

Question: Our teenage daughter has rebelled not only against the values we have taught her but also against society in general. We have thought of telling her to leave and that she is no longer a part of our family. What would Jesus do?

There is no one who can understand the heart-wrenching experience of dealing with a rebellious child more than our heavenly father. When God's beloved Israel turned away from Him, through the prophet Hosea he said: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me" (Hosea 11:1-2 NIV). Although God did discipline his children by sending them into captivity in Assyria and Babylon, he never gave them up completely. "I will not carry out my fierce anger," God said, "nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath" (Hosea 11:9 NIV).

In the New Testament, Jesus told a parable of a father with a rebellious "prodigal son" who demanded his inheritance before his father's death (Luke 15:11ff). The father could have punished the boy for his wicked request; instead he gave the boy his inheritance. The father did not force his son out of his home, but he did allow him to leave. By releasing his son, the father was not endorsing the boy's actions. He allowed the son to face the natural consequences of his own choices. The father wanted a son, not a slave. He knew that there were times when it would be better to let go without causing further bitterness than to force a maturing child to do right. That way the child could return to his father's love out of his own free choice. So, as much as this broke the father's heart (for he loved his son beyond belief), he recognized that there were some things this boy could only learn for himself.

When the boy faced devastation and loss, he knew he could return home even if only as a hired-servant. When the boy did return, the father recognized him from a distance and ran down the road, humiliating himself to save the boy from having to face the village alone after his failure. The father embraced him and fully restored him to the family, the community and to his position as an honored son. Such love and grace can often accomplish what all other efforts at correction and discipline cannot. The father of the story represents God.

It's difficult to rebel again against that kind of love and mercy.

What would Jesus have you to do about a rebellious teenage son or daughter? First, look to God for strength and wisdom. He understands and can help you and your child. Second, learn from the way God dealt with His children. Like God with his children, you may need to exercise the tough love that disciplines, but you also need to continue loving your child. You may need to release her to face life's realities to learn what she refused to learn from her parents. But never, never totally cut your teen off. Trust in the power of your love and the love of God to penetrate her heart. She needs to know that she will always have a father and mother who love her and will receive her back when she comes to her senses. If this does not work, nothing will.

Above all, during the long days of physical and/or emotional separation, seek strength and love from your heavenly father. As much as you do not want to face the loss of a child, know that the heavenly father cares for you and your daughter; and he will help you get through any loss. Allow Him to fill your hearts and lives. In addition, you should realize that so long as there is life there is hope for your daughter.

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