

## Traffic School- Some Helpful hints to help with rebellion

When a teen chooses the route of rebellion there are no easy 1,2,3 steps to fixing the problem. Dealing with a true rebellious teen can be extremely painful that takes a long time to bring them back. Sadly, there are occasions when the teen does not come back and continues the path of destruction. Traffic court is when the verdict has been read and the results of the offense must be adhered to. Well, the verdict is in for many parents and they are having a hard time dealing with the offense that their child has brought into their relationship. Here are some helpful hints and rules that a parent should consider when they are dealing with a rebellious child who has the guilty verdict.

### 1. Do not live in guilt.

What parent who sees their child go the wrong way toward pain and suffering while choosing rebellion doesn't feel a little guilty? Their minds are flooded with thoughts like; "What could I have done differently?" "What did I do wrong?" "Did I not love them enough?" How does a parent get around feeling so guilty when their child rebels? The only way you can live without guilt is to be set free from that burden. It's very clear that each of us, including your teen, falls short of perfection and we sin-"For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God" Rom. 3:23. Each of us must take responsibility for our sins. You cannot take on the responsibility of your teen's sin. Only Christ can take on other's sins and burdens. The parent can only do what the Bible tells them to do to take responsibility for their actions. If you want to live guilt-free you must first-

- a. Accept that Christ forgives you for all your short-comings and does not hold it against you. Romans 8:1 says, "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*". That means God does not blame you for your teen's failures even if you were part of their anger causing rebellion. He only holds you accountable for your own decision in accepting Him as your personal Savior so you can live a victorious life.
- b. Acknowledge the mistake(s) you made that potentially estranged you from your teen in some way. We all know it is impossible to make it through as a parent without hurting our children. We are sinners saved by grace and fall short of being a perfect parent.
- c. Take full responsibility for your mistakes without sugar-coating it. Call it what it is, SIN. If you messed up with your kid through anger or humiliating them, or some other type of manipulation then realize you were or are part of the problem.
- d. Now the hard part-Go and confess to your child your mistake and ask for forgiveness. I've already shared the process we should go through with the Matthew 5:23-24 teaching of confessing and forgiving earlier in this chapter. You can only do your part in asking for forgiveness. You can't require your hurt teen to forgive, that's up to them. The scriptures teach that they should forgive you, but during their rebellion, it's not uncommon for them to hold it against you for a while if not longer. God will only hold you responsible for doing the right thing with your child, not fixing your child. They are still responsible for responding to your confession in the right way and if they choose not to then it's on them.

Guilt has a way of making people not want to deal with their problems. A parent doesn't need to be robbed of help because they feel guilty. During times of teen rebellion, a parent needs to feel guilt-free to receive help from God and others He has surrounded them with. Parents don't need to hide in shame. Guilt has a way of making one not seek wisdom from others and many times will make them hide from God because they don't feel worthy as a parent.

## **2. Pray unceasingly, then pray some more.**

It's one of the shortest verses in the Bible but probably one of the most powerful verses. I Thess. 5:17 says, "Pray continually". If you were not a praying person before your child became rebellious, I can guarantee you'll become one if you want to help your child get out of the throngs of rebellion. Think back to our prodigal son story. It doesn't say in scripture that the father in the story was a praying man, but I believe you have to believe he was. James 5:16 says, "*The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*" I believe the father in the prodigal son's story was a righteous man, so I assumed he was a praying man. What do you think he prayed for? I think he prayed for things any parent who has a rebellious child will pray. He probably prayed for wisdom in trying to figure out what to do with his rebellious son and how to handle his request for wanting to leave the home. I imagine he prayed for patience as he saw his son walking down the road heading off to sow his wild oats. He probably prayed for strength during the lonely days, weeks, months, and possibly years wondering if his son would ever come back. I'm sure he prayed for grace when he finally saw his son coming up the road back home, wanting to make sure he handled his return properly. Do you think he prayed for God's love when he had to deal with the upset older son? Look at all the things God can show us through his scripture when it comes to praying for our rebelling teens.

I agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Tim Kimmel when he says, "when praying for our rebellious children we need to ask God to start with us." Real change in our children starts with a change in our attitude and how we are willing to put ourselves under his authority. Once we ask Him to help us know His perspective of the situation and how we need to respond to our teen we'll then need to ask for perseverance to stay strong and faithful throughout the ordeal. We need to make sure we ask God to use friends and other influences in our teens' life to help bring them back to the fold. Many a parent cries out to God, "Lord, do whatever it takes to bring my child's heart back to yours." Then if you are blessed by God to see your teen come to their senses be sure and give Him blessings and praise for His answer as well as asking for wisdom in walking forward with your teen.

## **3. Don't be afraid to allow natural consequences to teach your teen hard lessons.**

Many times, we can lecture our teen until we turn blue in the face. We can counsel them lovingly and even have others encourage them to change to no avail. What usually has to happen to many rebellious teens is to allow the natural consequences of their choices to discipline them in ways we could never. It's also one of the hardest things for a parent to do because we want to intervene so we can protect them from pain. When we intervene, we often will do nothing but delay the inevitable or enable the teen to continue to live in their defiant ways. Just like in the prodigal son story the father let the son experience the consequences of his choices so too must we as parents. It's no fun and can be gut-wrenching but it must be done. Teens get kicked off

teams, will lose friends, get in trouble with teachers or the law, find themselves in very painful physical or emotional situations because of the consequences of their choices, and desire to live in sin. Some of you may ask when do you allow natural consequences to take over the disciplining of your teen? It boils down to where reasoning with your teen, setting down rules and restrictions no longer work, and more drastic steps need to be taken. The teen will think that they finally have the freedom to be who they want to be and do what they want to do but, in the end, due to their rebellious immature nature, they will experience some rough road ahead.

#### 4. Watch your words and guard your tone

In the book of James, there are some very stern warnings about how you should speak. Listen to these words and let them soak in for a minute before you read on. *“Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. (James 3:5-10)*

Wow, what hard counsel! Our tongues are very hard to tame and in the heat of emotion and disappointment, we can cause a mess with our rebellious teen. Even though our teen may be rebellious and disrespectful we still have to watch how we say things to them. Rebellious teens have a way of storing up things that we negatively say to them and use those things we have said against us in the future. A fire, like the verse above says, is very hard to control and to keep from spreading all kinds of hurt. James says its *“restless evil, full of deadly poison.”* I’m sure many of you parents have experienced the deadly poison your rebellious teen has lashed out toward you with words that deeply wounded you. It’s critical that we not participate in the same vein, even though it will be hard not to speak back in kind.

You have the power to change the course of history with your rebellious teen by the way you speak to them. Proverbs 18:21 says, *“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”* You can choose in the heat of the moment to either offer life to your child or death in your relationship, depending on how you use your tongue. Imagine if the father in our prodigal son story would have said the following when his rebellious son returned. *“Son, I’m glad you’re home but you wouldn’t have had to go through what you went through if you would have only listened to me in the first place. I told you before you left that leaving was a bad idea and look at you now. You can hardly hold up your clothes you’re so skinny from probably not being able to eat. Am I right?”* I think if he would have used his tongue in that way then he would have offered death in their relationship as the Proverb mentioned. Instead, he elevated the status of his son by telling everyone that he was going to have a celebration for his son who was once dead but now is alive.

The book of Proverbs has a wealth of wisdom on how we can break through to our rebellious teen by how we speak.

*"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Prov. 15:1*

*"Through patience, a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone."  
Prov. 25:15*

*"The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."  
Prov. 12:18*

Look at some of the practical principles we can learn from these three verses.

- a. Speaking under control can defuse a situation while disrespectfully raising your voice guarantees an argument.
- b. Even someone hard to reach can have their mind changed through a loving patient way while continually speaking gently. If done consistently then the heart of a rebellious teen though hard as a bone can be broken.
- c. The quickest way to kill whatever relationship you want with your rebellious teen is to use your words recklessly. The quickest way to have them open to you for the opportunity to heal broken hearts is to use your tongue wisely.

#### **5. Very important, once they truly repent, accept them, forgive them, and restore them**

First, let's keep in mind what is going on here. If you have a true rebellious child who wants to be accepted back into the home per se, let's be brutally honest. More than likely they have hurt you deeply and it's very hard for you to forget what they have done. They probably hurt their siblings to the point that their brothers and sisters could care less if they come back or not. Families can only take on so much pain before they say enough is enough. But a teen who is a prodigal son who has come to their senses and truly repents of their sin deserves the opportunity to experience grace and mercy just as we do when we rebel against God. You must determine how sincere your rebellious teen is about getting their life back together. The story in Luke 15 shows us clearly how the father recognized quickly that the son was serious about changing their rebellious ways. He recognized that the son was broken and showing humility by coming home rather than having the father go after him. He saw the son had learned hard lessons and had come to his senses by being willing to only come back as a servant and not a son. When a parent recognizes their rebellious teen is no longer showing signs of pride and arrogance but humility, they must at least give that child a chance to explain where they are in their life. Once a remorseful heart is evident it would be great if the parent could restore the teen as the father did in this story. Remember, there is nothing in the story about the son regaining any inheritance. The son only wants to come back to the home, but he will not see one dime of the inheritance he squandered. We get the impression that the son has learned that love and acceptance are more important than money and independence.

Most people are not aware that Jesus gave the story of the prodigal son a new twist compared to the Hebrew version that had been around for quite some time. According to Ray Vandedrlawn, from the Introduction to *Echoes of His Presence* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1998), there was quite a

different Rabbi version circulating. It went something like this: "The prodigal son returns to his home and asks to see his father. (In this version the father doesn't run to the son, instead, the son has to come to the father). Once ushered into his father's presence, he repents of his sin, acknowledges that he is not worthy to be part of the family, and asks if he can be hired as a servant. The father says, "NO! Are you out of your mind?" He explains to the boy how much he has hurt the family, how he has used his siblings, and how he has shamed the reputation of the family. He also refuses to give him a job in the family business. He shows his son the door and bans him from looking up his family in the future. In the end, the people applaud the father not only for his "tough love" toward his undeserving son but also for protecting the integrity of the family standards." (Taken from page 78 of Tim Kimmel's "Why Christian Kids Rebel).

Can you imagine how shocked people must have been when they heard a father in the prodigal son story that was full of grace and mercy? He gave a whole different perspective of how to help a rebellious child back into the home. I can only imagine how many who heard that story cried deep inside thinking if only they could experience that for themselves. Forgiveness and restoration are so important to the teen that has walked away from the home either emotionally or physically. It's no different than what we did to God when we walked or walk away from Him and rebel against His intentions for our lives. Once true repentance comes to our heart and we come to the Father, He offers grace and mercy; though we still have to oftentimes pay the price of our choices.

## Final Thought:

I want to leave you with one final thought as I know some of you struggle with a very difficult teen in your home and you wonder what you could do differently and better. I believe God is telling you it's okay to not be perfect. I believe He is saying, "Hey, I'm AM perfect and look at all my rebellious children." You must realize, understand, and accept that even though you could do things better, the real rub comes from your teen's lack of responsibility for their sinful behavior. You cannot change their sinful behavior by force. You can only encourage them to change by being the example we have shared in this chapter. Your teen could be trying to grow up too quickly and through their immature behavior shows signs of a rebellious nature. Remember to love them by taking responsibility for how you respond to their rebellion. Don't let their immaturity drag you down to frustration. Instead, offer patience to see if your loving discipline will move them toward maturity. If they run your red lights and refuse to stop then you need to ask God for the ability to offer grace and mercy when they least expect it. Grace and mercy have a way of jolting a teen back to repentance and an understanding that they have to slow down and accept the consequences of their behavior.

If however, your child continues to down the path of a DUI with consistent rebellion that refuses to submit over some time to God's and your authority then take the steps necessary to start the healing process. Don't beat yourself up with guilt. Allowing guilt to be prevalent in your life will only limit your ability to take responsibility for your share of the blame if there is any on your part. If so, do what's Biblical and go to your teen and confess and forget. Then pray and pray

some more that God will give you the wisdom to know how to handle this rebellion. Pray that He will bring both mentors across your path and the path of your teen. Pray for patience as your child leaves your home emotionally and physically. Pray for the ability to watch your word and guard your tone as you look for ways to heal the situation. Pray for strength to hold up under difficult situations that could take years to heal. Pray for wisdom and the ability to love those within the home affected the most by this rebellion, including the siblings.

Don't be afraid to allow your teen to suffer, even needlessly, through natural consequences due to their poor choices. It will be hard but sometimes it's necessary. Finally, should by God's grace and mercy they repent and come home, be sure to accept them back warts and all and restore them to their rightful place within the home.