get meals together for those who are struggling. Someone may be a great encourager. Keep them stocked with cards, stationary and give them time to visit others in need of encouragement. Whatever you do, let your spouse and kids find their niche and not simply do what you do.

Conclusion:

Do you remember the "Jukes" and the Edwards that we talked about at the beginning of this lesson? That is a startling contrast. Notice however that each story began with one person who were themselves part of some family or other before them. Each father chose what he would be like and what his immediate family would be like. It impacted their descendents for years. What kind of generational legacy would you like to leave? How much better to start being zealous for good deeds right now and train your family to do the same. Will everyone who ever comes from your descendents follow suit? Of course not, but there is no doubt you can impact your family for years to come. You can impact God's kingdom for years to come if you work on these keys and help your family be zealous for good deeds.