

When You Should Not Rescue Your Kids

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” (Gal. 6:7)

I was, for a short time, a private teacher for an affluent family. My job was to teach algebra and physics. My student was a good kid. But as often can come with great wealth, he also felt entitled.

When I took the job, I was told that there was one rule: no homework—ever! Immediately I knew this would be a problem. Teaching algebra and physics without homework is like becoming an Olympic diver without a swimming pool. But being the foolish optimist that I am, I agreed to work around the limits.

To say that he struggled with the material would be an understatement. Yet the number-one problem was that he couldn't retain anything from one lesson to the next. I would find myself going over and over the same things day after day.

Things finally came to a head at the midpoint of the school year. He took a test, which I had watered down considerably, and bombed it. Sadly, I had given him problems exactly like the ones we reviewed the two previous days. However, since he never had to do any homework, he didn't retain it. When he failed the test, he was very upset. Then, as I'd seen him do with another teacher, he went in the other room and called his mom on the phone to complain that the test wasn't fair.

On my way home, I got a call from his mom. I was glad she called, for I wanted to tell her the truth about this “no homework” rule. What I wasn't prepared for was when she opened the conversation with “My son never fails tests. If he failed, it was because you weren't teaching him the material.” Uh, it

could be that, or could it be that your son isn't required to do any work?

The mom loved her son, but unfortunately, she loved him by the wrong definition. To her, love meant that she should rescue her boy from the consequences of his own behavior. He shouldn't have to change; other people should. It is a recipe for disaster, for her boy was going to become a man who believed that the rules of life didn't apply to him. Her boy was going to become a man who didn't live in reality.

"Reality is larger than we are," writes Dr. John Townsend. "...God has designed us so that if we live according to His ways, life works pretty well. But if we don't, life begins to fall apart. You don't fight long against gravity, magnetism or nuclear force. The big realities always win. We should reap what we sow—in the good or bad consequences of our lives."

He goes on to write that people who treat us badly, button-pushers he calls them, need to experience reality. "So the button-pusher's lack of awareness and resistance to taking responsibility should cause life not to work well for him. And that can be a great incentive to change. For example, a man with a hot temper who won't listen *should* encounter relationship and job problems.

A mother who is invasive and intrusive and won't listen *should* annoy people in her life, who will then avoid her or not be real with her. An irresponsible adult child who won't listen *should*, at some point, have to live on his own and find a job, even though his quality of life isn't what he is used to."

This is what was happening in the situation with my student. He didn't have to reap what he sowed, and it was dysfunctional. And although that situation seems obvious to us, what we don't realize is that we often do the same thing. In other words, we rescue people.

Take a hard look at your relationships. Where do you step in and prevent people from reaping what they've sown? Often we might nag and complain and cajole someone but do not allow anything *real* to happen to them. We save them from the hurt or loneliness or failure that should naturally follow from their behavior. It doesn't work—for them or for you.

God made a world where you either do your homework, or you fail the test. And although it is hard, we need to allow those we love to get an F when they've earned an F. Otherwise, they will never grow or stop pushing our buttons.

Ryan Hobbs *has been a teacher, pastor and church planter with a Master's degree in counseling. He has an eclectic ministry background that has led to a passion for practical discipleship. Check out his blog [Practical Devotion](#) for daily insights into putting Jesus into real life.*