

Keeping Your Faith and Sanity with a Prodigal Child

Eileen Scipione

Introduction

I. Define Your Terms:

A. Faith

Gift from God to believe Jesus is truly God and that He forgives and changes sinners who repent and that He is preparing a place for you.

B. Sanity

The ability to handle rationally and reasonably what comes your way.

C. Prodigal Child

Your natural or adopted child of any age who resists what you hold most dear.

II Trust In God's Sovereign Love and Control

A. God Does Not Give His Children More Than We Can

Handle Joseph
Samuel
Esther
Three Hebrew boys in Babylon

B. But it is shocking/amazing what He thinks you can handle. These three fathers tried to raise their children in the covenant but some went in a very bad direction.

Eli
David
Jacob/Israel

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- C. In the end, when you look back, you will see that He has enabled you to keep on believing God's promises and to maintain your sanity. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Matthew Henry has written: "Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary graces. Sanctified afflictions our spiritual promotions."

- D. God loves your child more than you do.
Never stop telling them and showing them that you love them more than they will ever imagine. But because you love them you will not allow them to destroy themselves- if you can help it.

III. Don't suffer alone. Get help.

- A. Call on the church for help even if the problem appears too much.
Even if the leaders seem too busy or naive to the severity of your problem, or they preach in such a way as they would not understand how you got into this dilemma, they need to shepherd their own sheep. They may never have had much training in seminary on these issues but it is their God given job. At least they can pray with you and cry with you.
- B. Seek help from a biblical counselor if the church proves to be unwilling or incapable.
- C. Seek the best medical professional possible if the church and counseling is indicating that there is a biologic condition in the mix.

You may want to start the process with a medical professional if your child exhibits behaviors that appear to be a combination of physical disability and spiritual rebellion.
Some diagnoses are based on hard science and not simply behavior.

If your child has changed dramatically in a short time, don't assume they have suddenly lost their salvation or turned into a monster.

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IV. Take personal responsibility for YOUR thoughts and actions, not your child's.

A. Be quick to confess and to ask forgiveness for your own sins and failures.

One of the most common sins in solid Christian families is the emphasis of performance over grace. We parents who take the Bible seriously, as we should, can fail to give your child the message that your love for them is based on your relationship and not on how well they keep your rules.

If your child had a sensitive conscience and wanted to please you, they may not ever have grasped what grace in Christ actually looks and feels like.

B. Be consistent with planned and reasonable consequences. Let them feel the pain long enough to get the message.

Now prodigals often are the opposite of the child with the tender conscience. They have never cared to please you as their parent. These type of children have almost no conscience and are usually defiant. They need prayerful well thought out consequences for their rebellious behavior. Don't make sudden threats that you will not carry out anyway.

Don't second guess yourself. If you made a decision prayerfully with your believing spouse and the advice of the elders, and your child went in a very bad direction, trust in God. Do not beat yourself up with fault finding and introspection.

Develop a plan so that the child knows what to expect and does not just wait for your mood to change.

C. Don't rescue or condemn. Walk the narrow balanced path of grace and truth.

If you live in grace, rejoicing in your union with Christ, you will be more likely to encourage the struggling prodigal and avoid making excuses for the defiant.

Pray for wisdom as to whether the child needs a gracious bailout or a tough love consequence.

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- D. Preach the truth to yourself daily so you find your value and worth from your union with Christ and NOT from how your children are doing.

Feed your own soul and body. Don't torture yourself by denying quality time with God, and making time for your own rest and restoration.

Do not feel guilty when you send them out to live on their own.

- V. Be ready for the long haul.

- A. They are on a long journey. Never give up.
- B. Be like the five wise virgins in Jesus's parable who brought along extra oil.
- C. Our son in prison went downhill into a homeless, Muslim pothead. But today he is a baptized fruitful member of a Bible believing church and has a job and he is a huge help to me in our ministry caring for a seven bedroom house on a large piece of property.
Our daughter in the psych hospital now lives on her own and drives herself most places.
The daughter in Hollywood still is pursuing that career but she goes regularly to church and is kind to everyone.
- D. What keeps me sane and filled with faith is maintaining a daily relationship with Jesus and keeping lines of love and communication open with the prodigals and/or former prodigals.