

# Going After the Prodigal Sons and Daughters

By Doug Hamilton

Last week we covered parts one and two of three lessons on “Saving Our Children”. The first lesson discussed ten steps to produce unfaithful children. There are many things that we as parents can do that affect our children’s faith down the road. These issues ranged from how we give to how we live, from our attendance to regular participation in the church family, from our perception of the leadership to the fellowship.

In the second lesson, Brian Dowler poured over 35 years of history of the youth group in Camp Hill. What he exposed in the research more than confirmed the pattern of what was discussed in the first lesson. How we raise our children usually, but not always determines their level of faithfulness down the road.

There should be nothing greater to Christians than to see a saving faith in the lives of their children and nothing more painful than seeing their children take a path of destruction and condemnation. This is why it is best to deal with the problem before it becomes a problem. I came across a great quote this week in regards to this issue:

**"IT IS BETTER TO BUILD CHILDREN THAN TO REPAIR MEN"**

When children are still young and in our care, that is the time to lay the foundation of faith, for when they are older, the repair of the soul can be much more difficult. In lessons one and two, we focused on the “building” of children, but this week we will cover the “repair” of men.

## The Reality for Some

There are many that presently cannot rejoice in the salvation of their children, for they are not in a saved relationship with Jesus Christ. For any number of circumstances their children are not going to be in heaven on that Great Day of Judgment. Over the years I have known many god-fearing, faithful Christians that have come to me and expressed their sadness over a renegade son or daughter. Anyone with any compassion would have to agree with Paul in *Rom 9:3* “*For I could wish that I myself were accursed, {separated} from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*”. Simply wishing for something like the SALVATION for a son or daughter is not a PLAN and is not enough by itself, but a starting point to which “REPAIR”.

## Analyze their Future

Do you realize how awful HELL will be?

- Yes
- No

Jesus said in *Mark 9:43* “*And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire...*” He said in *Matt 18:9* “*And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell.*” Just the thought of plucking out the eye or cutting off the hand of my child is enough to turn my stomach. Yet Jesus said that symbolically it is far better than burning in hell. It is here that *Rev 20:10* states “*...they will be tormented*

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*day and night forever and ever.*” That is bad and I would never want something like that for a loved-one or even an enemy.

Do you realize how great HEAVEN will be?

- Yes
- No

Jesus said in *John 14:2-3* "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, {there} you may be also. He wants us to be with Him forever. Rev 21:4 "...and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be {any} death; there shall no longer be {any} mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." We will have a new body that is imperishable and incorruptible. We will not grow or be tempted in any way (1 Cor 15:52-54). Just the thought of our children having the very best that God has to offer should make us excited at the thought of our children being there.

Are you willing to sacrifice everything for the soul of your son or daughter?

- Yes
- No

Jesus said in *Matt 13:45-46* "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it. If we understand the awfulness of HELL and the awesomeness of heaven, then the seriousness of our children ending up in the latter will be more than apparent. We must analyze their future in order to properly pursue it.

### Analyze their “Unbelief”

When were they exposed to the Christian faith?

- From birth
- As a young child
- As a teenager
- After they left the home

*Prov 22:6* Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it. If the child had a deep exposure to the Christian faith and a good foundation was laid, then the task may be easier in the end.

Did they ever convert?

- Yes (They heard, understood, repented and obeyed the gospel.)
- No (They never entered the saving covenant with Jesus.)

Did they have a functioning faith?

- Yes (They actively participated in Christian living, service and evangelism)
- No (They really did not experience Christian.)

*Luke 8:12-15* "And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 "And those on the rocky {soil are} those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no {firm} root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall

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*away. 14 "And the } seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of {this} life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15 "And the {seed} in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*

There are many different ways to unfaithfulness. Some never converted; some fall away from temptation; some will simply die a slow death of non-fruit bearing. If you do not analyze the situation, your medicine for the cure may not be as effective.

### Analyze the parents

Did you as parents generally model a saving faith?

- Yes (Regular attendance, involvement in activities, a loving relationship, scripturally-based faith, giving, supportive of the leadership, evangelistic and outreaching)
- No (Addiction, anger, poor attendance, greedy, argumentative, violent, infidelity, undisciplined, neglectful, laziness, etc.)

Paul stated in *Eph 6:4* *And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* As hard as it may be to accept, we might have damaged the future of our children's perception of God and salvation. If that is the case, denial will only result in failure in the mission to fix the problem.

Do you as parents presently live faithfully?

- Yes
- No

Jesus said in *Matt 5:16* *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* This is absolutely crucial, for if we are not living for Jesus 100%, our children will not even begin to take us seriously in our attempts to lead them to Jesus or back to Jesus.

### Analyze the church family

Does the church family demonstrate care, candor and concern?

- Yes (They are concerned and want to help you in you quest to have faithful children).
- No (They do not care for the soul of your son or daughter.)

Does the church family live faithfully?

- Yes (They preach the truth and practice what they preach.)
- No (They display bad morals, slack discipline and/or contempt for the truth.)

Jesus stated to the Ephesian church family in *Rev 2:5* *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent."* There are cases where sons and daughters have fallen away do to the unfaithfulness of others in the church. Typically the church family is quite functional as a whole.

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Are you willing to enlist the church family in this struggle?

- Yes (I am willing to share my struggle in the cause of the gospel Philippians 4:3.)
- No (I am afraid that my son or daughter might not listen or might get angry.)

We are to pray for one another, confess to one another, love one another, serve one another, encourage one another, correct one another and defend one another. We in the church are a family and your earthly family is our concern as well. We will weep with you and rejoice with you.

### Analyze the Gospel

Do you understand how the gospel of Jesus Christ saves?

- Yes (It is trusting in the historical fact of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, knowing that fully committing to Him involves a life-long and life-changing commitment.)
- No (Are you willing to be educated in this way?)

Paul said in Rom 1:16 that the gospel message "*is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...*" He said in *1 Cor 15:3-4* "*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...*" If we are not willing to engage the gospel into the spiritual dilemma for our children, then how will they convert? *Rom 10:17* *So faith {comes} from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.* By understanding more clearly the gospel, we will be better prepared to share it.

### With all the analysis in mind, the following plan is put forth.

#### 1) Pray for their salvation.

This is often the first and the only strategy the ailing parent has. Prayer is so powerful, but never meant to be the only part of a plan. Pray without ceasing for your son or daughter to find God and salvation.

#### 2) Confess to God.

Even though the children will be held accountable for their own soul, the parents of the child often have played a contributing factor. If we as parents could look God in the eye, would we tell him that we were perfect examples to our children? I think not. If there has been major errors made that have contributed to the unbelieving ways of our children, then come clean with God. He will be glad to hear that you are in agreement with Him and His blessings will abound.

#### 3) Repent to your son or daughter.

It is not enough to go to God, but you must also make it right with your child. Go to them and tell them how much you love them. Let them know that you want them in heaven more than anything else in the world. Confess to them your failings that might have weakened their hope in God. Let them see humility toward God. It is okay to say that you are sorry for blowing it at such a tender time of their life. You know better now and will do all you can to make it right.

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### 4) Enlist the church in your struggles.

Stop fighting this battle alone and start enlisting the other church members in the struggle. Don't worry that they might see a weakened side of you. Don't be concerned that they will not care, for they do care. I am here to tell you that we weep over the idea of anyone in our family suffering with the thought of a child going to hell. We were never meant to fight through life alone, but to go into coliseum together, arm and arm, hand and hand, heart to heart.

### 5) Rejoice in your own salvation.

If you have Jesus Christ as your Master, Lord and Savior, rejoice. To borrow the words of Paul in *Phil 4:4-5 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your forbearing {spirit} be known to all men. The Lord is near.* Know that the Lord has not left you, but is right there with you; HE IS NEAR!!! Comfort the painful thoughts that you are suffering with the joy and anticipation of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. Rejoice in your own salvation, for it has a way of taking the edge off the pain. Rejoice in the Lord, for it is contagious. Rejoice in the Lord, for the one whom you love might be the one whom will catch the next conversion. REJOICE IN THE LORD!

We don't know what will happen in the future for our sons and daughters, but we can leave here today knowing with a winning plan. Pray for their souls, confess to God, repent to them for any fault, enlist the church in the struggle and rejoice in your own salvation.

**"IT IS BETTER TO BUILD CHILDREN THAN TO REPAIR MEN", but both are AWESOME when working together.**

**Go out and win your sons and daughters to the kingdom of God!**