

3 Things to Remember When Your Children Break Your Heart

You will always be a parent, even when your children are grown. And sometimes the choices they make are completely inconsistent with the values you worked so hard to instill in them.

Or you may see some things you wish you had done differently as a parent, and now that your children are older, it seems hopeless. It hurts when children break your heart.

In our most recent survey, I heard from a number of parents. Your children may be teens, young adults or even middle-aged, and the way they are living seems to be far from God. And it hurts you to see it. "That is what breaks my heart." "And my heart breaks!" "It grieves our hearts." Your pain is deep and real. I can hear your tears and feel your heartache.

When your children were little, you could control their behavior somewhat. You could take them to church, punish them if they did wrong and make sure they ate their vegetables. You could decide what TV shows they watched and which friends they spent time with. During their teen years (if not before) all that began to change, and now, you are no longer in charge. The tearing-away may have been happening right under your nose without you realizing it until a serious break in your relationship with them forced you to see it. Or it may have been gradual and relatively pleasant until they were out of your house, and then they walked steadily away from the kind of Christian lifestyle you wanted them to have.

Did you do something wrong? Yes. No parent does everything perfectly. Are you responsible for their choices now? No. That's something very difficult for many parents to

accept—that regardless of how well or poorly you raised them, your children are now responsible for their own choices and behavior.

So is there anything you can do now? Absolutely. Here are some things you can do as a parent regardless of how old your children are now.

How to Influence Your Older Children

If your children break your heart:

1. Remember that God has no grandchildren. Each human being—your child included—stands before God on their own. He loves your children more than you do. (Yes, He does.) Jesus died for them, and God will make Himself known to them in the way only He can. They will have an opportunity to make a decision for or against Him separate from any baggage you may or may not have saddled them with. If they respond negatively to God (not to you), He will grieve more deeply than even you can.

2. Your behavior, not your words, is what is important now. Your time for speaking truth into your children's lives is largely over. Imagine yourself in their shoes. Do and say things that will make them want to be around you even if you cannot agree with their lifestyle choices. Act as Jesus would. Those around Him never questioned the righteousness He stood for, but even the worst sinners felt welcome. Make your heart a safe place for your child to come if they want to make a positive change. Trying to control or change them will only push them away and may make it harder for them to respond to the Holy Spirit. Love them unconditionally even if you can't agree with them. They will know the difference.

3. Don't stop praying. The persistent prayers of a weeping parent have brought many a child who had wandered far away back to God. You may or may not realize the impact of your prayers. You will need His guidance yourself to navigate your

relationship with your child and to know how to respond lovingly without accepting sin. Jesus did that, and He can help you do so too. Your own transformation into Christ's likeness will be noticed by your children, so don't stop growing yourself. The person you are, the person you are still becoming may well make a much greater impact on your children than anything you say. Stay on your knees—for yourself and for them.

I join my prayers with yours that God will speak to and redeem your children—regardless of how well or not well you've done in your parenting or how far away from Him your children have gone. There is no greater power in the universe than God's Holy Spirit. Let's keep praying together for Him to bring that power to bear on your children in the way that is most likely to turn their hearts toward God. {eoa}

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