

Question: My son has left the all faith in Jesus Christ that we taught him when he was a child. Why does God not answer our prayers to bring him back to that faith?

Some people insist that parents have no right to expect their children to follow the faith of their parents. But for those who know Jesus Christ and the blessings he brings, faith in Christ is a matter of life and death both now and eternally. Such parents of deep Christian conviction and love for their children are going to be greatly concerned about how leaving that faith affects the future of their children.

However, parents need to understand that God loves their children even more than parents love them, and God's love allows each child to make his own final choice about faith in Jesus. God, the Father, took a risk that Christ, his son, might reject his will for him; but the Father felt the risk was worth taking. A love that is not freely given by the son is no love at all. We hear Jesus making his choice when he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). He could have chosen not to do the Father's will; instead, he chose to do his father's will even to the point of dying for the sin of the world.

On one occasion, Jesus told the story of the prodigal son that illustrates how God deals with a wayward child (Luke 15:11-24). Although the younger son insulted his father by asking for his inheritance while the father was still living, the father gave it to him and allowed him to leave home. The father, who represents God, could have denied this freedom to the son; but he did not. The father continued to love his wayward son, always watching, waiting and hoping that the boy would repent and return home. Thankfully, the prodigal son did come to his senses, remembered his father and came back home. This parable should encourage us not to lose hope for our children when they stray but to be willing to take the risk involved. A parent's heart may break when a grown child leaves the faith of his heritage. But when that straying son decides to return, he has freely chosen to come back because of his own faith and not because he felt forced to do it. Love and faith must be freely received and freely returned.

Also, consider the prayers of Jesus for Peter and Judas. Jesus told Peter, "But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32). The prayers of Jesus on the night before he called to the

twelve to be apostles (Luke 6:12ff) and on the night before he was betrayed (John 17) included both Simon Peter and Judas Iscariot. But Peter still denied Jesus, and Judas betrayed him. God's promise to hear and answer prayer does not mean he will take away anyone's freedom to either believe in Christ or not to believe. Thus, we must recognize that like Peter, some children will return to faith. Sadly, some, like Judas, will leave and never return to faith.

If our children leave the faith we have nurtured in them, we must not lose hope. Keep praying for them. Our Heavenly Father wants every one of us to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), and Jesus died for the whole world (John 3:16). He loves our sons and daughters and wants to bless them. As we pray, the Lord will stay near to our children and will give them every opportunity and encouragement possible. Wait on the Lord. He may act in a way that will succeed in getting a child's attention and eventually lead him back to faith. Don't give up. Remember the prodigal son.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2014/08/15