

HELP!

MY TEEN IS REBELLIOUS



LIFELINE
with Family

dave & judi coats

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REBELLIOUS

Dave & Judi Coats

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INTRODUCTION

Sitting in our living room in Wisconsin one day with our junior-high daughter, we were stunned when she pointed her finger at us and said, “You are *not* going to tell me what to do!” Frankly, this event scared us as parents. Perhaps you have had a similar experience.

We now have three grown children, but we went through happiness and heartache with each of them. As a family, we know the anguish of having both an “in-your-face” rebel and one who covered for himself by lying to us. The latter covert-type of rebel seemed at times to be a greater danger for us because we did not know where his lying would lead him or when it would show up. With our other daughter, we faced frustration as she drove her vehicle recklessly fast on country roads, indicating that she thought little of our driving rules.

These struggles with our teens have driven us

to our knees in prayer and to the Word of God for answers about their rebellion and, equally as important, about our own rebellion. Having learned through our experiences, we desire to share with you some of the biblical truths that have helped us.

As parents, God forced us to face up to our own rebellious hearts. There were times when we became angry at God for having to deal with an explosive daughter. We also got tired of responding to a liar. In our impatience, we asked God to transform our children so that we could have peace in our home. But God chooses his timing and his path for change. As a result, we went to God to get our own hearts checked out, to see where we needed to change in order to prepare the way for an open dialogue with our teens. By God's grace, we then saw our three teenagers respond to our loving confrontation. Subsequently, God created in them submissive hearts. Today, we are glad that our adult children love God and are serving him. God used our home as a workshop where his grace, through the Word and through the Spirit, changed our teens into his likeness. He can do the same in your home.

Perhaps this introduction surprises you. Perhaps you thought that we would begin with a diatribe against the evil "teenage years." But guess what? Each

one of us rebels every day, but do we see ourselves as rebellious? We get disgusted with the authorities in our workplaces. The car breaks down and we become angry rather than going to God to seek his will. We rebel against God's plan for us, and our teens observe the rebellious reactions that we model. Too often, we ignore the rebellion in our own hearts. Whatever kind of rebel you are or have in your home, you must first walk with God yourself to check your own rebellion; only then can you begin to address your rebellious teen's needs. We will look at this in detail in the following pages.

The rebel in your home may have brought you great sadness and disappointment. Is there any hope in this situation? There is indeed, and it is found in the Bible. Because rebellion is a common issue for parents and teens, every home can benefit from working through this study.

1

Identifying Different Kinds of Rebels

In the book of 1 Kings in the Old Testament portion of the Bible, we find an account of King Solomon, who is known as the wisest man who ever lived. Here's one example of his wisdom. One day, two women brought a baby to him, and both claimed to be the baby's mother. Solomon had to determine which woman actually was the mother. He told the women that he would cut the baby in half and give them half each. One of the women wanted no part in this decision but insisted that the baby be kept alive; thus Solomon knew that she was the real mother (1 Kings 3:16-28).

Solomon's unique wisdom was given by God so that he could rule his people. As a result, his fame spread across the known world. Solomon shared the key to a wisdom-filled life with his son in the book of Proverbs:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of
knowledge [wisdom].

(Proverbs 1:7)

In Proverbs, we encounter the definition of a fool or rebel; such a person is the exact opposite of a wise man or woman. Proverbs says that a fool does not listen to instruction: he or she is rebellious. A fool rejects the instruction and direction given to him or her by someone in authority—a parent, a guardian, or a pastor.

Not all fools are at the same stage: some are further down the path and more deeply entrenched in their foolishness than others. As a parent or guardian, it is important that you determine what level of rebellion in your home you presently face. In the following pages, we explain the various levels of foolishness that are described in the book of Proverbs.¹ This identification of foolishness will help you to know what practical and biblical direction you should

1 In Proverbs the Hebrew for “fools” distinguishes different levels of foolishness. See R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (eds.), *Theological Wordbook Of the Old Testament [TWOT]*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980). The following entries were submitted by Louis Goldberg, Th.D.: “the simple fool,” *TWOT* #1853; “the slow fool,” *TWOT* #1011; “the settled fool,” *TWOT* #44; “the shameful fool,” *TWOT* #1285; “the scornful fool,” *TWOT* #113.

follow. As all roads of rebellion ultimately lead away from God, your hope lies in turning your son or daughter to God through the cross of Christ. The Bible says in Isaiah 53:6,

*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own
way
and the LORD has laid on him [Jesus Christ]
the iniquity [sin] of us all.*

Pray that your teen will see the foolishness of his or her choices. Until your teen has a new heart and life in God that comes from the presence of Christ within, any change will be merely external and will not last.

The Simple Fool

*I have seen among the simple,
I have perceived among the youths,
a young man lacking sense.*

(Proverbs 7:7)

The fool we see here, the “simple fool,” is open and receptive to good or bad influences, but is immature.

The teen who could be characterized as a simple fool may also be uninformed, naïve, lacking in perception regarding the consequences of his or her behavior, or basically untaught. The simple fool is *inexperienced*.

What are some of the ways in which the simple fool rebels? Parents of a simple fool may say, “Don’t make such and such a choice.” But a friend of the teen then says, “But what’s wrong with doing that?” and the teen makes the bad choice. The simple fool has perhaps been told not to do something, but he or she sets aside that instruction through not knowing the “why” behind it. The instruction was weak; thus the immature teen decides to make a poor choice because of a lack of knowledge. This rebellion is not excusable, but the reasoning behind it differs from that behind other types of rebellion.

If you are a parent in this situation, how should you deal with it? You need to address the disobedience gently and give your teen more instruction.

If this level of foolishness, were the only kind of rebellion parents faced, we would probably be irritated but we certainly would not suffer the deepest points of discouragement that we face. What else comes out of the foolish heart? The more serious levels of foolishness will show us what can come out of the human heart.

The Slow Fool

*Doing wrong is like a joke to a [slow] fool,
but wisdom is pleasure to a man of
understanding.*

(Proverbs 10:23)

*To turn away from evil is an abomination to
[slow] fools.*

(Proverbs 13:19)

This “slow” (sluggish, dull, and obstinate) fool is someone who has a *tendency* to make wrong choices. He or she knows right from wrong but is more readily drawn to the wrong crowd. This slow fool enjoys the company of that wrong crowd and the fun that they engage in, even though he or she knows that wrong is involved in their choices.

The slow fool is struggling with issues of the heart that the parent must go after. What do we know about his reasons for going in the wrong direction? What does he want that these friends offer him, although making sinful choices? What enjoyment does he find in doing wrong? If the parent wants to deal with the slow fool, he must know what is driving the behavior, not just react to the sinful patterns. If

we do not go after the heart's motives and longings, we will address only surface issues. What else can the heart produce in the direction of foolishness?

The Settled Fool

*The wise lay up knowledge,
but the mouth of a [settled] fool brings
ruin near ...*

*The lips of the righteous feed many,
but fools die for lack of sense.*

(Proverbs 10:14, 21)

The “settled fool” has decided in his or her heart to live a life of rebellion against what is right. He or she has crossed a watershed in the severity of his or her foolishness (rebellion). The nuances of the Hebrew word translated “fool” in the Bible indicate that this fool is more insolent. The Bible verses quoted above indicate that these fools are near destruction, are proud, and despise instruction. They twist the truth against those who challenge their rebellion. Bitterness and anger against those who instruct and correct them may dwell in their hearts. This rebellion may be extremely deceitful or blatant: your teen may slam doors, yell, or act out, but he or she may also

be a silent rebel and find inventive ways to hide that rebellion. You must be discerning when you have a “settled fool” in your home, since the rebellion is often hidden behind a nice, compliant exterior.

The parent of this kind of fool may begin to feel a desperation. Yes, there were days that we thought certain foolish directions of our teen’s heart would not change. We were desperate for God’s intervention. Mom may have fear that grips her heart and wants to turn her home into a prison of control. Dad may feel threatened in his reputation and respond to his teen’s rebellion with his own anger and frustrations, adding fuel to the foolishness in the teen’s heart. Where do you go next? As we track with the downward spiral of foolishness as it controls our teen’s heart, we cry out to God for help.

The Shameful Fool

The father of a [shameful] fool has no joy.

(Proverbs 17:21)

We can understand how this statement from Proverbs applies to a home in which the teen has acted disgracefully and senselessly. The “shameful fool” has closed his or her mind to the voice

of reason.

We find an example of a shameful fool in ¹ Samuel 25, where we are told of the man Nabal (his name in the Hebrew means “shameful fool”). His behavior toward David and others around him is typical of this kind of person—arrogant and overbearing, and lacking shame or any sense of disgrace. Most likely, this person does not believe that God is going to bring any punishment whatsoever against him or her. God was not in Nabal’s mind at all. Psalm 14:1 says,

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

Such a fool’s behavior is in-your-face, not only before his or her parents, but also before God.

What parents have to understand at this point is that the struggle going on inside their teen’s heart is not about mom or dad, but about this teen and God. That has been, in fact, the battle since the first step of rebellion that showed up in their home. But now this rebellion is out in the open. They don’t have any pretenses. Please don’t say, “I don’t know what happened to my good son?” His heart is open before you. Deal with the reality and know that this teen is in open rebellion against God first and foremost.

The Scorner

*Drive out a scoffer [scorner], and strife will
go out;
and quarreling and abuse will cease.
(Proverbs 22:10)*

The “scorner” is the fool who acts out in extreme ways, often indignant and showing contempt and utter disdain for someone or something. The book of Proverbs indicates that the only solution to the endless battle with this type of fool is to “drive [him or her] out.” The scorner is beyond our control.

What does it mean for a parent to “drive out” a scorner? For the sake of other children and the household as a whole, and for the shame that the scorner has brought to the home, parents or guardians must be willing to turn the scorner over to the results of his or her foolishness. Your teen does not hear you; he or she hates you; your reproof backfires. Remember that one person who will benefit from the casting out of a scorner is the simple fool:

*Strike a scoffer, and the simple will
learn prudence;
reprove a man of understanding, and he
will gain knowledge.*

(Proverbs 19:25)

To “drive out” means to make the difficult decision to remove your rebellious teen’s influence from others who are led astray by him or her.

How can we follow this biblical principle of removing the scorner from our home and yet show that we love our teen? Will people say that we are just getting rid of the problem?

Loving our teen and addressing the problems from a biblical perspective are clarified in these timeless truths in Proverbs. What the study of the fools (simple, slow, settled, shameful, and scorning) shows us is that we are all broken--we are all rebellious. Knowing where rebellion began adds another layer to the understanding of the dilemmas that we will face in the home so that we examine ourselves along with our teens.