

“How to Help Your Addicted ADULT Child”

THE PRODIGAL

Luke 15:11-24 NIV

In Christ’s parable of the rebellious son, the father gives his son his inheritance and allows the young man to leave home:

*“There was a man who had two sons.
The younger one said to his father,
‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’
So he divided his property between them.
“Not long after that, the younger son got
together all he had, set off for a distant
country and there squandered his wealth
in wild living.
“After he had spent everything, there was
a severe famine in that whole country,
and he began to be in need.
So he went and hired himself out to a
citizen of that country, who sent him
to his fields to feed pigs.
He longed to fill his stomach with the
pods that the pigs were eating,
but no one gave him anything.
“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How
many of my father’s hired men have food
to spare, and here I am starving to death!
I will set out and go back to my father and
say to him: Father, I have sinned against
heaven and against you. I am no longer
worthy to be called your son; make me
like one of your hired men.’
So he got up and went to his father.
“But while he was still a long way off,
his father saw him and was filled
with compassion for him;
he ran to his son, threw his arms
around him and kissed him.
“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned
against heaven and against you. I am no
longer worthy to be called your son.’
“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick!
Bring the best robe and put it on him.
Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his
feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it.
Let’s have a feast and celebrate.
For this son of mine was dead and
is alive again; he was lost and is found.’
So they began to celebrate.”*

THE PROBLEM

Parents often ask what they should do to help their child who is addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. The child is an adult, is unemployed and is still living at home with his parents. The parents are paying all or part of his or her living expenses.

Parents who provide a “safe house” where their children may eat, “sleep it off,” and come and go as they please, are actually forestalling their children experiencing the natural consequences of their destructive addiction.

Parents are usually motivated to help their addicted children because of their love and sense of duty. Perhaps they believe they are somehow responsible for their child’s addiction. And they hope and pray their child will “wake up” to their problem and seek help. The guilt and shame parents feel are emotions that help keep their adult children at home and addicted.

LET GO AND TRUST GOD!

Let go of your child, and let God work His perfect will for him or her. Allow God to cause your child to reap the consequences of his/her selfish, self-destructive behavior.

We parents forget that the lessons we learn best are those resulting from difficult times. When we interfere with God’s plan, we are being selfish. We are playing God. The following Scripture applies to the parent as well as the child:

*“Be not deceived; God is not mocked:
for whatsoever a man soweth,
that shall he also reap.”
Galations 6:7 KJV*

As *adult* parents, with our own pasts, we can identify with both the son and father in Jesus’ parable. In our youth, didn’t we want to live life on our own terms? Didn’t we respond selfishly to that rebellious nature within and try to prove ourselves? Just as the prodigal son indulged in the pleasures of the world, so did we. It is human nature. Our sinful nature.

The degree to which we choose to indulge ourselves isn’t what is important—Christ shows us in His Sermon on the Mount that it is a heart issue. To *think* of doing sinful behavior in the heart is equal to commission of sin.

The Most Excellent Way

We all have war stories from our pasts, and our children experience their own wars. We cannot change our child any more than another human being could have changed us. When we suffered enough shame, humiliation and degradation, we decided to change. Some of us despaired and threw ourselves on the mercy of someone who cared about us, someone who could lead us in the right way.

When Jesus is that *Someone*, we experience a welcome home that cannot be expressed fully in human terms. It is Jesus' love, acceptance, and forgiveness we need. Our parents could not satisfy that need. And we cannot satisfy that need for our children—no matter how much we want to.

The prodigal's father released the son and continued his own life, taking care of his own responsibilities. His joy at the return of his son shows us that he had missed his child very much, he did not withhold forgiveness, and he felt compassion for what the boy had experienced. The father never stopped loving his son!

Our Father in heaven welcomes us into His home—His eternal kingdom—when we repent and humble ourselves to be His children. What a homecoming!

THE ADDICTED ADULT CHILD

Drunkards and addicts do not and cannot understand the full effects of their behavior in their own lives or the lives of others because:

- **They cannot clearly discern between good and bad.**

"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

I Corinthians 2:14 NIV

*"There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death."*

Proverbs 14:12 NKJV

- **They are focused on gratifying their own self-centered desires.**

"... but each one is tempted when, by his own evil

desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

James 1:14-15 NIV

- **They are spiritually deluded and do not know the kind of person they are.**

*"Do not merely listen to the word,
and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror

and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."

James 1:22-24 NIV

- **The chemically dependent person is enslaved (in bondage) to his addiction**, and will make excuses for his behavior. As long as he is prevented by over-indulgent family and friends from seeing the reality of his hopelessness, he will remain deluded. However, the excuses can -not block out the obvious, observable facts: lying, stealing, laziness, abusive language, driving under the influence, violence, general lawlessness, missing school or work, etc.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- **FOCUS ON THE PROBLEM SOLVER!** Release your adult child totally to God's care. Acknowledge that He loves your child and sacrificed His own Son because of His great love.
- **Trust God for your child.** Though he or she needs to be humbled by experiencing the consequences of destructive behavior, which will include physical, emotional and spiritual pain, God is in control.
- **Be prepared to allow your child to face the consequences of his/her choices** — poverty, hunger, homelessness and jail — without your intervention.

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man, and God is faithful;

He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand under it."

I Corinthians 10:13 NIV

The Most Excellent Way

This is God's assurance for parent and child.

- **If you child become uncooperative, ask him/her to leave your home, and not return until he/she has been clean and sober for a specific amount of time.** Assure him of your love and concern, yet firmly stress that you will no longer be a party to his self-destruction. Be prepared to obtain a restraining order from local authorities if you believe your child may retaliate with violence.
- **When your child has reached his/her "bottom," encourage him/her to seek help from Christian resources, i.e., "The Most Excellent Way," residential facilities and programs.** Encourage your child to seek resources without your help to prove he/she is resolved to become clean and sober. Of course you could attend support meetings with your child, or visit your child in a residential facility, to demonstrate your love and concern.
- **Expect angry accusations from your child:** "You don't love me," "it's your fault I'm this way," etc. If you believe there is some truth to the accusations, ask your child to forgive you, as God has forgiven you. You cannot change the past, and God is in control of your future and your child's.
- **Make a list of the many effects and consequences of the dependent's behavior** in order to present him with the evidence of his own bondage. This list is not a "club" used to remember wrongs suffered against you, but rather a record of facts to refute your child's excuses.
- **Pray, pray, and pray some more. Seek God's will for your life and as well as your child's.**

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:6-7 NIV

- **Cultivate Biblical Love. When God delivers your child from chemical bondage, you will**

have the opportunity to renew your relationship.

"Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking,

it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with truth.

always protects, always trusts,

always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails."

I Corinthians 13:4-8A NIV

- **Seek God — one day at a time — in His Word, at home, church, discipleship and fellowship groups to strengthen your walk with your Lord.**

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Matthew 6:33 KJV

"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

Trust in the LORD forever,

For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength."

Isaiah 26:3-4 NKJV

- **Finally, forgive and forget. When the lost relationship is found, when apology is genuine, when reconciliation is sought — forgive and forget, absorb the losses and the cost, and rejoice and let the party begin.**

The Prodigal's father restored his wayward son and celebrated his return. In this reconciliation, the father absorbed the hurt and financial loss, and was willing to adjust his hopes and dreams for his child.

People are not perfect — your life will not unfold according to your blueprints. Your children will not develop according to your specifications. You can harbor resentment if you choose, but when it comes to relationships, that choice is always self-defeating.

Joy embraces others — stubbornness shuns them. Peace forgives others — pride prolongs the separation. Self-pity smudges the record until one remembers who is at fault or why.

Love cleans the slate of hurts recorded. ♥