

How to Talk to Your Children When Christian Leaders Fall

It was a pretty sobering revelation for many home-school families. A very prominent leader and speaker in Christian home-school circles recently confessed to an inappropriate relationship with a woman and resigned from his ministry and speaking engagements.

As speakers ourselves (my husband Hal and I), we and our children know most of the other families on the speaking circuit, so we realized we needed to address this with them.

How do you talk to your children when a Christian they know falls into sin? Here's how we try to handle it.

1. Don't ignore it. Children, particularly teens, have a tremendous hypocrisy detection system. We need to be very, very careful that we don't pretend to be without sin or pretend our leaders are without sin: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10). When we sin, we need to confess it and ask for forgiveness, especially when our children are involved. If we don't, we may save our pride but lose our children.

2. Be frank. When Christians fall and it causes a stink, it's often a sexual sin (or the beginnings of it). These sins tempt our sons tremendously. Don't avoid an opportunity to show them the tragic consequences that can come from indulgence. Explain the cost in terms of shame, loss of employment, effect on family members and effect on testimony. Pray for the leader, his family and everyone affected by this tragedy.

As difficult as it is, it is a good thing for your children to see this pain because the enemy is whispering to them, “No one will ever know,” when he tempts them. Instead, they need to understand that sometimes practically the whole world will know, and in the end God always does know. This is why we love accountability software for our computers—it teaches our children that someone will know. Please protect your children. Internet filth is a primary way sexual sins get a foothold.

But how do you explain something like this? In this case, it’s not too hard: “He had a romantic relationship with someone other than his wife. That’s not right. We are supposed to be faithful to our wives and family.” In other cases, it may be more challenging, but your guys can really benefit from the warning.

3. Be humble. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Better Christians than we are have fallen into sin. We really can’t afford to be self-righteous, and neither can our children. Make sure you express to them that we are, every one of us, susceptible to sin and have to be careful. Pride is a huge danger for all of us: “For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself” (Gal. 6:3)

And if you disagree with or dislike the leader who has fallen, be especially humble: “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him” (Prov. 24:17-18).

4. Address their grief and anger. As we talk about in our book, everyone craves heroes, especially boys. We want someone to look up to, someone who can be an example to us. When we realize those heroes are fallible, as we all are, it’s hard enough, but when they do something repulsive to us, it can really shake us up. There are a lot of 20-somethings and teens who are grieving and stewing and rethinking everything. Their

idealism is taking a huge hit, and that's a hard thing. We need to come alongside them and help them make sense of this.

We'll need to talk through whether this affects what they've been taught and what they believe. Remember, just because someone hasn't followed biblical principles they teach, that doesn't make those principles wrong. On the other hand, if there is error, either in what has been taught or in your expression of it, confess it. We don't lower ourselves in our children's eyes by saying, "I was wrong," because sooner or later (usually sooner) they'll realize it for themselves. When we tell our children when leaders are right in some areas and not quite right in others, we're not teaching them to despise them; we're teaching them to not put any man on a pedestal above the Word of God. No man should be made an idol—and most teachers don't want to be!

When our children get angry and say, "How could he?" we need to remind them that we are all sinners. David, a man after God's own heart, committed adultery; Peter even denied Him. We need to pray and pray hard that God would keep us from sin. Don't make excuses for sin, though, and don't try to soften it. Sin is ugly and evil, and this kind of heartbreaking situation ought to make us hate it!

5. Remind them that though battles seem to be lost, the war is won. It's hard to see much upside in the sin of Christian teachers being exposed. We need to remind our children that God is holy and that He has His own purposes. It may be hard for us to understand why He allows things to happen, but we need to trust Him and to remember that He wins in the end.

6. Pray for those leading and teaching. Our enemy delights to bring down leaders. We need to be praying for their protection. Seriously. Really praying. It's hard not to be proud when people are praising you. Pray, pray, pray for those in authority over you, for those teaching you, for those whose books and work are blessing you. They really need it, and our

children need to see it, too.

7. Galatians gives us the pattern for this very situation. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

Gentleness. So, any talk on this matter needs to be gentle, humble, honest and Christ-centered. Keep your eyes on Christ, not on us or on anyone else teaching or writing. Just on Christ, who died for you.

8. Share the gospel with them. Whatever direction you take in this discussion, don’t neglect to tell your children that Christ’s blood covers this too. We have all sinned. None of us is righteous, and God is holy and cannot condone sin. Thankfully, He has provided a sacrifice for us: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). What hope lies in those words!

Update: Since we know the family involved, we intentionally left the names out of this article, not wanting to add any more to the grief and notoriety the wife and children are suffering already. However, some of our readers were concerned to know the situation which prompted this article, and when they searched online, learned the news from very ungracious, gossip-laden sources. Since there was a public confession and letter of resignation, you can read it directly **here** if you need that clarification.

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For the original article, visit .