



LET'S BEGIN HERE

We learned in the last study how parents are to guide their children like archers aim an arrow. Archers aim their arrows at the center of the target; parents aim their children at the center of God's design for them.

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 lead to the first driving lesson of the teenager and, eventually, to the first apartment of the young adult. Celebrate your child's growing self-sufficiency and independence!

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 having a wayward child?



DIGGING DEEPER

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. His list of rebels stretches as long as history's timeline, all the way back to Adam and Eve.

A Study of Rebellion

One prominent name on God's list is Saul. 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).

Quotable

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



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When the Fun Stops for Parents

1 Samuel 15:22–23; Luke 15:11–24

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Samuel's next words penetrate 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 worshipping idols.
So because you have rejected the command of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king.” (1 Samuel 15:22–23 NLT)

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.

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?

Which words are *repeated*?

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?



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Dig deep enough into the craggy soil of 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).

A Story of Rebellion and Repentance

Is there hope for the rebel? Yes! And also, healing for the rebel's family. Jesus tells 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.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

As with all His stories, Jesus mounts 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](#). Click this link for more information and to purchase your copy.

The Ethnic and Domestic Scene

Read Luke 15:11–12. The younger son brazenly demands from his father, “I want my share of your estate now *before you die*” (Luke 15:12 NLT, 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 his son's disrespect.

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 for and lets him go. What do you learn from the father's example when relating with your wayward child?



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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. Read and reflect.

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. Jesus puts the Father's loving heart on full display—which is the point of His story and the purpose of His mission. Jesus came to display *His* Father's love—a love that disregards its own dignity to run and embrace us, 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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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.



Bring It Home

To wrap up the study, here are Chuck Swindoll's 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.
- *When true repentance occurs, let grace abound.* Forgive without reservation or hesitation!



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 one home. In the name of Jesus, amen.



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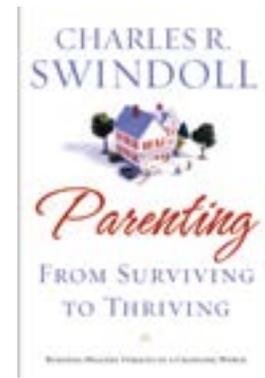
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2017 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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