

Why Children Often Grow Up And Abandon Their Parent's Values

Written by admin

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By Greg Baker



It is amazing how many stories I hear of children even in good Christian homes that grow up to abandon everything they were taught, abandon church, abandon the morals and standards their parents hold to jump pell-mell into a life that ends up consuming them much like the story of the Prodigal Son. I'm glad the Prodigal Son came back; I just wish he would have never left to begin with.

Statistically, we are doing something wrong very wrong. As parents, Christian or otherwise, many of us believe in being strict with our children, holding them to a high moral and value standard to protect them from the sharks in the world seeking to consume them. Yet so many of these children jump ship in their early 20's and late teens. What are we doing wrong?

More than likely there are many things we are doing wrong. Child rearing has never been fully mastered. Still, I believe there is an inherent problem in among strict parents desperately trying to prevent their children from duplicating their own mistakes.

In our efforts to provide a safe future for our children, we mistakenly try to dictate or legislate

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character.

This, I believe, is one of the major reasons why we are losing our children to the world. In addition to rules about moral living, we force our children to conform to rules of character. The problem with this approach is that character cannot be dictated or legislated. Children do not develop character by being forced to yield to rules of character.

Moral rules, even strict ones, are necessary to prevent our children from straying into a path that leads to destruction. Rules that dictate character, however, do not actually build character in the child.

Character is self-control, self-government. Commanding a child to have patience is not a development of the character of patience; it is being forced to yield to the will of the parent. As soon as the restriction is removed, so will any semblance of patience.

The following Scripture reference is a perfect description of the average child who grows up in a strict home and suddenly, at the age of 18 or 19, finds he no longer has to live by the standards and rules his parents have dictated to him all his life.

Proverbs 25:28 - He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

He doesn't have any character of his own. He lived by the character of his parents for 18 years. Now, on his own, he has never developed any self-control. He does not rule his own spirit and his is defenseless against the onslaught of worldly desires and pleasures. His spirit is ripe for plucking by Satan.

Only by developing character, this rule of his own spirit, will he adopt the moral rules for himself when he is of an age where your rules no longer have a hold over him.

CHARACTER MUST BE DEVELOPED NOT DICTATED

The wise parent wants their children to decide to do right for themselves. The parent's duty is to develop character in their children.

2 Peter 1:5-8 - And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Character is about addition, not subtraction. You can't set rules that make a child have brotherly kindness, or temperance, or patience, or godliness. You have to help develop these character traits in your children. They have to be the ones to add them. The parent needs to assist and help that development progress.

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Proverbs 16:32 - He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Since character is self-rule, it is necessary to develop a child's decision making process. Let me give some examples of what I am talking about:

If you have a rule that a child must make his bed by 7:00 am or he cannot eat breakfast, you have a rule that dictates character to the child. Not eating is a punishment. It is a penalty for not making the bed. Unfortunately, a child does not learn character from this. He does it because he has no choice because it is a rule. His yielding to your rules makes it about your rule, not about his learning to rule his own spirit.

Instead, make eating breakfast a condition of making the bed. Instead of making it a rule, simply say, "Once you make your bed, you can eat breakfast." It is now a choice. The child determines if he wants to eat. If he doesn't make his bed, he has chosen not to eat. If he wants to eat, he merely decides to make his bed. There is no contest of wills between the parent and child in this case. Make it about his choices, not your rules.

All choices have consequences. You teach this by setting conditions for the desires the child has. It's not about punishment; it is about developing a child's ability to govern himself and eventually to yield to the moral values we hold as parents.

The difference is subtle, but profound.

Too often we have such a militaristic set of rules at home that makes the relationship about rules. There is little mercy and grace. When it comes to moral rules, toe the line. But when it deals with character, learn to use mercy and grace to help develop character in your children.

For example, if you want to teach your children the character of preparing in advance, don't set out a list of procedures that state: First, you must ask at least three days in advance. Second, you must present all the details at that time. Third, you cannot contact your friends until permission is granted. When your child violates one of your rules, you automatically say, "No! You broke the rules!" The child begins to resent the rules. He doesn't think them fair. He feels that to get to you, the parent, he has to wade through rules. He may grow rebellious.

Instead, allow the child's choices to have consequences. Give the child a bird's eye view of the consequences of their decisions. This will teach them more character. If your child comes to you and says, "Dad, last week, Billy asked me to come over to his house today. Can I go?" You can reply, "Son, you should have planned this earlier! We already have plans for today." He may say, "But Dad! I promised Billy I would be there today!" Smile and say, "This is what happens when you don't prepare in advance, son. Do you think promising Billy without talking to me first was a smart decision? When should you have asked me about going to Billy's? You know, when you prepare things in advance, you get what you want more often."

This second scenario makes it about the child's decisions instead of your rules. The child will realize that if he had made smarter decisions, he could have gone to Billy's. He will be more apt

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to decide on his own to ask you earlier. This scenario also allows the parents to demonstrate more mercy and grace as well.

When our children are out on their own we want them to have the character to abide by the morals and values we held them to as children. They will only do so if we have helped develop their ability to rule their own spirit.

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