

COVENANT KEEPERS

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Parenting Teenagers

For many families the teenage years can be filled with turmoil. The battle that goes on between teens and their parents can at times be extremely intense and discouraging. Both parent and teen think, *What is happening to us? Why is there so much conflict? Will our relationship survive these final years together?* Your priority as a parent must be to grow in your understanding of what your teen is thinking, and how you can keep the conflicts to a minimum. As you consider this difficult topic, I encourage you to begin by reading the story of the "Prodigal Son." This story relates the same turmoil and conflict you are experiencing in your family right now (Luke 15:10-20). Jesus reveals in this story that He understands the dynamic between parents and young adults, and that His love is what will get you through this time.

Characteristics of a teenager

One of the most important places to begin is to understand what is going on inside your teen's heart and mind. When your son or daughter is eleven or twelve years old you may begin to see the process. He or she begins to intellectually reason and think through life independently from you as a parent. They verbalize their own opinion more and more. Why? This is the natural maturing process of moving from a child into adulthood. This is why the Prodigal Son came to his father with his own conclusions of what he believed he needed to do (Luke 15:12). Do you want your child at eighteen to still be running to you for all their decisions? Of course not! This would reveal a very immature person. But, how does this transformation to maturity take place? It requires a process where your teenager begins to make more and more decisions on their own.

Consequently, your teen is striving for independence from you in all areas of his or her life (Luke 15:12-13). This is a natural maturing process at work, whereby they will find their own identity

as a person. Your teen is realizing he or she is growing up, and this process is what is driving the battle for independence between you and them.

It is also natural for your teen to begin questioning the basis and reality of his or her faith. They are wondering, *Does God really exist? Does Christ truly live in me? Do I really believe what my parents believe?* These questions within bring more confusion in their hearts. They are not content to believe simply because they are told to believe. They want to form their own beliefs based on their own reasoning.

Teens are also not as teachable as they were in their earlier years. This again is because of their push for independence and their desire to think for themselves. This adds further struggle to the relationship between parent and teen.

Most teenagers are very impatient and self-willed. Remember the request of the prodigal son: *"Give me my portion of the goods"* (Luke 15:12-13). The implication in the text is – I want it now!

Teens are also maturing physically which brings on the attraction for the opposite sex and sexual desires. These thoughts and desires are very new for them and they struggle with how to deal with them.

When you put these physical, emotional, and spiritual changes all together, you have a boiling pot of potentially explosive tension and conflict in your relationship. How you handle your teen and how your teen responds to your input will determine how much conflict you will experience.

What teens want from parents

Teen do not want to be treated as just "kids" anymore. They want to be considered young adults. They realize that they are not children anymore, but do you understand this fact? You must speak to them respectfully and treat them as you would any other person in your family. You cannot talk down to them. You also must gradually give them more and more privileges as they show themselves to be

responsible to handle the freedoms you give them.



Are you building a relationship with your teen?

This is why they "try on" a certain behavior one day, and another the next. They are attempting to determine what works for them and what does not. They will even "try on" sinful behavior, just to see if it is really as bad as their parents have told them that it is. This is what the prodigal son did (Luke 15:13). You must verbally assure your teens that life and all its decisions are now in their control, and that you know they are going to do as they please when they are not with you. Just remind them that when they make decisions, they also have to live with the consequences of these decisions. This statement will communicate that you understand their independence and freedom to choose, but puts the responsibility and consequences upon their shoulders. Let them also know you are ready to give your counsel if they want it. But that is their decision. This also shows your respect for them.

In addition, your teens need your love, forgiveness, and your support when they fail (Luke 15:20-24). They are going to make poor decisions. It will happen! At that moment remember your own bad decisions as a teenager. Even as adults we still make terrible decisions at times. Don't you need support and encouragement when you fail? You don't

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

need condemnation, and neither does your teen. In fact, if they do not find support from you, they will go looking for it in the world. Remember, Jesus even acknowledged that the world loves its own (John 15:19). I assure you, the world will love and accept your teen if you do not. They are looking for a loving and concerned individual, not a dictator. Remember, Jesus never went into a rage and dictated to people. Responding correctly to your teen is difficult at times, because they bounce back and forth from desiring to be independent, to questioning if they really know what they should do, to then back again to listening to you. I used to always end my encouragements with "But, it is your decision."

In addition, your teens do not want long lectures. Teens hate this! Give short encouragements and ideas for them to consider, while encouraging them to make up their own minds over the issue. I call this the thirty second lecture! Why is speaking to them in this manner so important? If you go on and on telling your son or daughter what they should or should not do, you will see their eyes glaze over and they will start looking off into space. They are shutting you out! They will see this long lecture as you treating them like a child.

How do you give a thirty second lecture? Reserve your comments to two to three sentences, and say it just once. Always end with this statement, "*But, it is up to you. You have to make the decision because it is your life. You are not a child anymore and you will have to live with the consequences of your decisions. I will be praying for you.*" When Jesus taught publically He would have lengthy instructions, but when He ministered privately to individuals He was usually very brief (Mark 5:18-20; Mark 5:30-34; John 8:1-11; Luke 12:13-15).

Why do teenagers rebel?

Teenagers are sinners, and they sometimes handle their confusion and desire for independence in the wrong way. Parents are sinners too. We forget what it was like to be a teenager. When parents do not understand what is happening to their teen, they usually take every attempt at independence personally, and the battle only intensifies. Therefore, if either the parent or the teen are not walking in the Spirit there will be conflict (Gal. 5:16). Both parent and teen need to walk in the Spirit!

Errors to avoid in disciplining teenagers

1. Do you resort to spanking instead of reasoning and persuasion? As your children age, your spanking days are over. You need to turn to reason and persuasion. God says, "*Come now, let us reason together says the Lord*" (Is. 1:18). Teach your children to reason through situations so that they can come to a correct decision.
2. Do you use anger, yelling, ultimatums, or manipulation to get your teen to respond? These behaviors communicate a lack of love and respect. The Apostle James said, "*For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*" (James 1:20).
3. Do you withdraw your love, friendship, or communication to force your teen to change? This is what David did with Absalom and it backfired into rebellion (2 Sam. 13:37-39).
4. Do you refuse to acknowledge your own faults when you have been too extreme, spoken disrespectfully, or have exploded in anger? Your teens know what sin looks like even when it is your sin toward them. If you don't acknowledge your sin when you fail, how can you expect them to confess their sin (Matt. 7:5)?

Methods to use in disciplining

The obvious place to begin any discipline is with a simple verbal reproof. You must reason with them concerning what is morally right and wrong (Prov. 17:10; Prov. 15:32; Is. 1:18). If this is not successful, then move to restricting privileges from activities or rewards they would ordinarily receive. God told His people that, "*Your iniquities have turned these things away, And your sins have withheld good from you*" (Jer. 5:25). Discipline will also require you to withhold good. In addition, allow the natural consequences of their actions to be their discipline. Example: If they are given detention for tardiness at school or for some misbehavior, do not give them more discipline at home (Luke 15:11-21). If they lose their job for poor work habits or tardiness and can't afford something they want to do, don't give them the money. If they have stolen or broken someone's things implement restitution (Luke 19:8).

Teaching and devotions

There are many different ways to continue teaching your teens into adulthood. Here are several:

1. Find devotional books that are age appropriate at your Bible bookstore. Read through this material at the breakfast or dinner table while everyone else eats.
2. Share something from your personal time alone with God. What did He speak to you? Share this with your family at your breakfast or dinner table.
3. Read through a chapter of Proverbs from the Living Bible at breakfast or dinner. Before you read, ask everyone to share a verse from that Proverb that was meaningful to them when you are finished.
4. Use every spontaneous question as an opportunity to explain God's Word and His ways. These questions come when you are sitting in your house, walking by the way, or driving in your car (Deut. 6:7).
5. Be an example in your own devotions, church attendance, and your attitude toward God and others at home. Your example is powerful instruction to your teens. They are watching what you do in comparison with what you say (1 Tim. 4:12).

How should you deal with a rebellious teenager?

There are some teens that are simply rebellious no matter what you do or how much you love them. Why is this? They are sinners and have a free choice to listen and follow like any of us do. In these circumstances you must keep a cool head and attempt to avoid angry confrontations that will only drive you further apart. Refuse to get into a shouting match with your teen (Prov. 17:14; Prov. 20:3)! Remember, the wrath of man will never work the righteousness of God (James 1:20). You cannot force them to love God. However, if you yield to your anger you are going to do and say things that you will regret. Do not say to them in anger, "I can hardly wait until you're gone" or compare them with a sibling that is more compliant. Listen to their concerns. Keep the communication lines open as much as possible so you will not become isolated from each other (James 1:19).

Remember, do not give long lectures. It is better to give short encouragements or reproofs (thirty second lecture). If you do not keep these conversations short, your teens think you are trying to control them.

Remember, they see your lectures as being treated as a child.

If there have been conflicts between you and your teen, be sure to confess any fault you have had in them. Ask for their forgiveness. This brings about reconciliation and also causes them to respect you (James 5:16; Matt. 7:5). If you refuse to ask their forgiveness, these unreconciled issues will drive you further apart, and only gives your teen an excuse for further rebellion. Unreconciled issues are a major cause of continued conflict.

Remember, your teens are testing the boundaries. Be sure that you have clearly established and communicated your limits to them. Re-evaluate on a regular basis to see if you are being too strict, too permissive, or too over-protective. Parents who are over-protective need to realize they are being governed by fear. Being over-protective will hinder your teen's growth to maturity. Sometimes you have to let them fail. It's like not letting a baby walk when they are ready to take those first steps because you are afraid they will fall.

Try to say "yes" to their requests as often as possible when things are going well between you. This takes some of the edge off the times you must say no. Therefore, if the issue is minor, don't sweat the small stuff!

Allow them to make as many decisions as possible over their own lives. Pressure from you will only cause them to rebel (Rom. 14:5). Allow them to choose their own styles and tastes in clothes and hobbies when these are not in conflict with God's Word.

Stay as involved with your teens as much as you can. Spend time with them on a one-on-one basis. This communicates that you consider them important and special. This also fosters your time together around relationship, not rules. Remember that rules without a relationship will always equal rebellion. To disciple, influence, or lead others you must be with them. This was the plan of Jesus (Mark 1:17).

Praise their wise and mature decisions. This communicates your acknowledgment of their independence and growing maturity (Ps. 72:15).

When your teens threaten to rebel and say they are going to do whatever they please, call their bluff. Explain to them that this is not a mature attitude, and you can be just as tough in your resolve. With the rebellious God can be just as stubborn as

anyone (Luke 20:8; John 13:8; Ps. 18:25-26) The word *shrewd* in Psalm 18:26 means to oppose with wisdom. Resist and oppose the rebellion in every way you can, without getting into a physical confrontation. Explain to them that the longer they rebel the more restriction they will get. If you do not call their bluff over rebellion, ultimately, you will lose complete control. However, you also need to stop during these times to re-evaluate where or if you need to release a little more freedom to them. When things calm down, confirm your love to them. Put your arm around them and hug them. Demonstrate your love (1 John 3:18).

Do not compare your teenagers with other siblings. "Why can't you be more like your brother or sister?" This only drives a teen to more anger and rebellion. Comparison is never wise (2 Cor. 10:12). Children always think parents love one child more than another. This statement only confirms their suspicions and will cause additional sibling rivalry and jealousy. Remember, the greatest mistake Jacob made in his parenting was showing favoritism to Joseph (Gen. 37).

Treat your teen with respect. Speak respectfully, knock before entering their room, and do not embarrass them in front of others (Matt. 7:12).

Ask God for the love, patience, and endurance you need to get through this period in their lives. It will pass! You want your relationship to survive these years. Remember, anyone can love an obedient teenager who is demonstrating love and respect. Jesus said, "I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you... For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same" (Matt. 5:44-46). The test is to love the rebellious or prodigal teen, and to continue to speak kindly and respectfully to them, which enables the relationship to survive. You can be firm and loving at the same time. All of us were rebellious once and our heavenly Father patiently loved and reached out to us. You must do the same.

Will teens rebel even after you have loved, trained, and disciplined them correctly?

Yes they will! The best example of this fact is the children of Israel. God's people were loved, nurtured, and disciplined correctly and they still rebelled. Notice

what God said to them; "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me" (Is. 1:2). Their rebellion was the result of their self-will and their sinful nature. This is also why some teens from godly homes rebel.

But, doesn't God give a guarantee in Prov. 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it?" This verse must be taken in the context of the rest of the Scripture which also teaches the free will of man. Your children are not robots. God will not force them to obey His will; they must choose to follow Christ themselves. The entire book of Proverbs encourages young people to heed the instruction of their father and to choose what is right. Scripture also acknowledges that some will refuse to do what is right (Prov. 10:1; 8; 17; Prov. 13:1; Prov. 17:21). Note in these verses that the responsibility is placed on the children, not the parents. Proverbs 22:6 has been greatly misinterpreted even as another passage in the New Testament, Acts 16:31. The promise to the jailer was not that if he believed, his whole family would automatically also be saved. The promise was that his whole family *could be saved* in the same manner that he was, through faith. Peter taught the same: "The promise is to you and your children, and to all who are afar off" (Acts 2:38-39).

The lives of the kings of Israel also reveal a multitudes of examples of the individual choice of children contrary to their parent's lifestyle. It is interesting that the children of many ungodly kings chose to follow the Lord, and many of the children of the godly kings chose to reject Him. The ungodly King Amon had a godly son, King Josiah (2 Chron. 33:21-34:2). The ungodly King Ahaz had a godly son, King Hezekiah (2 Chron. 28:1-4; 29:1-2). The opposite is also true. The godly King Jotham produced the ungodly King Ahaz (2 Chron. 27:1-28:4). Godly King Hezekiah brought forth the ungodly Manasseh (2 Chron. 29-33). However, some godly kings also raised godly sons (Uzziah & Jotham) (2 Chron. 26-27). Also, ungodly kings raised ungodly sons (Jehoram & Ahaziah) (2 Chron. 21-22). What do all these examples teach you? It reveals that the example, training, and influence of the parent is important, but in the end, the children must choose for themselves whether or not they will follow the Lord. Scripture clearly teaches this concept of personal decision-making on the part of children as in Ezekiel 18:4-

14. As you read this passage note that God assumes that the godly will have ungodly children. The bottom line is this; do your best, and then commit your children to the Lord. Teach them and pray for them continually, and trust God to work in their lives as He has in yours.

Why does Jesus tell the story of the Prodigal Son, if this does not happen? The story reveals a rebellious child was a very common occurrence in the time of Jesus. This rebellious son grew up in a home with a loving father. Jesus told us stories that we all could relate to and understand.

How do you let your teens go?

Recognize that launching your teen into mature adulthood is the biblical goal of your parenting. You must let them go. It's the oldest principle in the book. Children are meant to *leave* the home, your control, and ultimately *be joined* to their spouse (Gen. 2:24). Your job is to prepare them to leave. If you refuse to allow them to mature and ultimately leave your home, you are fighting against God's plan.

Verbalize to your teens your intention to gradually give them more and more freedom and responsibility as they grow older each year. You must repeat this conversation with them over and over, especially when they are chomping at the bit for more freedom. This at least satisfies them intellectually that they will not be "a child" under your control forever. Then set practical goals for them to take on each year. Ask them to show you that they have the maturity to handle the increased freedom. Have them wash their own clothes, take care of the family car, get their own checking account. Ask them to regularly check in with you for accountability.

Recognize that you are not called to be the lord of their lives, God is. They have not been given to you so they could live out your own unfulfilled desires or expectations. Do not set goals for them that you have determined, and then try to manipulate them to fulfill these desires. You must help them discern their gifts, talents, and abilities. Help your teens to see what they are good at, and encourage them in that direction. Enable them to see where they can make a difference in this world (1 Tim. 4:14-15).

Be supportive of their decisions, remembering it is their life. If they make bad choices, this is part of the learning process. The Prodigal Son had to learn for himself that he had made the wrong

decision. He also realized by himself that he was unsatisfied. No one came and told him these things (Luke 15:14-17). When he came to the understanding of what he had done, he then made the correct decision to return home (Luke 15:18-19). This is what the maturing process entails.

When they ask for advice, always give it with the postscript, "*But, you must decide*" (Rom. 14:5). Whether or not they take the advice is their choice. Remind them they have to live with their choices, so encourage them to choose wisely. If your teen wants you to make the decision for them, refuse. Explain to them that if you did decide for them, you would only be hindering them.

Give them the decision-making tools and then step back and pray for them. Explain to them how you make decisions using the wisdom of the Word of God.

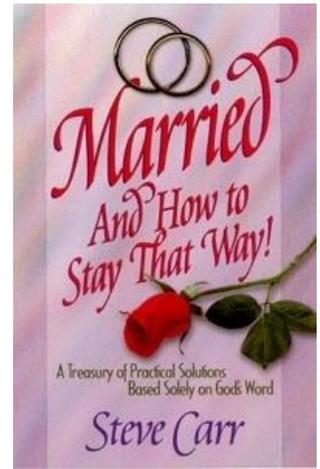
Do not rescue them from the consequences of their bad decisions. Again, the father did not say to the Prodigal Son, "Here, I will replace your lost inheritance." The natural consequences are one of God's best tools to teach and mature your teenager. Do not take this tool out of God's hand. Remember how the natural consequences of losing all, worked on the Prodigal Son and started the process of his return (Luke 15:14).

Be loving and gracious when your teenager or young adult comes home after a failure of any kind. Do not say, "*I told you so!*" or "*I hope you learned your lesson!*" Make sure love is the first thing they sense. You can discuss the issues later. Concentrate on what they have learned from the failure, rather than condemning them for their foolish decisions (Luke 6:37; Eph. 4:32).

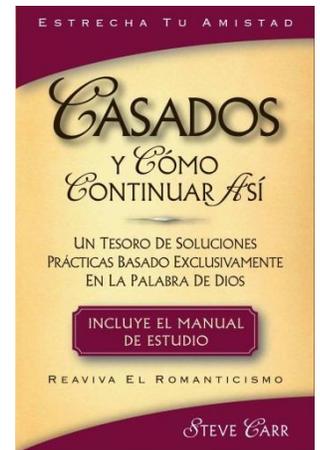
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