

## BIBLICAL PARENTING STUDY EIGHT

### When the Fun Stops for Parents

*1 Samuel 15:22–23; Luke 15:11–24*

*The rebel curls his lip toward his parents and says, “I’m going my own way!”  
You can’t reason with him or counsel him; you’ve got to cut him loose. God will  
be faithful.*

—Charles R. Swindoll

**A**s we learned in the last study, parents are to guide their children like archers aim an arrow. While archers aim an arrow toward the center of a target, parents aim their children toward the center of God’s design for them. And just as an archer releases an arrow so also parents must let their children go as they become more capable and responsible.

Independence is a healthy process. The first steps of the toddler naturally lead to the first driving lesson of the teenager and, eventually, the first apartment of the young adult. We celebrate our children’s growing self-sufficiency and independence as we launch them into the world.

But what if the arrow veers off God’s good course? What if the child’s natural urge toward independence becomes a fist-clenched demand for control and godless freedom? How should parents respond when the sounds of laughter in the home fade into the sobs of grief when a wayward child falls into self-destructive sin? Thankfully, God gives parents wise counsel for relating to prodigals, which we’ll examine in this study.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## **When the Fun Stops for Parents**

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### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

For parents, few heartaches are as deep as the sorrow over a prodigal son or daughter. Read the following lines from Psalm 55 as an invitation to draw near to our sympathetic God whose heart also breaks over His rebellious children.

*Morning, noon, and night  
I cry out in my distress,  
and the LORD hears my voice. . . .  
Give your burdens to the LORD,  
and he will take care of you.  
He will not permit the godly to slip and fall. (Psalm 55:17, 22)*

What parental burdens can you give to the Lord today? Express these to Him now as you open your heart to receive encouragement from His Word.



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

In this study, we'll examine God's response to rebels as a model for parents. No one else has more experience in parenting rebellious children than God, whose list of rebels spans history's timeline. One prominent name on God's list is Saul.



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### **Observation: A Study of Rebellion**

Read the story of his disobedience in *1 Samuel 15:1–21*. In the space below, write down what God clearly told him to do (*1 Samuel 15:1–3*). Then summarize what Saul did (*15:7–9*), along with God’s and Samuel’s responses (*15:10–11*) and Saul’s rationalization when Samuel confronted him (*15:12–21*).

Samuel’s next words penetrated Saul’s excuses like darts aimed directly at Saul’s rebellious spirit.

*“What is more pleasing to the LORD:  
your burnt offerings and sacrifices  
or your obedience to his voice?  
Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice,  
and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.  
Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft,  
and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols.  
So because you have rejected the command of the LORD,  
he has rejected you as king.” (15:22–23)*

Linger over these verses for a few moments and use the fivefold observation plan in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. Look for words that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, and unlike.<sup>1</sup>

Which words are *emphasized*? Saul has been so dull of hearing that God must shout in his ear, “Listen!” What follows this attention-getter is likely the central point of the passage. What point is God driving home?



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Which words are *repeated*? Several words are repeated here. What are they?

Which words are *related*? Some words form a connection to each other. Look, for example, at the question, “What is more pleasing to the Lord?” The question is related to its answer, which is what?

Which words are *alike* and *unlike*? Comparisons and contrasts clarify meaning. Note the synonyms in the passage, as well as the words that are opposite. What do these synonyms and antonyms tell you about the meaning of these words?

Dig deep enough into the craggy soil of Saul’s disobedience, witchcraft, and idolatry, and your excavation will reveal the common source of all rebellion: *opposition to God’s authority*. And why do rebels oppose God? The answer is as old as the first rebellious act: to make self the final authority and to worship self as god (*Genesis 3:1–6*).



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### **Interpretation: A Story of Rebellion**

Is there hope for the rebel? Yes! And healing for the rebel's family. Jesus told the story of a family wounded by a son's rebellion and restored by a father's love. Let's read Jesus' story, "The Prodigal Son," with an eye toward finding help for families with wayward children.

As with all His stories, Jesus placed this gem of a story in a cultural setting to enhance its meaning. A helpful resource to gain insight into the customs of Jesus' day is *Insight's Handbook of New Testament Backgrounds: Key Customs from Each Book*.

### **The Ethnic and Domestic Scene**

Read *Luke 15:11–12*. Let's discover the meaning of the son's request as he brazenly demands from his father, "I want my share of your estate now *before you die*" (Luke 15:12, emphasis added). Can you feel the jab to the father's gut? This same boy who once sat on his father's knee and so lovingly hugged his father's neck now is a wild stallion chomping at the bit and bucking off his relationship. He says in so many words, "I wish you were *dead* so I can have my inheritance."

Put yourself in the father's shoes and describe his heartache as well as the cultural stigma he must endure because of the disrespect of his son.



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Notice how the father's love absorbs the son's hurtful words. He doesn't lash back, cling, or lecture; instead, he calmly gives the boy what he asks and lets him go. What principle can you draw from the father's example about how to relate to your wayward child?

### **The Lifestyle and Consequences**

Read *Luke 15:13–16*. By bolting to Gentile country, this Jewish boy shows contempt toward his father, family, and his own heritage. When his money runs out and famine strips the countryside as bare as his bank account, the once unbridled youth enslaves himself to a Gentile farmer and takes company with pigs to survive. He is alone and ashamed, rejected and unclean by Jewish standards, and starving.

Put yourself in the shoes of Jesus' listeners, and describe how they might have responded to this part of the story. Would they have felt compassion toward the young man? Or judged him? Perhaps *Proverbs 13:15, 18* would have come to mind—and rightly so. How might a person use these verses to condemn the son?



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### **The Realization and Decision**

Read *Luke 15:17–19*. The opening line in verse 17 is the turning point of the story, “But when he came to his senses.” Like a thick wall, a stubborn will does not crumble easily. For the son, it took an onslaught of hardship to break through his defenses before he finally surrendered his pride. If you have a wayward child, what might it take to get through to him or her, and how can you sustain yourself as you wait for the turning point?

### **The Return and Restoration**

Read *Luke 15:20–24*. What meaning did Jesus intend for His Jewish audience as He put on full display the loving heart of the prodigal’s father?

Here is the point of His story and the purpose of Jesus’ mission: to display *His* Father’s love—a love that doesn’t condemn us but runs to embrace us as lost sinners still in the filth and stench of our condition. God’s love is equally as shocking in its extravagance as the love of the prodigal’s father. Just as the father covers his son’s shame with a robe of honor and restores his identity with the family signet ring so also does our Father cover and restore us. In this moment of grace, prodigals drink their fill of true love and, once satisfied, never wander again. Oh, for this to be true of our wayward one!



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### **Correlation: The Father's Love Displayed through Christ**

As you read the following verses, write down how the Father loves you through Christ and restores you as His own: *Matthew 9:35–36* (the same Greek word for *compassion* in Luke 15:20 is used here to describe Jesus); *Galatians 3:26–27; 4:3–7; Colossians 1:21–22*.

Our heavenly Father has provided a way home for us when we and our wayward children wander. We praise Him for His great love and grace! Make this prayer your own:

*How we can easily identify with this boy, and how great it is to witness the grace of a father to welcome him back. And not only to forgive him but to restore him to a place of significance and dignity in the home and family. I pray for all those today who at this very moment find themselves distant from You. And I ask that You would draw them to Yourself as only You can do. —Chuck Swindoll*





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### **Application: Responding to the Rebel in Our Family**

To wrap up this study, Chuck offers four principles for parents, based on the father's response to his wayward son's rebellion. Reflect on the principles, and then use the provided space to write down your plan for dealing with the rebel under your roof.

- *No rebel can be allowed to ruin a home.* How is the stress from the rebel's presence in the home robbing peace and harming other family members?
- *If the rebellion necessitates a separation, go there.* Draw a line and stick to it. Follow through. Don't support a foolish child's folly.
- *Let go!* Resist the urge to rescue again and again.
- *When true repentance occurs, let grace abound.* Forgive without reservation or hesitation!

As worries for your children crowd your mind, release them to the Lord: "Give your burdens to the LORD, / and he will take care of you" (Psalm 55:22). We read that promise at the beginning of our study. It's a promise we can count on today and every day as we pray for our wayward children and wait for them to return to their loving Father.

### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, bring hope to every broken heart in homes fractured by rebellion. Give peace to replace anxiety, patience to support weakness, and love to cover shame. Help us wait. And please, Lord, by Your grace and mercy, bring the wayward ones home. In the name of Jesus, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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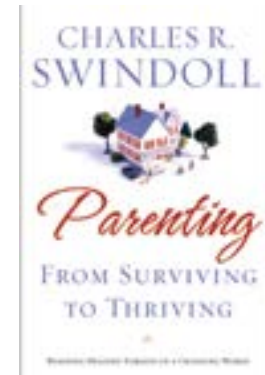
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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