

Winking at Disobedience, Winding Toward Destruction

A little girl sporting a blue tutu came into view the other day as I walked by a school parking lot. But it wasn't the tutu that caught my attention—it was her mother's various commands and entreaties that she was happily ignoring.

"It's time to go, honey!" No movement. "We need to go home now," came the repeated request, but little tutu lady kept playing behind a dwindling snow pile. "One ... two," the increasingly frustrated mother counted.

Leaving the pair behind to sort out their homeward bound issues, I soon came upon another child playing while her parents looked on. Repeating the "time to go!" command numerous times to no avail, her mother finally told her that she had one more minute to play, but within seconds, she also told the little girl that "the minute is up," completely reneging on the—apparently dishonest—promise just made.

I get it. In fact, anyone who has ever worked with little ones gets it. Children have minds of their own and don't come by obedience naturally. Furthermore, no adult enjoys the shame and difficulty of dealing with a public tantrum. The easy thing to do is to just wink at disobedience, cajoling and coddling children instead. What many of us forget, however, is that such an approach to childhood disobedience not only affects the child and the adult working with that child, it also affects society at large in many negative ways, a fact we are seeing play out today.

The reason it negatively affects society is that a child's failure to learn obedience to proper authorities builds distrust, confusion, and rejection of rightful authority as that child grows into an adult. Writer and speaker Elisabeth

Elliot discussed this idea roughly 50 years ago in her book [Let Me Be a Woman](#):

Failure to fulfill threats and promises trains a child to discount what is said. It trains him to lie. The parents are not to be trusted, therefore they need not be obeyed, therefore no authority is trustworthy or need be obeyed. Obedience is optional, depending on convenience or inclination or obvious reward.

But such parental action (or inaction) not only trains a child to lie, but also trains him to believe a lie. When a child cannot count on a parent or teacher to follow through, he lives in a world of uncertainty, which creates further chaos in his life and may even confuse him enough to follow and believe other authorities who tell him further lies and lead him down ruinous paths.

“A child has to know first of all and beyond any shadow of doubt that the word spoken will be the word carried out,” Elliot wrote. “Threats (‘If you don’t do this, you’ll be spanked’) or promises (‘If you pick up all your toys you’ll get a Popsicle’)—if not carried through are ruinous to a child’s morality.”

And it is that ruined morality that we are experiencing today. We see it in the riotous individuals who regularly engage in [smash-and-grabs](#) at stores or [hijack yet another car](#). It shows up in angry students [disrespecting those who present a different viewpoint](#) than their own. It rears its head in those who pull down statues thinking they’re symbols of a racist past. And it shows up in those who fool themselves into thinking that [a man can be a woman](#), or even those who can’t truthfully [define what a woman is](#).

The fact is, when children don’t learn how to respond rightly to and interact with their parents—their first and foremost authorities—they won’t know how to respond to other

authorities in the future. They thus risk being misled or abused by those authorities, or conversely, abusing authorities themselves.

Many today see our nation declining and wonder what they can personally do to help it change course. One answer? Train your children to obey. Follow through not only on your threats, but also on your promises. In doing so, you will be raising children with a moral compass, who will then have the discernment and character to advance the type of government that will make our nation prosper once again.

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