

Question: What should you do if your grown-up children are making decisions that could ruin their lives? What would Jesus do?

Few things cause greater emotional pain for loving parents than seeing their children hurt. Even after their children are grown and away from home, parents may continue to feel responsible for the successes, failures, mistakes and troubles that their children face no matter the cause. Parents who lack all sense of loving concern for their children are said to be “heartless” or “callous” (Romans 1:31; 2 Timothy 3:3).

However, God’s word does not hold parents responsible for the actions of their adult children in the same way that they are told to train and instruct them during childhood and youth (Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 22:6). But even grown children are taught to honor and respect their parents (Leviticus 19:3) and to provide care for aging parents (Mark 7:10-13; 1 Timothy 5:4; Proverbs 19:26; 20:20). While parents are told to nurture and instruct their children “in the Lord” when they are young, they should also give their children wings of freedom to go into the world as independent and responsible adults. For example, a man who marries is told to “leave his father and mother and be united to his wife” (Genesis 2:24), and Ezekiel taught that parents are not accountable for the sins of their children any more than children are accountable for the sins of their parents (Ezekiel 18). So, parents should not burden themselves with guilt because their children choose to walk a different path from the one set before them in their early years. There has never been a better parent than God; but his children, Adam and Eve, made a wrong choice and disobeyed him, too.

With the understanding that parents must allow their grown children to be independent, Jesus would also respect the concern you have for your adult children. You may not be in a position to direct your grown children, but you are still in position to have an influence on them. Therefore, I believe Jesus would suggest that you begin by praying for God’s Holy Spirit to control your own anxiety about your child and to help you approach your child with humility, respect and wisdom. Speak graciously with love (Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 4:6), and respect the fact that your son or daughter may have a better understanding of what should

be done than you. A respectful conversation in which you listen as well as talk can aid understanding and bless both of you (cf. Proverbs 29:20).

Even if you, your son or daughter should continue to disagree, avoid making threats or giving ultimatums. Do not allow anger to cause you to say something you will regret later (James 3:3-6). Keep the door open for a continued relationship as far as it depends on you. Make it as easy as possible for your child to come back and to say, "I'm sorry." Don't make your child feel he or she will hear "I told you so" for years to come.

We can learn from the example of the father in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The father knew that his son was making a wrong decision when he asked for his inheritance, but he respected the boy's right to make his own choices in life. The father made no threats and kept the way open so that even in his rebellion the son knew he could return home. When he did return, the Father ran to meet him. The boy did not have to humiliate himself or come crawling to his father in order to be accepted. He received a warm welcome from a loving father who had patiently waited for his son's return. Jesus told this story to illustrate the manner of the grace and love of God our Father toward each one of us. But let us also learn from this parable how to deal with our grown-up children.

[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] 2014/06/20