

My Child is a Prodigal

As a Christian parent, you pour your life, time and resources into your children. You pray and guide them to the best of your ability, expose them to Jesus and your church community. Then they choose a different path – the path of the prodigal.

What can you do when someone who has your heart makes poor choices? What do you do when they ruin family traditions and special occasions? What are your options when they lie to you or about you and get into various types of trouble?

As a psychologist, I have worked with thousands of prodigals for over three decades. Each one of these prodigals has loving parents who have gone through what I call the Prodigal Parent Process for years or even decades.

When you are a parent of a prodigal, you go through a process. You are traumatized and shocked at your child's choices. You are in awe as their mind and relationship choices get poor as they walk out Romans 1:21 (NIV): "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

You will grieve so many losses for you, them and your family as they walk this road. You will be tempted to blame "the wrong crowd," the "wrong romantic relationship," the "world" or even your spouse as you grieve.

So what can a parent do when his or her child is a prodigal? The most important thing you can do is pray and reflect on the Word of God.

God's first two children ever created both became prodigals. God did not take the blame for their choices. He did not say, "I didn't do enough" or "I didn't provide enough." He didn't blame the Holy Spirit or say it was Jesus' fault. He gave 100

percent responsibility for being a prodigal to the prodigal.

Here are five things you will need to do as you go through this process:

1. You must get intelligent information about your prodigal parent process. You will need more than a prayer for you to go through this very long storm.

2. You will need to allow yourself, your spouse and other children to have and express their feelings of grief as the prodigal regularly disrupts, disappoints or hurts those in your family.

3. You must give up any idea of cause and effect. You being a godly, Christian parent does not guarantee your children will not become prodigals. We all know great, Christian people who have prodigals and we know great, Christian people who have come from horrific family backgrounds. Free will demolishes any guarantee of cause and effect in parenting.

4. Get support as you go through this storm. I recommend you participate or start a Prodigal Parent Process small group in your church or home. The workbook and DVD will help you and other couples go through this process together. I often find that couples want to isolate themselves from others when they have a prodigal. Isolation keeps you from receiving Christ's healing through the body of Christ. These groups can offer support and clarification when you must make difficult choices with your prodigal. Remember, this can be a long storm and it is beneficial to have support in your journey as a prodigal parent.

5. Stay hopeful! Christ is doing all He can to create circumstances for your prodigal to return home to Him and you. He feels your pain as well. Believe in your heart He can do what it takes to reveal His heart to them. He wants you to trust Him with this lamb of yours.

My hope and prayer is that if you or someone you know has a prodigal, they will take their process of a prodigal parent seriously and intelligently, as this can make this storm much more bearable and easier to navigate. Going through this process in an emotionally and spiritually healthy way can help your relationship with God, your spouse and your other children be much less impacted by your prodigal. {eoa}

Doug Weiss Ph.D. is a world-renowned author, speaker and licensed psychologist, and has been featured on many prominent television shows such as Daystar, Dr. Phil, The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Doctors, Good Morning America and more. As the executive director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center, he has over three decades of experience working with Christian couples during challenging times in their lives. He has created the series titled Prodigal Parent Process to help parents of prodigals along their journey of healing and awaiting the return of their prodigal children. To join Dr. Weiss online Parent Prodigal support forum, [click here](#). To learn more about being a parent of a prodigal, visit

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