

## ***For The Love Of The Family Ministries***

**Missionaries to America's Forgotten Mission Field, the Family**

**What Do I Do With A Child Outside My Home Not Living For God?**

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**I have given this article quite a bit of consideration and prayer, and it is my prayer that it will be a help to many. My wife, Kim and I have had the opportunity to have For The Love Of The Family meetings in many different churches. Some churches are smaller churches and some are larger churches. However, one theme that comes up in every meeting is, "Pastor, I do not understand why my child who grew up in this church, went to this Christian school, or was home schooled etc. does not want to live for God?" They are living a horrible sinful and in many cases a wicked life. They are doing damage to themselves and others. The parent is distraught and many times is weeping as to what went wrong. Then other people will come up and say, "I now understand what happened, why did I not hear this before now?"**

**Well, I understand those comments. The parent is at a loss as to what they can do now. Quite frankly, when the child is out of the home as an adult, you don't have nearly as much influence in their life as you did when they were home. This matter has to be approached in a different manner. It will require some real effort on the part of the parents.**

**Let me see if I can explain what has happened and then give the Bible help we need. You may feel there is no hope at all for the child over 18 and out of your home. Let me be clear, it will really all come down to where you are as a parent as it has come down like that as well, when the child was in the home. It has been my experience in more than 30 years of ministry and counseling that almost all of the time if there is a rebellious older child problem it really is almost always brought back to a parenting problem. Listen carefully; the real challenge here is for you as a parent to find where you have failed and to make the changes needed in order to help your relationship with the rebellious adult child outside your home now.**

**The goal of every Christian parent in life should not be to rear a “good kid” or have students who are excelling academically, are great athletes, and so forth. The goal is to equip our children, these young saints “for the work of the ministry” (Ephesians 4:12, Mark 10:45). Our goal as Christian parents is to train them to stay on the road of usefulness to God, Proverbs 22:6. If, in the end, they are unusable to Christ, they are not handling life spiritually and wisely, both they and we have failed.**

**Many parents are in total denial that they did anything wrong. It is not my purpose to lay a guilt trip on anyone, I am trying to help those who are devastated over their rebellious child. There needs to be an understanding of what needs to be done. Let me be clear, the Bible teaches very plainly a parent is to get the heart of their child, keep the heart of their child, and not lose the heart of their child, Proverbs 23:26, Malachi 4:6, Deuteronomy 5:29, Deuteronomy 30:2, Proverbs 4:23, Proverbs 14:14 etc. The Bible gives more than 800 verses that deals with the heart. The heart is a serious matter with God. If the child is in rebellion to the things of God you as a parent did not get their heart to begin with or you lost their heart somewhere along the way. So, that is the issue. The question is where, how, and why did you lose their heart? Then how do I go about to correct that?**

**Proverbs 15:31-33, 16:5, 18, and 25, “The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.”**

**Why are so many children from Christian homes growing up to not be useful to the Saviour? Nominal Christians rear their children to be nominal Christians or a lot worse. Most of the time it is a lot worse. One of the lies that we have been fed today by the liberal crowd, which is a lie of the devil, is that God is interested in a sloppy, mushy type of love that just loves everything. Nothing is right or nothing is wrong, it is all gray area. We condone a rebellious attitude from our children and even folks in our churches because God says to love them. Love and rebellion are opposites. Folks, discipline is a strong form of love. However, many times the parents have disciplined their children in anger or in a dictatorial manner, with out regard or understanding about the child's heart.**

**On the other side, many parents because of not wanting to lose their children have compromised with their children's rebellion, sinful attitude, and life style. Therefore, whether the parent realizes it or not they have lost their children anyway and do not even know it. They do this on the basis of love. Satan does a good job here, a deceptive job.**

**Some parents have just lived up to the teaching they have had and most of the time that teaching is very poor. They have been told that discipline is important, yet when they get in a tight spot, they do not act upon what the Word of God says, but they act on how they feel. Emotions and feelings will lie to you. I told my daughters that if they marry a man who is lead by his feelings and emotions he will lead them into sin every time. Your child will test you here. Most generally they will do what you let them do.**

**Let me give you an example here. You have a conviction against rock music from God's Word. You know Biblically it is wrong and rock music is anti-God. Rock music is worldly, sexually suggestive, appeals to the flesh and has ungodly words. The beat of rock music is designed to arouse emotions and other desires. Your daughter or son comes in and says, Billy is having a party or get together and he or she wants to go. Many times this is with, quote, Christian young people. Your child begs you to go. Your conviction is against that and you know better, but you give in to your emotions and feelings and let the child go "just this once." You have sinned against your conscience and what is right. YOU HAVE COMPROMISED!!**

**What about attendance in the house of God? Hebrews 10:25 tells us "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together." I believe the Bible not only teaches God's people are to be faithful to the house of God, but God commands His people to be faithful. Our children watch us in this area. Sunday comes up and we are visiting**

Harry, Billy, the car show, ball game, boat show, or something else. We are too tired, so we say we are ill. (I have seen people who are supposedly ill all the time. I think that is called lying.) Of course we are never too ill to do something we wish to do. We have stayed up too late the night before and cannot get up. Or, we are working on the Lord's Day. Parents you have just planted a seed in that child that it is okay to be led by your feelings rather than by what God says. I did not say not to visit Uncle Harry, but you need to do that when you are not missing the house of God. If you are going on vacation, find a good church to attend and make sure you do attend. Let me say this, a child can be going to church and not have a real relationship with God. However, when the rebellious child makes excuses (like the parents did) about church attendance, you know they do not have a real relationship with God. Many times the rebellious adult child now refuses to attend God's house. The purpose of being in God's house is three fold: 1. To worship God. 2. To desire to learn what God wants you to learn. 3. To be an encouragement to others, Hebrews 10:25. You cannot do any of the three if you are not there!

Parents when you do things like I am talking about you are teaching your children that it is okay to live by feelings rather than by the Word of God. This shows an inconsistent spiritual life and is extremely dangerous spiritually. A feeling led Christian will always make the wrong choice that is determined by their lusts rather than what God says. James 1:8, "A double minded man (feeling lust led) is unstable in all his ways." By the way it always shows up in his or her children as well.

You say "Pastor, I do not have a conviction against it." That leads me to my next point. Our convictions come from our relationship with God! If you have a sloppy relationship with the Lord you will have sloppy convictions. You will be a feeling led Christian rather than a conviction Christian and you will be headed toward deep spiritual trouble. The most important point about rearing spiritual children is the parent must have a real, passionate, intimate, and personal relationship with the Lord. It must not be a mechanical relationship, but a real relationship, Ephesians 6:4. They must also get the heart of their child and convey how to have a real relationship with God to the child.

The second point is making sure you get that spiritual relationship across to the child. The child has to have a spiritual relationship with the Lord. Proverbs 23:26. You must get the heart of the child and be a good example for him to spiritually follow. If you do not understand really what it means to have a real relationship with God, please stop and read the article on our web site called "How To Have A Real Relationship With God", (then come back here)

<http://www.elwoodbiblebaptistchurch.com/articles/family/HowToHaveARealRelationshipWithGod.pdf>.

I believe it is important to not just tell the child you can not go because I said so, but to take the time and make the effort to show the child from the Word of God why. If you desire to talk about the proper kind of Biblical love show scripture and pray with the child. You want to deal with the child's heart, but you also want the ground there to be soft ground. You as a parent must understand what proper Biblical instruction and discipline are.

**WARNING:** You can say no to the child all the time without Biblical explanation and instruction and you will raise a rebel. Proverbs mentions instruction twenty-five times and God gives you opportunity to instruct. Or you can be lead by your emotions or be lazy and cave in. If you fail to instruct or are lead by your emotions you lose the child spiritually both ways. You must train your child not to be lead by their emotions, but by what God says.

What do I do if I have failed? Children must see Dad and Mom respond to the Holy Spirit. God's kind of person is submissive, correctable, and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Many times the issue is the parent was a dictatorial and or angry parent and did not get the heart of the child. Every spiritual problem is a problem of the heart, Ephesians 6:6.

The order of this is the child's heart is lost by the parent. Many times the parent does not know that until the child is ready to leave the house (18) or right after they leave the house. The parent has told the child what to do, with an angry spirit, or compromised with numerous areas as I pointed out above. Let me point out here that ungodly anger has no place in the home or life of a Christian. (There are 47 different passages of scripture that deal with this telling us not to be angry or have an angry spirit), James 1:19-20, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Proverbs 22:8, "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity; and the rod of his anger shall fail." The child has a mechanical relationship with God, but not a real one. They are not spending time with God and letting God speak to their heart. However, the end result is you lost their heart. When the

heart is lost, it then gets hardened, and then it can be stolen from you by another person or something.

I find that most Christians are not aware of this Biblical truth. Never heard of it! Proverbs 23:26, “My son, give me thine heart, and let my eyes observe my ways.” When I talk about this many pastors just are not aware of it as well. The parent has to get the child’s heart and keep it. Much of what has gone on today is mechanical, activity oriented, Christianity, and the child sees no power in that and they do not have a real relationship with God. They go through the motions, (they attend church, memorize scripture, go to a Christian school, numerous youth group activities and programs, are home schooled, etc.) but do not have an intimate, personal, passionate relationship with God.

What do I do now that the child is out of my home and not living for God?

1. Ask God to show you where you lost their heart. Confess your sin to God, repent of the sin and find out what God Word has to say about the sin. I John 1:9, Ephesians 4:22-24. Don’t stop with just confessing your sin. Many people think that is all that has to be done.
2. Many times your conversation with the adult rebel child is strained or worse. They think you treat them like a child, and most parents with rebellious children do that. The rebellious child is not 14 anymore and you have to understand that. You cannot treat them like they are 14. You need to stop being negative with them. They don’t care what you have to say at this point and you’re telling them all the time what they are doing wrong, only drives them farther away. You have to treat them on an adult level even though they do not act like an adult. Remember their heart is hard and it has been stolen by someone or something. Maybe they are living with someone and he or she has their heart. Their lifestyle may be wicked and vile. You keep reminding them of that. They are not listening to you just like they have not been listening to you for a long time. Stop being negative! Stop preaching at them.
3. After God has shown you the area(s) in which you have lost their heart, you need to go to God’s Word and make the appropriate changes in your life. You will never change the heart of the child until you make the changes you need to make in your own life. Look at Ephesians 4:22-24. Ephesians 4 is what I call the change chapter. Your thinking has to be changed to God’s thinking in the way you handle this situation. You have to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” Your behavior has to change and your thinking has to change to the way God thinks on the matter that has got you here to begin with. At the appropriate time

(after you are comfortable that you have made the changes in your life that God has shown you) get together with the child and let them know that you have made some changes in your life. You need to ask for them to forgive you. Now, do not expect them to just melt here. They may wish to vent their anger at you with accusing remarks and things you feel are not true. Listen and do not be defensive or get angry. If you do you are not going to get their heart back, which is what you wish to do. I can hear someone now say, "But pastor, they are living a wicked life, somebody needs to tell them!" They already know! You have to get their heart back and you will not do it by being negative, angry, sarcastic, and condescending. Be careful to not make statements with them but instead try asking questions. We can generally say just about anything in a question format. You will be amazed at how quickly your whole demeanor changes, the flections in your voice, your body language etc. It is kind of hard to be angry or upset and ask a question at the same time. Remember; be very careful here not to be lead by your emotions. This is the time that I call the point of impact. The child may say negative things to you. Your response is "Lord I want to turn this over to you" and do not get angry. You may have to keep saying, "Lord I want to turn this over to you" many times. Once you are done with this meeting leave. Make sure you have told the child that you love them. Do not spend time continuing to hash over the same things. If you have sinned against someone, God tells us to go to the person you have sinned against. In reality by not leading properly you have sinned against the child. Pray for God to help you have the sensitivity to the Holy Spirit to do what is correct. This may be hard, but it is necessary. Do not go here if you are really not serious about making real spiritual, Biblical, long term change in your life. You will not get a second chance if you are not real about this. Many times the children have gotten so far away they really do not care and their life shows it. Explain to the child that God has dealt with you. Explain the areas you have failed in and if there is a specific area that the Holy Spirit brings to mind. Tell them you have asked God to forgive you and then ask them to forgive you and that you want to see them live for God. Once you are done with this meeting leave. Do not spend time continuing to hash over the same things.

4. If you have other children and the older child is living in sin, you need to sever contact with all the other children from them. If not it will be the domino effect. You don't sever contact with the rebel adult child, but do not let them influence their younger siblings still in the home. Explain to the younger children that the older adult child is not living for God. Dad and mom are praying for them. Don't spend any time hashing over the adult child's sin except to let the younger children know this displeases the Lord and you. Leave it alone. Many parents here make it like a grieving session every day over the adult child to the younger children. You are trying to help them have a real, intimate, personal and passionate relationship with the Saviour. Don't burden them down with an adult child and continually discuss the adult child's sins with them. One time and then leave it alone. You must sever all forms of communication with the younger siblings by the adult rebel child, no phone calls, text messages, e-mail

etc. with the younger children. If not they will influence those children and steal their heart.

5. Pray for the rebellious adult child daily. Ask God to give you their heart.
6. When you have conversations with them make them short and sweet. Ephesians 4:15, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” More than likely you have had negative contact with them continually. The communication has been negative and you want to reverse that. On a daily basis have some kind of positive contact, no negative contact at all. Quite frankly, at this point it needs to be kept short because if not something negative will come up. Let them know you love them. Ephesians 4:29-32, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, (strong desire to avenge) and **ANGER**, and clamour, (public quarreling) and evil speaking, **BE PUT AWAY FROM YOU** with all malice (intent to do harm). And be ye KIND one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Folks, these verse are the guideline in getting the child’s heart back. Anger and evil speaking is not going to do it. Remember, the scripture tells us, “Love is kind!” I Corinthians 13:4, “Charity (love) suffereth long and is **KIND**....” Read over these verses many times. Meditate on them. Ask God to show you where you are in these verses.

At some point your rebellious child may ask your opinion about something. Folks, they did not give you a license to tell them the entire thing they are doing badly or wrong that you do not agree with. A key to success here is asking a question. When they ask you your opinion ask them, “What do you think about it?” This will help you know if they really want your opinion or if they are just trying to figure out why you are not still blasting away at them.

7. I am sure your question here is, “Well what do I talk to them about?” Remember the key is to keep it light (love is kind) and you are trying to win their heart back. Do not be negative or angry. As you go through this process and if you get angry, you have lost every thing you have gained with a one time loss of temper. Really you just want to let them know you love them and are there for them. That is the basic extent of the conversation until they take it further. What you want to do is re form a bond that says you are there for them. Really you want them to feel they can come to you and you will listen and not be critical of them. Getting their heart back will have to start in small (kind) steps.
8. Some good examples of things to do is call them on the phone and say things like, “I was just thinking about you today and I want you to know I love you. I hope you are having a good day. Bye.” Send them cards with similar things on them. **NO NEGATIVE THINGS WRITTEN OR SAID!** Give them small gifts, with a

kind note. When speaking with them or writing to them, jot down a happy family memory. I was just thinking how we liked to go fishing together etc. Finally, find something to praise about them. I know you are thinking, "Well they are living like the devil." But you have to get above that because your goal is to win their heart back. You are trying to get and soften their heart. It is not easy, but you can find something about them to praise. Say something good about them to them. You say, "Gee, this is hard." Yes, it will be but keep turning your emotions over to God and set your life on the higher plain. You might consider getting them a family photo, one of a happier time they can look at. Nothing that might bring back a bad memory! When you start being kind, many times rebels are manipulators. They now wish to take advantage of you. Do not give them money to feed habits, go to rock concerts, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, immorality, or things of this nature. "I am sorry honey; I cannot help you with that." If they get negative with you just turn it over to the Lord and do not fight back. Get out of the way. Folks, I understand that many times a parent will think, they just aren't going to church, but they are good kids. Don't fool yourself here. They are in rebellion to God, you, and the Word of God. Also, I understand an adult rebellious child may be in a horrible living situation, (drugs, alcohol, immorality etc.) Their behavior is destructive behavior. The adult rebel child is just at different levels, but they will destroy themselves and others around them. Proverbs 13:13, "Whoso despiseth (does not give proper attention to) the word shall be destroyed..." It does not say might be, possible could be, it says "SHALL BE DESTROYED". In many instances they have harmed their life, their children's lives, their spouse's life, the person they are living in sin with, their life, (I Corinthians 5:1, 9-11), your life, and your children's lives. Rebellion is not normal it is wicked, vile, and must be dealt with, I Samuel 15:23, Deuteronomy 21:18.

9. Try taking them out for lunch or dinner on a regular basis. This should only be the parents and no younger or older siblings. You can have them to your home, but the other siblings must not be around.
10. Live by your convictions (what the Bible says not your feelings) in front of them and with them the rest of the way. Make sure you are having an intimate, personal, passionate, relationship with the Lord. Look at His Word on what you should do, and put it into practice daily in your life and your other children's lives. Folks, you cannot participate in the rebel child's sin or encourage it. That in many instances is how you got into this problem. Remember this is a heart matter and you are trying to get their heart back. I have found many Christian parents caving in to their adult rebellious child. They give them money, buy them cars, co sign for them on loans, (which they end up paying), take them places instead of being in the house of God where they belong, and don't baby sit the grand kids so they can go out and live like the devil etc. (There are times to see the grand kids without helping the adult rebel child sin.) The parent does this because he feels guilty and you are just enabling the adult child's sin and rebellion further. The parent is participating in their child's rebellion and sin!

9. Trust God for His deliverance for them. Folks, this process will take time. You may feel that you are not making good progress. Do not give up. It will be hard because of the emotional roller coaster you are on. You have to learn not to be lead by emotions, but to be controlled by the Holy Spirit at the point of impact, Ephesians 5:18-21. You may not love what your child is doing, but you can always love your child. They already know how you feel about what they are doing. Very few parents are willing to make all the sacrifices to win back their child's heart and life. It is my prayer that you will realize that you can see God's hand change you and your child. It can be done and you will be able to see the hand of God make Biblical long term change in their lives and yours.
10. When their heart has softened, you can start to introduce them to sound Biblical teaching again, by offering them sound teaching CD's or tapes to listen to, read, or view. We have good material on our web site, which will be helpful. We would encourage you to get for them and yourself the booklets, *How To Deal With Anger*, *How To Deal With Hurt*, *How To Deal With Bitterness*, *How To Have A Daily Time With God*, and *How To Have A Real Relationship With God* (I would give them this one first). I would also encourage you to read the book *Rearing Spiritual Children To Serve The Savior*. All of these are available on our web site at [www.fortheloveofthefamily.com](http://www.fortheloveofthefamily.com). Do not give them music tapes such as Contemporary Christian or Southern Gospel music. You cannot have a real relationship with God and be involved in things that appeal to the flesh. This is music that appeals to the flesh and will only drive them further away. If you are listening to this type of music it is a change that needs to be made in your life as well, Romans 6:12-19, Romans 13:14, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Folks, as they start to ask spiritual questions again, do not be negative with them. This now becomes a nurturing time, which should have been done when they were in the home, Ephesians 6:4, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the NURTURE (training with structure) and admonition of the Lord." They have to learn to have a real, intimate, personal, and passionate relationship with the Lord, before long term Biblical change can take place in their lives.
11. Remember four very important things, **DO NOT GET ANGRY, DO NOT GET DEFENSIVE, DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN THEIR SIN, AND BE POSITIVE!** I pray that God will give you the strength you will need as you begin the process of winning back the heart of your rebellious child. You want their trust, love and loyalty. It will only happen if you win their heart back.

Will this affect the other younger siblings? Absolutely and it is important that as you make these changes, that you work with the younger children in the same manner. Are you willing to make the changes necessary in your life to change your life and theirs for the honor and glory of God? Whoever has the heart of the child will control their lives and be able to instruct them.

**Many parents have older children who have not been trained according to the principles of God's Word. Do those parents get a second chance? In God's economy, it is never too late to make corrections and see fruit. But those parents must be willing to admit they made a mistake in training their children. If you are a parent who recognizes that you have not trained your children properly and desire to correct the situation you must consider the points above and begin to bring your parenting practices into Biblical conformity. It is never too late to start. Retraining is like starting over. You need to be consistent. Say what you mean and mean what you say. You may get a second chance with your children, but you will not get a third.**

**Experience has shown that children under ten adapt to new rules and positive parenting practices much more readily than children in their teens. However, children in both age groups will watch you to see how sincere you are in your desire to make changes. Once you have proven your sincerity, the younger ones tend to accept your new standard and the older ones many times follow.**

**Changing parenting habits takes time. But each day God will give you a new start and help you to be the parent that He wants you to be. With God's help you will lead your children to responsible adulthood for His glory and your peace of mind. Do not be overwhelmed at the task. Spend time alone with God in the Word and ask Him to show you the areas that need corrected first and what is His scriptural remedy. Pray for wisdom, James 1:5. God's promise in this verse is He will give wisdom to you. James 4:8, "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you." Making Biblical, spiritual change in our lives requires we are real with God. James 4:10, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up." It is our prayer that you will rear your children to the honor and glory of God, I Corinthians 6:19-20. It is also our prayer that you will win back the heart of your rebellious child. It can be done and God wants to help you do so.**

Some resources for this article come from the ministry of Solve Family Problems, Dr. S. M. Davis, [www.solvefamilyproblems.com](http://www.solvefamilyproblems.com).

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