

# Building Strong Family Ties

## What is a family for?

There are many forces at work today to change the family scene.

There are a lot of voices saying that the family is finished, it has no future in today's society; the family is out of date, a thing of the past.

**Let me assure you that the family is *not* finished – it is simply fragile, so it needs strengthening.**

What does the Christian Bible say about the family?

**Genesis 2:18, 24** [Good News Bible] *“Then the Lord God said, it is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him...” “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife.”*

Notice two things:-

- 1 The family was God's idea**, it is His institution, so it will always be around because it is the building block of strong stable society.
- 2 God, who made Adam, put him in a perfect environment with everything he wanted, but God still said, “it is not good for man to be alone.”**

**This is true whether we are married or single.**

People were made to need people.

**We need relationships, deep relationships and caring people in our lives.**

## What is the family for?

**The family is a shelter for storms**

**Proverbs 14:26** [Living Bible] *“Reverence for God gives a man deep strength; his children have a place of refuge and security.”*

**Three kinds of storm we face in life**

- a) Change** – we all go through changes in life.
- b) Failure** – you have probably realised by now that we are not always the winner in life.

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** [Living Bible] *“Two can accomplish more than twice as much as one. For the results can be much better. If one falls, the other pulls him up, but if a man falls when he is alone, he's in trouble.”*

- c) Rejection** – we all hate to be rejected, ridiculed, criticised.

The goal of most games we play is to get “home”, for when we do, we are safe: **homes were meant for safety.**

# What should be our response to this?

Demonstrate our love.

We love our family but this has to be demonstrated in a way they can recognise.

- a) **Hear** – listen to their hurts with total eye to eye contact.
- b) **Hug** – give the therapy of touch.
- c) **Help** – guide them to a solution to their hurt.

That is why divorce is so painful; because the place of acceptance becomes this place of rejection.

The shelter from the storm becomes the centre of the storm.

## A family is a learning centre for life

This is a multi way learning zone: children from parents, but also parents from children, husbands from wives, wives from husbands.

**Psalm 144:12** [Good News Bible] *“May our sons in their youth be like plants that grow up strong [the family is often likened to a garden in the Bible because it is a place to grow people] may our daughters be like stately pillars which adorn the corners of a palace.”*

**Ephesians 6:4** [Living Bible] *“And now a word to you parents. Don’t keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord Himself approves, with suggestions and Godly advice.”*

**Ephesians 6:4** [NIV] *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”*

**Luke 2:52** [NIV] *“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.”*

Note Jesus grew in four ways: a) wisdom – intellectual growth; b) stature – physical growth; c) favour with God – spiritual growth; d) favour with man – social growth.

This should be the goal for our family, that they grow in these four ways.

### Three things we don’t leave our family without gaining

- a) **Relationships** – Home is where we learn to work out our relationship problems in an atmosphere of love.
- b) **Character** – much of what we are as adults we picked up from our parents. **Character is caught not taught.**
- c) **Values** – what is important. We learn our attitude to work, sex, time, money, play, other people and God at home.

**Isaiah 38:19** [Living Bible] *“One generation makes known your [God’s] faithfulness to the next.”*

**Life is like a relay race** and each of us is passing the baton onto the next generation having received it from a previous generation.

## What then are we passing on to our children?

If we are not teaching our family about God we are making a major mistake that has eternal implications.

The Bible tells us that if we are a parent, teaching values to our children is part of our job description.

**Deuteronomy 6:6-7** [Living Bible] *“And you must think constantly about these commandments I am giving you today. **You must teach them to your children** and talk about them when you are at home or out for a walk; at bedtime and the first thing in the morning.”*

You know why we are not doing this anymore?

Because instead we watch TV.

Who or what then is really influencing the values of our children, who will then pass those values on to their children?

## What is our response to this?

We need to ask *‘what values am I intentionally or unintentionally teaching my children?’*

Then ask *‘is this what I really want them to learn? What heritage do I want them to have?’*

## The family is also a place to play

I like this one. The family is a format for fun, a haven for happiness.

The family is a place to enjoy life.

This is missing in a lot of homes.

**Ecclesiastes 9:9** [NIV] *“Enjoy life with your wife whom you love...”* That’s one of my favourite verses in the Bible; that’s one command I’m obeying wholeheartedly.

**Proverbs 5:18** [Good News Bible] *“So be happy with your wife and find your joy with the girl you married”* [hopefully that is the same person].

You may have heard the saying *“the family that prays together stays together.”*

Well, it is also true *“the family that plays together stays together.”*

**Lighten up. Have fun with your children.**

If we don’t have fun with our children we shouldn’t be surprised that when they grow up they don’t care to come back and visit very often.

Children want to be where the fun is.

## What should be our response?

We should demonstrate our love, evaluate our values, but also celebrate our families.

**Psalm 127:3-5** [Living Bible] *“Children are a gift from God; they are His reward, children born to a young man are like sharp arrows. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.”*

Children are a gift from God and we should be increasingly aware that our children are only with us for a short season: they are **not** going to be around for very long.

Make this short time last, make it count.

There is always plenty of time to have other projects.

## **The family is also a launch-pad for service**

We may not have thought of our family as a servicing team, but serving others as a family team will bring more unity and joy to our family than anything else we can do.

Have projects to serve others in need as a family team.

**1 Corinthians 16:15** [Living Bible] *“Stephanas and his family, they were first to become Christians in Greece and they are spending their lives helping and serving Christians everywhere.”*

**What a great goal. What a great example of Christian love!**

A family working together for a single project binds that family close together.

The ultimate basis for harmony and joy in the family is the next verses...

**Acts 16:32-34** [Good News Bible] *“Then they [Paul and Silas] preached the Word of God to him and to all the others in his house. At that very hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds and he and his family were baptised at once. Then he took Paul and Silas up into his house and gave them some food to eat. He and his family were filled with joy, because they now believed in God.”*

This is the “bottom line” when the whole family believes in God and serves God by serving others it is a unifying and joy filled factor.

**Romans 12:13** [Living Bible] *“When God’s children are in need, you be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or if they need lodging for the night.”*

**Hospitality can be a family team project.**

We have been talking about the ideal family, but there are no perfect families.

Why?

Because there are no perfect people.

## **What about single people?**

Not married, widowed or separated

- a) **Do not ignore the relatives we do have.** Brothers, sisters, mothers or fathers who are alive at this point of your life.
- b) **Realise that as a believer you become part of a spiritual family.**

**Galatians 6:10** [Good News Bible] *“So then, as often as we have the chance, we should be good to everyone, and especially to those who belong to **our family in the faith.**”*

The church is just a larger family, a larger expression of what should be happening in our smaller personal family.

**Therefore commit yourself to a local family church where the practical truth of God’s Word is taught.**

Remember then:-

The Church is to be a shelter from storms.

The Church is to be a learning centre for life.

The Church is to be a place where you have fun and fellowship.

The Church is to be a launch-pad for service.

**So if you do not have a natural family near you make a church your family.**

## **How to restore harmony in your home**

### **Conflict seems an inevitable part of life**

**Mark 3:25** [Living Bible] *“A house filled with strife and division destroys itself.”*

**Mark 3:25** [Good News Bible] *“If a family divides itself into groups which fight each other that family will fall apart.”*

**Conflict is inevitable because every person is unique.**

We have different desires, tastes, interests, talents, abilities, temperaments and so on, therefore we are going to clash.

We look at life differently.

### **The reasons for conflict**

The Bible is very blunt on this giving only one reason for conflict.

**James 4:1-2** [NIV] *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it.”*

Competing desires; I want what I want, and you want what you want.

### **How do we react to conflict?**

Normally one of five ways.

- a) **My way** – I assert my will until you give in.
- b) **No way** – I withdraw; I back away from the conflict; I ignore the problems.
- c) **Your way** – I give in, roll over and play dead.

- d) **Half way** – We compromise, I give in a little and you give in a little.
- e) **Our way** – Is when we work out mutual goals together, **where we not only care about the problem but also the relationship, and about each other.**

## **Now I want to look at the Bible and see eight steps on how to resolve a conflict “our way”.**

You will find this very practical, and something you can share with others.

### **Become a Christian; a believer**

This is the starting point.

**You cannot have peace with other people until you have peace with God.**

When I’m in conflict with God then that conflict spills out in my relationship with other people.

**Ephesians 2:16** [Living Bible] *“As parts of the same body, our anger against each other has disappeared, for both of us have been reconciled to God and so the feud ended at last at the cross.”*

What is Paul saying?

When Jesus Christ in spirit is living in me and in you, then Jesus is **not** going to fight with Jesus.

### **Talk to God about the conflict**

Before you talk to the person you are upset with talk to God about the conflict; admit it to Him.

You may end up solving the problem there and then.

**James 4:2** [Good News Bible] *“You strongly desire things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it.”*

**Many conflicts start when we expect other people to meet needs that God Himself expects to meet.**

You will never find a human being who will meet all of your needs – **they can’t.**

**When we look for other people to meet all our needs then the outcome will be conflict, and anger when they don’t.**

You are asking someone else to be God and that is unfair on them.

### **Analyse the problem**

Ask yourself, ‘*how much of this is my fault?*’ before you start to accuse and blame others, check your own self out. ‘*Am I the cause of the problem?*’ ‘*Do I have a blind spot?*’

**Matthew 7:3** [Good News Bible] *“Why, then, do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, and pay no attention to the log in your own eye? Take the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

**There is no such thing as a one person problem.**

**1 John 1:8** [Living Bible] *“If we say that we have no sin [cause offence – by missing the goal aimed for], we are only fooling ourselves, and refusing to accept the truth.”*

None of us are perfect, we all do and say dumb things at times, opening our mouths before we put our mind into gear, acting before we consider the consequences of our action.

## Arrange a peace conference

A sit down face-to-face to confront the issues.

A conference where we can deal with what is the problem.

**Conflict is seldom resolved accidentally, it is resolved intentionally.**

**Matthew 5:23-24** [Good News Bible] *“If you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.”*

Don't ignore conflicts.

We cannot worship Our Maker with unresolved conflicts with our brothers.

**1 Peter 3:7** [Amplified Bible] *“... you **married men** should live considerately with your **wives**, with an intelligent recognition of the marriage relationship, honouring the woman as physically the weaker, but **realising that you are joint heirs** of the grace of life, God's unmerited favour, **in order that your prayers may not be hindered and cut off**, otherwise you cannot pray effectively.”*

If we are not living peacefully with our mates, our prayers will be ineffective.

If we are not receiving answers to our prayers, unresolved conflict with our partners could be the reason.

## Practical hints for this peace conference

**a) Choose the right time** – timing is everything in conflict resolving.

Find a time that is best for both of us, that's the best time to deal with an issue, when both are comfortable and relaxed.

**b) Chose the right place** – a neutral place away from the children and without any chance of interruptions.

**c) Each of you pray before you have this meeting** – so you come to this meeting in a spirit of reconciliation, and a spirit of forgiveness ready to attack the problem – not each other.

## Establish ground rules prior to the fight

### Rules for fighting in marriage

#### Never compare

*“Why can't you be like so and so?”*

#### Never condemn

Don't use words like *“you always”* or *“you never”* or *“you ought to”*.

**Don't start statements with "you"** for that is a judgemental statement.

**Start statements with "I".** *"I need this from you" – "I feel this"*.

Such statements are much less threatening and condemning.

### **Never command**

Don't try to end an argument by force *"I demand that you do what I say"*.

### **Never challenge**

Don't make threats *"just try that and see what happens"*.

**The three most common threats in marriage are:** a) sex; b) money; c) threat of divorce. Rule these out as deadly weapons.

**Never condescend** - treat the other person as less than they really are.

Don't belittle your mate; don't put them down; don't ridicule them for their feelings or logic.

**Never contradict** – interrupt in the middle of a sentence.

Wait your turn to talk when you are in a conflict.

Treat each other with consideration.

**Never confuse** – when you bring up unrelated issues in the middle of the argument.

What we are saying in a *"nut shell"* is **attack the issue not the person.**

**Proverbs 11:29** [Living Bible] *"The fool who provokes his family to anger and resentment will finally have nothing worthwhile left."*

The Bible is saying it is dumb to intentionally push people's *"hot buttons"* to make them mad, so establish some ground rules on how to fight fair.

**Switch your focus** – move the attention away from self to the other person, from selfishness to unselfishness.

**Philippians 2:4-5** [NIV] *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."*

What was the attitude of Jesus Christ?

An attitude of **not** looking after number one, but looking after other people.

**Anger is the end result of looking only to our own needs, our hurts, our expectations that haven't been met.**

If you want a magical sentence that clears up so many conflicts, often right there and then, it is this sentence: *"I'm sorry, I was only thinking of myself."*

### **Ask for advice**

If we are not making any progress after having several peace conferences, **one is not normally enough**, we need to seek qualified help and advice.

It takes courage to get counselling; it takes real love for your family and maturity.

**Proverbs 15:12** [Good News Bible] *“Conceited people do not like to be corrected; they never ask for advice from those who are wiser.”*

**Proverbs 15:32** [Good News Bible] *“If you refuse to learn, you are hurting yourself. **If you accept correction, you will become wiser.**”*

**Don't give up** – don't walk out; stick with it.

Conflict resolution is never easy – it's tough.

## **There are three stages of conflict resolution.**

- a) **Recognition** – we have a problem!
- b) **Reaction** – this problem is worse than I thought it was.  
This is the painful stage when emotions come out and voices may be raised.
- c) **Resolution** – what are we going to do about this situation?

**It is more rewarding to resolve a conflict than to dissolve a relationship.**

As a church pastor I am dedicated to building strong relationships and I plead with you to make a commitment right now to do whatever it takes to resolve any conflicts you may have and **not** walk away from them.

**Galatians 6:9** [Living Bible] *“**And let us not get tired of doing what is right, for after a while we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't get discouraged and give up.**”*

I know that this message has been painful for some of you, but I feel God has led you to read this.

These eight steps will work for you and resolve any conflict you may be in if you only faithfully and prayerfully apply them.

**But you must start at step one and become a believer**, to open your life to Jesus Christ and offer Him the good and the bad in your life, the ugly, the past, the present and the future, the hurts and the fears, the resentment and the guilt.

Offer your life to Christ and let Him drain the pain, insecurity, anger and frustration from your life, and fill it with peace and security.

**Ephesians 2:16** [Living Bible] *“**As parts of the same body, our anger against each other has disappeared for both of us have been reconciled to God. And so the feud ended at last at the cross.**”*

**Accepting Jesus Christ as your Saviour is the only logical starting place to resolve any conflicts in your life.**

## **How to raise children without raising your blood pressure**

There are also many confusing voices in society today offering many different ideas of how we should raise our children and being a good parent.

**Where then do we go for help? Who is our model?**

**Matthew 5:48** [Living Bible] *“You are to be perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect.”* God is the model parent.

Let me give you the simple secret to successful parenting, how you can be a great parent. Here’s the simple secret.

**Treat your children the same way that God your Heavenly Father treats you.**

That’s it!

If I am to be like my Heavenly Father:

## **I must understand my children**

This is the *“bottom line”*. I must understand what makes my children *“tick”*.

**Psalm 103:13-14** [NIV] *“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”*

What is the number one complaint our children have about us as their parents?

*“They don’t understand me!”*

**Proverbs 24:3** [Good News Bible] *“Homes are built on the foundation of wisdom and understanding.”*

**Every child is unique; there are no two children with the same personality, temperament or gifts.**

Then we should not try to fit them all in the same mould.

Everyone is different.

You are one in ten billion: we are all unique and we need to understand that.

**Proverbs 22:6** [NIV] *“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”*

**What then does this verse mean?**

The key word is *“way”*.

This word means manner, temperament, personality, the course of life, mode of action.

Each child is personally fitted to go in a certain direction.

**Proverbs 22:6** [Amplified Bible] *“Train up a child in keeping with his individual gift or bent...”*

**We need to recognise the potential in our children**, the ability they have, and encourage them in the direction that they are naturally gifted to go with their talents and abilities.

**We shouldn’t, as parents, try to force our children in a mould that their natural abilities and interests don’t fit.**

**What is the proof of our understanding our children?**

**Proverbs 14:29** [NIV] *“A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.”*

The proof you understand your children is if you treat them patiently.

## **I must accept my children**

Really accept them as they are.

**Psalms 145:8** [NIV] *“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.”*

God accepts us just the way we are: warts, weaknesses and all.

Then patiently works with us to help us fulfil our designed potential.

**Psalms 127:3** [Good News Bible] *“Children are a gift from the Lord, they are a real blessing.”*

**God chose the children we were going to have, and gave them as a gift to be in our family.**

**Romans 15:7** [Good News Bible] *“Accept one another ... as Christ [God] has accepted you.”*

**Accept our children as a specially prepared and thought through gift from God, and not try to make them like ourselves.**

Trying to mould our children to our personality will eventually say to our children, *‘if I am going to be accepted by my parents then I cannot be myself’*.

This is tragic and heartbreaking for that child.

## **I must discipline my children**

Children are saying *‘why did you have to come to this point?’*

**Hebrews 12:6** [NIV] *“The Lord disciplines those whom he loves...”*

It is a sign of God’s love when we are disciplined by God.

**If I don’t discipline my children it proves two things:**

**a) That I don’t really love them.**

**Proverbs 13:24** [Living Bible] *“If you refuse to discipline your son, it proves you don’t love him.”*

If we allow our children to get away with almost everything it proves we don’t love them.

**b) That we are assisting with their destruction.**

**Proverbs 19:18** [Good News Bible] *“Discipline your children while they are young enough to learn. If you don’t you are helping them to destroy themselves.”*

That is a really strong statement.

It is very important that we understand the difference between discipline and punishment.

**God never punishes His children, He disciplines them.**

**All the punishment for every wrong we have ever done or will ever do has been taken by Jesus Christ on the cross.**

This is why the Bible tells us that when we accept Jesus Christ as our saviour that we no longer stand condemned, needful or some punishment for our wrong doings [sins].

**Romans 8:1** [Good News Bible] *“There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus.”*

**Romans 8:1** [Living Bible] *“So there is now no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus.”*

**Romans 8:1** [Amplified Bible] *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation, no adjudging guilty or wrong, for those who are in Christ Jesus who live not after the dictates of the flesh, but after the dictates of the Holy Spirit.”*

**John 3:18** [Amplified Bible] *“He who believes in Him [ Jesus Christ], who clings to, trusts in, relies on Him, is not judged. He who trusts in Him never comes up for judgement; for Him there is no rejection, no condemnation; he incurs no damnation.”*

**What is the difference between punishment and discipline?**

**Punishment.**

- a) **Purpose** is to inflict penalty for what we have done;
- b) **Focus** is to look back at past;
- c) **Attitude** is to get back at – we punish out of anger;
- d) **Result** of punishment is fear, guilt and more returned anger.

**Discipline.**

- a) **Purpose** is to promote growth – I want to help you, make you better so you will enjoy life more;
- b) **Focus** is on the future;
- c) **Attitude** behind discipline is love – I want you to make it in this world;
- d) **Result** of discipline is security, because our children know that there are parameters within which they are safe.

**How do we know what we are doing is discipline and not punishment?**

Simple, look at the child’s reaction and ask yourself, *‘is the child afraid of me?’*

**1 John 4:18** [Good News Bible] *“There is no fear in love, perfect love drives out all fear, because fear has to do with punishment.”*

**How then do we discipline?**

**I want to give you three words that describe discipline in the Bible.**

- a) **Discipline calmly.** In other words, **not to relieve our frustration**, it is all too easy to do it with that motive.

**Proverbs 29:11** [NIV] *“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”*

**Ephesians 6:4** [Living Bible] *“And now a word to you parents. Don’t keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the **loving discipline** the Lord Himself approves, with suggestions and Godly advice.”*

**b) Discipline quickly.** The Bible tells us not to delay course correction.

**Proverbs 13:24** [Living Bible] *“... for if you love him you will **be prompt to punish him.**”*

**Ecclesiastes 8:11** [NIV] *“When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.”*

**c) Discipline sparingly** - Not all the time. It is more effective if we don’t do it all of the time.

**Colossians 3:21** [Living Bible] *“**Fathers, don’t scold your children so much that they become discouraged and quit trying.**”*

**A lot of discipline can be avoided if we plan ahead.**

**Always discipline children strongly for being rebellious, this helps them to mature.**

## **Express love for our children**

Three ways to express our love **that they understand:**

**a) Through affection,** touching, hugs, kisses, pats on the back, rubbing the back.

**Psalms 145:9** [Living Bible] *“He is good to everyone and His compassion is intertwined with everything He does.”*

**b) Through affirmation** – the way that we talk to our children.

**Psalms 145:14** [NIV] *“The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.”*

**We shape our children by the way we talk to them.**

Do we talk down to them or talk to them as people?

**c) Through attention.** This is probably the most effective way to show children that you love them. Make them feel special (which they are).

**Psalms 145:18** [NIV] *“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”*

There are too many absentee fathers today who are not there for their children – even when they live in the same house.

Nowadays parents find it much easier to give things to their children than time, but **it is only time that brings out character.**

## **Be consistent with our children**

**Psalms 145:17** [Living Bible] *“The Lord is fair in everything He does...”*

You may ask why haven’t I mentioned teaching in this list?

We are teaching 24 hours a day, by our example, so we need to be consistent.

**Proverbs 20:7** [Living Bible] *“It is a wonderful heritage to have an honest father.”*

### **How do we display honesty?**

- a) **By not implying perfection.** Admit it when we do things wrong; be willing to admit it to our children by saying sometimes, *“Sorry, I was wrong.”*
- b) **By keeping our promises.**

**Psalms 145:13** [Good News Bible] *“... the Lord is faithful to all His promises ...”*

The number one cause of bitterness in families is broken promises.

Little minds cannot distinguish the difference between a “yes” and a “maybe”; “maybe” is translated into expectations; we are going to do it not next year but today.

Be very careful about the promises we make to our children.

If we are not trustworthy what does it say to that little child about God as a Heavenly Father?

That child comes to church and hears about a Heavenly Father and says *“if God is like my natural father, then no thanks God ! !”*

What was the last thing that God says in the Old Testament before Jesus comes on the scene in the New Testament?

Remember, it is always the last comment that a teacher makes that is uppermost on his mind.

**Malachi 4:6** [Living Bible] *“His [ Jesus Christ] preaching will bring fathers and children together again, to be of one mind and heart, for they will know that if they do not repent [change direction] I will come and utterly destroy their land [their inheritance].”*

No community, no nation is stronger than the families that make them.

## **Remember:**

**Treat our children as our Heavenly Father treats us as His children.**

- 1 Seek to **understand** our children.
- 2 **Accept** our children.
- 3 **Discipline** not punish our children.
- 4 **Express love** for our children in a way they can understand.
- 5 **Be consistent** with our children.

**These are an inheritance we can leave our children that is beyond anything that money can buy.**

## **Hope for Hurting Parents**

Why is it that so often children of good living, godly parents go astray and not follow in the footsteps of their parents?

**There are three stages in a typical child’s rebellion.**

## Stage One – Rebellion

**Luke 15:11-12** [Living Bible] *“A man and two sons, when the younger told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die! His father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.”*

**Luke 15:13** [Living Bible] *“A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and took a trip to a distant land, and there wasted all his money on parties and prostitutes.”*

What do you do when your child is beyond the age when you can physically control them and they leave home to “do their own thing”?

**You do three things –**

**1) You let them go.**

Notice the father didn't chase him when he left home; he released him.

**From the birth of our child we should be preparing our children to leave home.**

**2) You let them make their own mistakes.**

The father realised that some things we only learn by going through personal pain.

**Proverbs 20:30** [Good News Bible] *“Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.”*

**3) You let them reap the consequences of their choices.**

**Luke 15:14** [Living Bible] *“About the time his money was gone a great famine swept over the land and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. The boy became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the swine looked good to him, and no-one gave him anything.”*

**There is always a price tag on rebellion.**

**Galatians 6:7-8** [Living Bible] *“Don't be misled, remember that you cannot ignore God and get away with it: **a man will always reap just the kind of crop he sows!** If he sows to please his own wrong desires, he will be planting seeds of evil and he will surely reap a harvest of spiritual decay and death; but if he plants the good things of the Spirit, he will reap the everlasting life which the Holy Spirit gives him.”*

**The fact is that all of us make mistakes as parents bringing up our children but we are not the only influence in our children's lives.**

**Parent responsibility ends where parent control ends.**

**Proverbs 20:11** [Living Bible] *“The character of even a child can be known by the way he acts...”*

**Ezekiel 14:20** [Good News Bible] *“Even if Noah, Daniel and Job lived there, as surely as I, the Sovereign Lord, am the Living God, they would **not be able to save even their own children.** Their goodness would only save their own lives.”*

**Even if we are perfect parents our children could still rebel.**

God is the perfect parent and He still has rebellious children.

**You should not feel guilty over something you cannot control.**

**Because the father did not intervene his son went to stage two.**

## **Stage Two – Re-evaluation, and regret**

**Luke 15:17** [Living Bible] *“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired men have food enough and to spare, and I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired hand.’”*

**What do we do while we wait for this stage to be completed?**

- a) **We pray.** Our children may be out of our control but they are never out of God’s control.
- b) **Knowing this we commit them to God’s care.** For our children are God’s, we only had them on loan for a short period.
- c) **We wait patiently.** Sometimes this stage takes a long time to complete. Some of us are now in this waiting period, but don’t short circuit God’s natural discipline.

**All of this is about a teenager who is in rebellion not a young child that is still needing our day-to-day care.**

Because the father in this story did it right (he represents the God the perfect father), the child reached stage three.

## **Stage Three – The Return**

How we handle the return of our child is critical.

**Luke 15:20-** [Living Bible] *“So he returned home to his father, and while he was still a long distance away his father saw him coming and was filled with loving pity, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”*

**Three things we should do when our child returns.**

- a) **Love them faithfully** – The door must always be open to our home and our heart, to enable reconciliation.
- b) **Accept them unconditionally.**

Note this father didn’t set any conditions on his acceptance.

You may ask *“how can I accept such a child without lowering my own standards?”*

You don’t have to, when you understand the difference between acceptance and approval.

**You can accept someone without approving of their lifestyle.**

Jesus accepted everyone, even the *“sinners”* as the religious people called them, when He was on earth.

**Notice the son’s confession.**

**Luke 15:21** [Living Bible] *“His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and you, and am not worthy of being called your son.’”*

Do we make it easy for our children to confess when they have made a mistake?

**c) Forgive them completely.**

**Luke 15:22-2** [Living Bible] *“But the father said to the slaves, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him, and a ring [signet ring] for his finger, and shoes! And kill the calf we have in the fattening pen. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has returned to life. He was lost and is found.’ So the party began.”*

God our Heavenly Father doesn't “*rub it in*” – He “ *rubs it out*”.

**The father gave him what he really needed:** love, acceptance and a second chance.

**This is very important.** When the child returned the father gave the son responsibility right away; the father didn't put him on trial for a few months to see if he really had changed.

We must not let such a son become dependent on us again, they have to grow up, matured through personal experience.

**The story of the prodigal son shows exactly how God deals with our rebellion as a child of His, who need to grow up into a son.**

We also need to come to God and admit to Him we have made some dumb choices in our lives and are reaping the results of them and we need to have a second chance and start again and do it “*His way*” not “*our way*”.

**How will God respond to such a confession?** The same way as the father in this story did, with love, open arms, reconciliation, and a second chance.

This is the “*good news*” the “*gospel message*” we all need to hear, understand and accept.

**God is the God of a second chance.** He wants to take our lives and mould them into something beautiful out of the total mess we offer to Him.

**We were put on this earth to relate and react to each other** and everything you or I choose to do is going to have an impact for good or evil on others.

**I have responsibility to you, not for you but to you. You have responsibilities to me and we all have responsibilities to one another.**

This present society is constantly crying out about “*rights*” and ignoring “*responsibilities*” and look where it is heading.

**God points us towards “responsibilities” and that is the only way to lasting peace and happiness** – responsibilities one towards another.

**It doesn't matter where we have been as parents or children, what is important is where we are now going to head in the future.**

**Remember God is a God of a second chance**, and as the father in the story He is waiting for us parents and children to see the foolishness of our ways, confess them to Him and return home to Him and be accepted into the family and loved by Him as our Heavenly Father.

**The choice is yours – but don't delay.**