

# Changing the Heart of a Rebel

by S.M. Davis

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*The key to raising good kids is to get their hearts early and keep them, and to be extremely vigilant to not lose them.*

**Duration:** 1:03:14

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 15:1, 2 Samuel 15:6, Proverbs 23:26, Malachi 4:6, Matthew 6:33, Luke 1:17

**Topics:** "Parenting", "Spiritual Renewal"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of parents being committed to long-term change rather than seeking quick fixes when dealing with rebellious children. The speaker shares that while these principles can bring about positive changes in children, there is a danger of parents becoming complacent once they see initial improvements. The speaker references Matthew 12:43-45, which talks about an unclean spirit leaving a person temporarily but returning later to find the house clean. The speaker also highlights the influence of various external factors, such as media, friends, and idols, on children's hearts and behavior. The sermon concludes with a personal testimony of a family's journey in restoring their child's heart through intentional actions and the work of God.

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## Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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These messages are offered to all without charge by the freewill offerings of God's people. A special thank you to all who support this ministry. Raising kids is a challenge.

Raising good kids is a big challenge. And raising godly kids is an incredible but possible challenge. There are several important ingredients needed to raise godly children.

One of those is teaching children to obey. Obedience to be obedient must be immediate and sweet. Parents must also teach children to show respect and honor.

A child who is not taught to respect his parents will also not respect other adults, older people, his mate, or God. Then too, parents must protect their children from evil. Evil in general and evil influences in particular.

It is a false philosophy that says that you produce better kids by exposing them to the filth of this world. Romans 16, 19 says, I would have you wise unto that which is good and simple or ignorant concerning evil. Fundamental Bible believers are often accused of overprotecting their children.

Could I give you my observation of that? We do not lose our children because of being overprotective. We lose our kids because of being harsh and critical or from being inconsistent in our own lives. By far the majority of Christian families I know are not protective enough of their children.

Teaching obedience and respect and protecting children from evil are key ingredients necessary to raise godly children. But they are not the key ingredient. In fact, you may have those ingredients and still not succeed in raising a wise godly child without the key ingredient.

In Proverbs 23, 26 we read, My son, give me thine heart. Malachi chapter 4 verse 6 is a prophecy concerning the ministry of John the Baptist, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers. But that is not the end of the verse.

The verse ends with a warning of what God does if fathers don't turn their hearts to their children. It says, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. We are witnessing the fulfillment of that verse all around us when kids shoot kids, and when schools have to have armed guards and metal detectors, and when people are afraid to walk city streets alone.

Luke chapter 1 verse 17 is a further exposition of Malachi chapter 4 verse 6. And he, that is John the Baptist, shall go before him, referring to Jesus, in the spirit and power of Elias or Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient, that's the children, to the wisdom of the just. That's what parents are supposed to be. The number one characteristic of wisdom is justice.

When children see parents as just rather than unjust, then children are more likely to cease their disobedience and rebellion and give their hearts to their parents. The last phrase of that verse says, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Young people are not ready, not prepared for God to work in their lives until their hearts are turned from themselves or from others to their parents.

Now I've given you the passage where the truth is stated. Now let me tell you where the truth is illustrated. 2 Samuel 13 and 14 are the chapters that tell how King David lost his son Absalom's heart.

Absalom and Tamar were full-blooded brother and sister. But David was not as protective of Tamar as he should have been. David allowed Tamar's half-brother Amnon to be alone with Tamar, and Amnon raped his half-sister.

David was angry when he heard what happened, but he took no action. Two years later, Absalom had his half-brother Amnon executed to revenge his sister's rape. Then Absalom fled to Geshur for three years.

David's general Joab noticed how badly David missed Absalom, so he got the king to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. But for two more years, David refused to talk to his son. Absalom, provoked to wrath by his father's five-year silence, sent for general Joab.

When Joab didn't come, he sent and set Joab's barley fields on fire. Those fields on fire were a picture of Absalom's heart burning with anger and rejection and distress because of being cut off from his father David. Finally, Joab came, and Absalom looked at him and said, I want to see my father.

If he wants to kill me, then let him kill me, but I want to see my father. So Joab talked to David, and David sent for Absalom. But the reception he received was not the warm reception of a father.

It was the cold reception of a monarch on a throne. When a man is a father, his children must see him first and foremost as a father. Children don't mind a father being something else, but he must primarily be a father to his children.

It's alright to be a pastor, or a banker, or a businessman, but a father must first be a father to his children. Absalom was treated like a subject when he should have been treated like a son. And in the very next verse, 2 Samuel 15, verse 1, Absalom had become a rebel, and he had plotted and was carrying out his plan to usurp his father's throne.

Verse 6 of chapter 15 is an enlightening verse. Absalom did to the men of Israel what he apparently wished David, his father, would have done for him. By listening and talking and touching, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Before that chapter ended, David was running for his life, and Absalom, the rebel, had taken the throne of Israel. Now please listen carefully, as I make one of the most important statements that has ever been made from this pulpit. In fact, this statement will be one of the most important statements you will ever hear any preacher or teacher make in your entire life.

Here it is. The key ingredient in raising good kids is to get their hearts early. Keep their hearts.

And be extremely vigilant to not lose their hearts. But if you do lose a child's heart, then quickly find out where and when you lost it, and put into action a plan to get the heart back no matter what it takes to do it. No matter what it takes, what do I mean? I mean no matter how much time or trouble or money it takes to get back your child's heart, you must decide you will be willing to pay the price.

It might cost. It might cost financially. It may cost a thousand dollars or ten thousand dollars.

You must be willing to pay the price. It may cost you your job. You must be willing to pay the price.

It may require you selling your home and relocating elsewhere. You must be willing to pay the price. It may require radical changes in your own personal life.

You must be willing to pay the price. Be sure of this right now as you listen to this message. God knows your heart.

And God already knows whether or not you love your child enough to be willing to pay the price to deal with their disobedience and rebellion. The date was December the 21st, 1992. I was at home and had not gone to the office yet when my telephone rang.

A very distraught mother was on the other end of the line. For a year and a half, they had had problems with their now 17-and-a-half-year-old son, Michael. It all seemed to have started about age 16 when they got Michael his own car and let him get a job at a local fast food restaurant.

Michael became close friends with a 19-year-old fellow who had attended the same Christian school where Michael was a student and also a 25-year-old man who had a wife and a child. Why don't I stop right here and allow Michael's mother to tell you their story in her own words. Our son running around with a 25-year-old married man with a child, a man faithful to our church, seemed fine.

Boy, were we wrong. Michael soon started staying out late. He was working later and later.

On his days off, he went with his friends to their homes to play pool or ping pong. Mr. 19-year-old's girlfriend wasn't allowed to go out with him unless her parents went, so that wasn't a problem. So far as we knew, Mike and Mr. 19-year-old were just a couple of Christian guys having fun.

We totally trusted Mike. We watched him. He seemed to be still having devotions.

He was still in church most of the time. His mouth was a little smarter than usual, but we chalked it up to being 16. We also noticed him stretching the rules a little bit.

Some things weren't adding up, but nothing major. Then in November, four months after Mike turned 16, we got up one morning and the car was gone. It was 4 a.m. and Mike wasn't home yet.

Well, this was stretching the rules a little much. We were both up and suddenly noticed a note on the dining room table. I still remember every word on it, even though it's been three years now.

It said, someone said I could do it. I love you, Mom and Dad. By Mike.

We weren't sure what it meant, but we were horrified. First we ran over to Mr. 19-year-old's apartment. No one was there.

We checked the garage. No one was there. About that time, I checked my purse and realized \$300 was gone.

It was really a relief to realize that he had taken the money and probably run away. We did all the things we could do, but what happened is we started searching through his stuff. Questioning people he knew at school.

Boy, were we shocked. We found lots of awful hard rock music tapes. Mike set those out for us before he left.

We found cigarettes and found out he'd been drinking. We found pictures he had drawn of evil, wicked skulls. They gave me chills.

Mike had a side that we knew nothing about. Mike was found five days later in Florida. Broke.

We had him put in a detention home, and we went to get him. This family lives in the state of Illinois. Mr. 19, who had gone with Mike, was just left in the street.

We had the car impounded, so he had nowhere to go or stay. His parents sent him nothing, so he was left on the streets of Tampa, Florida with only his clothes. He was scared.

He stayed at a police station sitting in a chair. We got there two days later. God had started to work, and we brought back both boys.

Mike confessed to us everything and asked our forgiveness. We blindly gave it to him. From this point on, Mr. 19 and Mr. 25 were gone.

Mr. 25-year-old had been taking the boys to bars. One part Mike held back was that Mr. 19-year-old had introduced him to pornography. They had started renting X-rated movies.

Mike was fine until the next summer when a girl came into the picture. She seemed like a nice girl. She went to church, an A student, worked hard.

We liked her. Again, we trusted blindly and soon started noticing small things not adding up. Mike was smart-mouthed with us.

By this time, we were homeschooling, but I still was working 35 hours a week and my husband 50 hours a week. The children were home alone a lot. There were small things that weren't adding up, but the hard rock music wasn't seen around the house.

He wasn't smoking. He never talked mean or ugly to us. His hair was short, neat, and clean.

He was always in church. He loved his family. To us, he was just a struggling good kid.

December the 20th, that was one day before they called me, Mike's sister came into our room about 11 o'clock at night crying. She said she had to talk to us. She told us Mike and a friend had been bringing X-rated movies into the house.

She had walked in on them one night. He had a VCR in his own room. They threw her out and told her to keep quiet.

They didn't care what we thought or anyone else. They were going to do what they wanted to do. Our daughter also told us he had ruined her birthday slumber party two weeks earlier.

He had taken one of the girls into the car and was kissing her. He had also been equally aggressive with all her other 14-year-old friends. I'll read more of the letter later.

But it was that morning of the next day, December the 21st, that Michael's folks made contact with me. They desperately wanted to know if there was anything they could do to change their 17-and-a-half-year-old son. Now, allow me to ask you right here, what would you tell those parents? What could this mom and dad possibly do that would straighten out a 17-and-a-half-year-old son who has now tried about everything the world has to offer, has become deceitful, and shows little or no inclination towards changing whatsoever? Before I tell you the end of the story, let me first point out to you, number one, rebellion originates in the heart.

Rebellion originates in the heart, and the heart of every problem is a problem in the heart. And that includes rebellion. Rebellion is more a heart problem than it is an outward life problem.

Hebrews 3.10 says, they do always err in their heart. The problem David had was that he had lost Absalom's heart. Absalom's life wandered, and he became a rebel because his heart had wandered.

Many months before the young man Michael ran away from home to Tampa, Florida, Michael's parents lost his heart. Michael's life wandered because his heart wandered. How easy it would have been for Michael's parents to focus on his running away from home, or on his bad friends, or on his pornography

addiction, or on his beer drinking, or on his rock music, or on and on I could go because I don't tell you everything that he was into.

But all those things were symptoms. They were surface. The root cause of all those problems was this.

Without even knowing when, where, or how it happened, Michael's parents lost Michael's heart. I repeat, the heart of every problem is a problem in the heart. I can't emphasize this too strongly because the heart that I'm talking about controls everything else in a person's life.

There is no more vital organ in your body than your heart. If you had to choose between an injured arm, or an injured leg, or an injured heart, which one would you choose? Choice would be easy, wouldn't it? You could make it without an arm or a leg, but you can never make it without your heart. Your heart keeps everything else in your life living and functioning.

A parent who has their child's heart, then, will have access to everything else in their child's life. Just like the physical heart controls everything else in the body, so if you have the child's heart that I'm talking about, then you'll have access to everything else in the child's life. When Michael's mother said he had a side they knew nothing about, she was stating plainly that they didn't have his heart.

A parent who has their child's heart will know what is going on in their child's life. A parent who has their child's heart can direct their child's feet to go in the right direction. A parent who has their child's heart can protect their child's eyes and ears from the wrong pictures or the wrong music.

A parent who has their child's heart can determine who their child's friends will be. I remember talking to the parents of a boy that I'll call Oscar. For 15 years, those parents had never had serious problems with their son.

But with tears, they told me something was wrong as they had called me on the telephone and pleaded for my help. When I quizzed them concerning their home, it seemed that they had the perfect home. I mean, high standards.

No TV, careful with the radio, newspapers, magazines, careful with the music. The son was in homeschool, on and on. Something was wrong.

I'll tell you later what was wrong with Oscar. Did you know that it is better in the long run to have a child who occasionally disobeys you but you have his heart than to have a child who is continually, compliantly obedient but you don't have his or her heart. Not every child whose parents lose his heart becomes wild or rebellious, but the potential for rebellion is present regardless how outwardly obedient a child is if you don't have their heart.

That means if you don't have their heart, if they don't become rebellious, it's not because they couldn't have, because they could have. Any parent listening to me right now who does not have their child's heart has a child who has the potential to become a terrible rebel who does horrible things and breaks his parent's hearts. How are you thinking? I ask you a very personal and a very probing question.

Do you have your child's heart? Don't fool yourself. It won't hurt anybody but you and them. What would be your child's response to you if you were to ask him or her right now this question? Do I have your heart? Don't forget, the heart of every problem is a problem in the heart.

Second, the one who has the child's heart will eventually have the child's life and loyalty and the child will give their heart to someone. This heart I'm talking about was not made to be kept, it was made to be given away. Whoever has the heart will have the life and the loyalty.

How could Michael run away from a safe, secure home full of love with his 19-year-old friend? It wasn't hard at all. His friend had his heart. Whoever has the heart will eventually have the child.

That's the reason that the world around us is continually pressing upon us trying to tie our children's hearts with everyone and everything except their parents. From babysitters, to TV stars, to school teachers, to cartoon figures, to basketball stars, to football stars, to rock and roll musicians, to boyfriends and girlfriends. I've seen kids whose hearts were more with the Power Rangers than they were with their parents.

And sometimes you can tell just by walking in their room and looking on their walls who has their heart. May I ask you, do you right now have your child's heart? Would your child rather spend time with you than almost anyone else? Does your child listen respectfully when you speak? Does your child have a genuine desire to please you? Does it hurt them to displease you? Are they loyal to you in your presence as well as behind your back? Do you know right now what is going on inside your child? Remember Oscar? The reason Oscar's parents were having problems with him was because Oscar had gotten a new girlfriend. And they didn't know it.

One of Satan's biggest ways of getting kids' hearts from their parents prematurely is by getting young people to play the boyfriend-girlfriend game. Is there no other alternative to this approach that is so common in our day and yet is destroying so many of our young people? I believe there is an outstanding biblical alternative whereby a young person plans to give their heart to one other person in life. Then they guard their heart with their parents' help against coveting anyone else before they find that person and after they marry that person.

You say, Brother Davis, where do you get that in the Bible? Could I ask you a question? Respond to me. How many Eve's did God make for Adam? How many Adams did God make for Eve? One. Do you realize that when we go from girlfriend to girlfriend to girlfriend to girlfriend to girlfriend to girlfriend that all we're learning how to do is break up after we get married? Do you realize that the dating game that is played by the world as well as by most Christian parents and their young people is sowing the seeds for the destruction of marriages all around us? It is not just sowing the seeds after marriage for destruction.

It is also sowing the seeds for the disintegration of the parent-child relationship before a child is married. But if they will do what I just pictured for you, guard their heart against coveting anyone else before they find God's key person and after they marry that person, then young people are able to seek first the kingdom of God while being friendly with everyone. I said friendly, not flirty.

Then a guy can keep his heart with his parents and let them help him find his mate after he's old enough and mature enough for marriage. Michael's parents brought him back from Florida. But they didn't really get his heart back even though they brought him back.

It was a really easy thing for Mike to give his heart to a girl so that problem started up all over again. I'm glad to be able to say to you, number three, that children want parents to have their hearts. We're all born with the desire to please our parents and be close to our parents and share things with them and get their praise and their approval.

That's built in. We all hunger for that. Hear Esau as he cries in the book of Genesis, Bless me, even me also, O my Father.

See David hungering to see Absalom. Why he didn't, I don't know. But you also see Absalom hungering to see David.

He hadn't seen his father for five years. He's hungering. He says, if he wants to kill me, let him kill me, but I'm ready to see my father.

And there's the young man I'm telling you about by the name of Michael before he ran away to Florida setting everything out so his parents could find it. Before he ran away, he set it all out where they could find it. He was crying out to his parents to get his heart back and help him get his life straightened out.

Listen to me carefully here. One of Satan's biggest lies to parents in our day, and I underline biggest lies, it is a tremendously huge lie to parents in our day, is this, Some adolescent rebellion is normal and is to be expected out of every teenager. Every teenager at some time or other in their teen years becomes rebellious.

You just expect it. And since you expect it, you don't deal with it and you lose your kids. Rebellion is not normal.

According to 1 Samuel 15, 23, rebellion is sin and exposes a child to the realm and power and control of Satan. Just a little bit of rebellion should be a sign to a parent that their child's heart is wandering and is troubled and is hungry for love and attention and acceptance. When a child has a smart mouth like Michael had, you must not simply chalk it up to him being 16.

A little bit of rebellion is like a fast-growing cancer that multiplies exponentially into a whole mass of life-destroying rebellion. Number four, the Bible gives us an ideal picture of a parent-child relationship. It really does.

Do you ever think about where it is? No, it's not Abraham and Isaac. And it's not Isaac and Jacob, and it's not Jacob and Joseph, and it certainly wasn't David and any of his sons. This may surprise you, but the ideal example of this, of the hearts of parents and kids being knit together, is that of the heavenly Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you see the picture of Father and Son here in John 5, 19? Jesus said, "...verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do. For what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." This is a Father and Son who had each other's hearts. In John 5, 30, Jesus said, "...I can of mine own self do nothing, I think not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." And consider Jesus' statement in John 10, 30.

In this same context, we use this to refer to the doctrine of the Trinity. But take it further. Think of a Father and Son relationship.

Hear this verse, I and my Father are one. Number five, there are three big dangers for the heart, and they take place in this order. The heart can be lost, then hardened, then stolen.

Notice first that the heart can be lost. Fathers often lose their children's hearts by expressing anger at the child. Contrary to what many fathers think, anger does not break a child's will.

That's not a proper goal anyway. You don't want to break a child's will, you want to direct a child's will. Anger crushes a child's spirit and causes a child to harden his heart.

Over and over when I deal with a rebel child, I find that his father has had a problem with anger. Michael's dad was not angry all the time, but occasionally, I talked to the family just yesterday, and they said dad would explode and then back off. Hear me? Fear of explosions of anger can cause a child to retreat into a shell.

And when he retreats into that shell, he takes his heart in there with him. The heart of a child is much too delicate to survive the catastrophic explosions of a father's anger. Sometimes parents lose their child's heart when they break the most serious command given to parents in the Bible.

Do you know what that is? I believe it is the command that says, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath. I refer to that command as the most serious command because it is the only negative command I know of given directly to parents in relation to their children. The most devastating consequences occur not from breaking positive commands, but from breaking negative commands.

The Bible commands us to love our neighbor. It also says, I shall not kill. Now, it's bad to break the positive command to not love your neighbor, but it's horrendous to break the negative command if you kill your neighbor.

Amen? You may provoke your child to wrath by criticizing or needling the child. You may provoke your child to wrath by raising the standard required for him to get your praise and approval so high that he or she can't reach it. An inexperienced, immature child should not be expected to do a job as well as an experienced, mature, perfectionistic parent.

When a child does their best, they should be praised whether they did as well as someone else or not. They also should not be compared to others so as to make them feel inferior. That provokes a child to wrath.

You may provoke your child to wrath by making them do something they're terribly afraid to do. You may provoke your child to wrath by not communicating enough with them, by spending too much time outside the home, by watching TV too much, or by being buried in the newspaper too often. The second thing under this thought is the child to accommodate the hurt of you losing their heart hardens his heart.

And third, after the heart is hardened, someone else can easily steal the heart away. When King David did not listen to the needs of the men of Israel, then they hardened their hearts toward him. Then Absalom came along and saw the weak area and listened to them just like wrong friends will pick up on the weak area in your child's life where you have not been communicating with the child, where you have not been listening to them, and the wrong friends will come and listen in.

Absalom listened to them, talked to them, touched them, and stole their hearts away. The things Absalom did to steal the hearts of the men of Israel are the very same things that are used in our day to steal the hearts of young people from their parents. But here's the good news.

Listen to this. Those same things will also work for parents to steal back the hearts of their sons or daughters from those who stole them away in the first place. Thank God that's true.

I've seen it work over and over. Dad and Mom, listen to your child and then speak kindly with concern to your child while touching them. If you'll listen closely enough to your children, you'll find out where they're hurting and what's bothering them.

Proverbs 24-3 says that a house is established by understanding. Say to your child... Well, let me tell you what not to say. Don't say to your child, I don't have time to listen to you.

Say to your child, I've got plenty of time right here. I want to understand what you're talking about. Be careful.

A lot of parents blow it right here. It may be bothering your child that he just got his first zips on his face. He'll tell you about it.

And don't you foolishly say, Oh, Johnny, that's no big deal. You say this, Thank you, John, for telling me how you feel. I know it hurts when people laugh at you.

I remember how I felt when I was your age. Tell me some more about it. Let's talk about it for a while.

Your child may feel fat or skinny or ugly or too tall or too short. Listen to them. Give them your ear.

Some parents say, My kids don't want to talk. That is not true. Kids want to talk, but they wanted to talk about stuff you didn't think was important.

And you and I need to learn that if it's important to them, then it's important. What I see as my child's needs and what she sees as her needs, I have four girls, two already married, two still at home, and what I see as my girl's needs and what she sees as her needs may be two different things. You know what that means? It means I have to meet her needs not only as I perceive them, I have to meet them as she perceives them as well.

You know what that means? This is my favorite sentence in this whole sermon. It means that you're taking time to kiss your little girl's dolly because it has a sore toe is more important for your happiness 20 years from now than you're taking time to listen to your boss offer you a \$20,000 a year raise. It means you better care that your little boy got his toy truck stuck in the mud today and wants to tell his daddy about it.

It means you better care about your little boy's dog and your little girl's cats. This cat business is tough on me. We now have a yard full of immoral, prolific cats.

You say, Brother Davis, do you love cats? It doesn't matter whether I love cats or not. I love my girls and they love cats. I was in my office one day busily occupied doing church work.

Important, I said, important stuff. But when my telephone rang and my daughter was weeping because one of her kitty cats had been accidentally killed, I left behind all that important stuff and drove 14 miles home. And when I got there, I hugged and loved and spoke comforting words to my girl.

Then I went out and buried her kitty. Then I hung around for a couple of hours more just to make sure she was alright and to continue to comfort her and talk to her and tell her it was alright. And then every day for several days I continued to ask her, How are you doing? It's alright.

Don't let it worry you. It's alright. Why did I do that? Because it was an opportunity for me to let my girl know that she had a daddy who was a daddy first and foremost and then a pastor.

I know every father couldn't drop everything like I did and go home, but I could, so I did. And I don't have to be a cat lover to be happy in my old age, but I have to be a kid lover if I'm going to be happy in my old age. Why do kids give their hearts to their friends? Because their friends listen to them.

You're not going to raise good kids based on how they look on the outside. Are they conforming or not conforming to your rules? Some parents are just looking at their kids to see what they look like on the outside. Are they doing fine? No, they may not be doing fine.

You've got to reach deeper than that. Son, what have you been thinking about? How do you feel about this? Does this bother you? What are you saying to yourself? How are you dealing with your emotions? What did the message in church say to you? Did you read your Bible and pray today? Did you get something out of it? Are you getting answers to your prayers? Questions, questions, questions. Study Jesus and how He was continually asking His disciples questions to see how their character and their understanding of Him and their dedication was progressing.

There's a philosophy about youth work that prevails in many fundamental churches. Now, the philosophy is this. Now, don't throw any tomatoes at me.

Just listen for a minute. The philosophy is have a youth director to whom the young people give their hearts and let him do lots of things with the youth. That philosophy is not all bad.

There are some young people without parents or who have parents who refuse to be what God wants them to be and those young people won't make it unless some godly adult is able to get and direct their hearts. But God's best is not for a youth director to spend time with young people. God's best is clearly for parents to spend time with their young people.

Rebellion originates in the heart. The one with the child's heart will eventually have their life and loyalty. Children want parents to have their hearts.

It was built in. The ideal example of parent-child relationship is the Heavenly Father and the Son. The three big dangers for the heart is that it can be lost, then hardened, then stolen, and sick.

Only the heart can keep the heart. The hand alone cannot keep the heart. Neither is a spanking likely to turn around a rebel teen.

Can you imagine Michael's parents spanking that 17 and a half year old young man and it doing any good? I'm not sure they could have even gotten it done if they'd wanted to. The first thing to do at any sign of rebellion is not to get exasperated and shove away from the child. The thing to do is to draw closer to the child.

A home with a rebellious youth is often filled with a negative, critical atmosphere. That has to be changed. Praise creates an atmosphere of love and joy and acceptance, whether it's in a home or in a church.

You wouldn't want to attend a church where there's a harsh, critical, fighting atmosphere all the time. You come in here, why do you start with singing? Because singing is praise. Why do you sometimes have testimony? Because testimony is praise.

Why do you pray? Because prayer is praise. And in the preaching, there needs to be praise even in the preaching. And praise creates an atmosphere of love and joy and acceptance.

Now look, a critical atmosphere is as bad or worse in a home as it is in a church. Even a rebel hungers for the praise and acceptance of their father. And if a parent will look diligently, they can find something for which they can praise even the most rebellious child, no matter who they are.

Several months ago, I came across a phenomenal statement. Here it is. Every year children are schooled at home, they become less peer-dependent.

Then a well-known preacher said to me, Well, Davis, I've noticed that children who are home-schooled are more mature at a younger age. Those statements caught my attention because we've been teaching our children at home for a number of years now. I've also had the opportunity to observe the results of socialization in the lives of thousands of public school students, Christian school students, and home-school students.

Could I share with you my observations? Children are better socialized in a family setting of a home-school environment because they learn to relate and how to relate to both adults as well as other youth. I've seen a shy, withdrawn, seven-year-old little girl pull out of her shell and start walking up to adults and talking to them at church after three months of home-school. I saw my two oldest daughters choose older, godly ladies in their fifties and sixties to be in their wedding.

To be in their weddings, to be their maids of honor. Why does it work like that? Because children spend so much time with their mom and dad in a home-school, they're going to spend their life relating to adults. As well as, it's no problem for them if they can relate to adults, adults have no problem at all relating to kids their own age.

Think for a moment. We talk about the benefits of socialization, and I'm not totally against a child being with those their own age, but I want to ask you a simple question. What good thing does a twelve-year-old learn from another twelve-year-old? For that matter, what good thing does a fourteen-year-old ordinarily teach another fourteen-year-old? Not a whole lot, folks.

I know everyone can't do home-school, but if you want to get your child's heart or keep your child's heart, there are very few other things you can do that are as safe or as effective as having your children with you almost all the time. You say, but do the kids get a good education? Statistics show that they get a better than average education. But we also need to be careful of something else.

We need to be careful, now listen to me carefully here, because somebody in this room's got this problem. We need to be careful that we don't elevate knowledge to a pinnacle that even the Bible doesn't give it. 2 Peter 1, verse 5 gives God's order in this area, and besides this, giving all diligence add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge.

God was not guessing when He said number one is faith, number two is virtue, and number three is knowledge. The top priority in a person's life is faith, a person's relationship with God. That's the number one thing you want to make sure your children have.

The very next priority is virtue, which is character or moral excellence. And after virtue is knowledge. In other words, God sees virtue and character as being more important than knowledge.

When God's priorities are not recognized, then we wind up turning out educated idiots. People with lots of knowledge, but little wisdom and character. Are there folks like that? Oh my soul, there are lots of folks like that.

God wasn't guessing when He said wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom. Only an educated fool believes man came from monkeys. Wisdom of any great design demands a designer.

More and more in our day we hear things like this. Trust us, we're scientists. Something comes from nothing.

Or how about this one? Trust us, we are medical doctors. We are highly educated. It has a heartbeat, eyes and brainwaves, and it sucks its thumb, but it's not a baby.

Better an abortionist doctor is an educated fool. He is a brainless fool who could not read and write their own name in boxcar letters than to have a child who becomes a doctor that doesn't have enough wisdom to not kill babies. Amen.

Better a little knowledge with a lot of wisdom than a loon. A pastor and his wife came by our church, drove quite a distance, were anxious to talk to me. I sat down after a service and listened as they shared their concerns about their children's education.

Brother Davis, my wife's done a good job teaching our five children at home, but they're getting in the upper levels of high school now and she just can't handle teaching algebra and geometry. The nearest Christian school is 30 miles away. We just don't know what to do.

Do you have any advice for us? I let them talk for about 10 minutes and then I said, Are you done? Yes. Are you sure? Yes. Are you ready for my answer? Yes.

You're sure you're ready for my answer? Yes. Here it is. Hang the education! What? Hang the education! What do you mean? I said, Well, now that I've got your attention, let me balance that statement a little bit.

I'm not against education. Believe it or not, I've got some. But sir, ma'am, your children are all wise, intelligent, knowledgeable, character children who have a good relationship with you and with God.

I've seen them on more than one occasion. They can get through life fine without algebra, but not without character. You continue teaching them everything you can and since they do have character, if they need things you can't teach them, they'll get it whenever they need it.

The Bible is very plain. The ear of the wise seeketh knowledge. What is the Bible commentary on? Knowledge without wisdom.

Knowledge puffeth up. When you see these folks who are walking around proud as peacocks of all their degrees and all of their knowledge and everything, and they don't have the wisdom to know anything about life and what is right and wrong, you see knowledge puffs up and you can't even give them wisdom. The principle thing.

There may come a time when you have to choose in your child's life between wisdom and knowledge. If you have to choose, choose attentiveness over algebra. Choose generosity over geography.

Choose forgiveness over foreign language. Choose for them to learn compassion over chemistry. Choose truthfulness over trigonometry.

Choose humility over the humanities. Choose self-control over sociology. Choose obedience over ophthalmology.

If they get character, they will have the goods they need to get whatever knowledge they need to become, whatever they need to be. Number seven. A parent needs to take the following steps to turn around a rebel child.

First of all, the parent must first acknowledge to God and their child that they have lost their child's heart and sincerely seek forgiveness from both God and the child. Now, most parents first try to change the child, but God's order is very significant. Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children comes before the reverse statement.

Once the parent is seen as just. That statement, the disobedience to the wisdom of the just. Once the parent is seen as just, then they are ready to reach the one who is disobedient.

Justice usually requires humility on the part of the parent before grace is given for them to reach their child. This is the reason that counseling with a rebellious teenager usually accomplishes little or nothing. Most parents, that's what they try to do.

They say, my teen's a mess, I'm going to take him to a counselor. You can pay a fortune or you can listen to this sermon. I remember counseling with a rebel teenager and bringing him, several months ago, to the point where he was ready, right then on the spot.

He was weeping. He was ready to apologize to his parents. But when I brought them in the room and gave him the opportunity to speak, he said nothing.

And I was sitting there thinking to myself, now wait a minute, what's wrong? And then I remembered, God's order is the father turns his heart to the child first. The command is not given to the child to straighten up. The command is given to the father to straighten up.

And I said, hold it, I ask you to speak, but son, just wait. And I turned to the father and I said, there are some things you need to get right. You get them right first.

And that father broke down and begged his son's forgiveness with tears streaming down his face, and immediately his son did the very same thing to his father. Secondly, the parents must examine their own lives to make sure they're fully dedicated to God and cleansed of all evil. A parent with sin in their own life will find it difficult or impossible to deal with sin in their child's life.

Third, the rebellious child must be completely separated from all negative personal influences. I cannot emphasize this too highly. The book of Proverbs says, he that walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed.

If you continue to allow your child to run with young people who are not what they ought to be, and it is obvious they are not, you will not straighten out your child. Your child will be destroyed. So that includes all friends, especially any boyfriends or girlfriends, as well as any family members not totally in agreement with the parent's spiritual objectives.

This usually means that homeschool is essential, not an option. The parent must be so thorough in this area that the child would not even be allowed to attend a Sunday school class with young people their own age without the parent present. Sadly, there are times when the child must even be separated from grandparents if they are not supportive of the parents.

Fourth, the young person must also be completely separated from all negative impersonal influences. The home should be cleansed of TV, radio, bad music, tapes, questionable magazines, cell catalogs, etc., etc. Satan will keep ground in a rebel's life if there is anything left where he can hold that ground.

Fifth, everything bad must be replaced with that which is good. The child cannot become a spiritual vacuum. They can't be empty.

When you get the bad out, you've got to put something good in its place. Sixth, the parents should earnestly pray that God would bind all demonic powers that may be influencing their child. Any time you deal with rebellion, you can be pretty sure you are dealing with satanic powers.

Seventh, the parent must not follow their natural inclination to push away from the child, but must instead draw closer to the child. Both parents must spend hours and hours with that young person. They should talk and work and teach and play and pray and praise and study and share Scriptures and on and on and on and on.

Go fishing together. Go hunting together. Sew together.

Cook together. Do lots of things together. A father who wants to turn around a rebellious teenager should commit himself to give a minimum of one hour a day for at least six weeks.

Put it on his calendar and say, that's the way it will be. Number eight, the child must be continually praised for even the smallest display of any character trait. Even a rebellious child hungers for the praise and acceptance of his father.

Look at Absalom crying out for his father. Number nine, the parent must continually humble themselves to ask the child's forgiveness for anger, for criticism, for inconsistencies and for failure to communicate, failure to love, failure to praise, failure to care as God brings those failures continually to light over that several week period of time. The parent must especially try to recall where they have broken God's key negative command, fathers provoke not your children to wrath.

They especially have to see that. Number ten, the parent must be ready to help the child deal with bitterness and to accept and forgive the child as the child begins to open up and share previously hidden sins and failures. Rebels often disclose incredibly shocking things.

A parent must decide ahead of time they're willing to forgive anything. Number eleven, the parent must be committed to following God's principles and refuse to yield to the pressure that will come both from outside the home as well as from the child himself when these principles are first instituted. Many times, parents of children in churches, even in Christian schools, have children who are rebellious and when they start carrying out these principles, the folks in the church look at them like, what's the matter with you? Boy, have you flipped out.

I told one set of parents that for the first several days after they instituted these principles, they would think they had climbed on the ninja black belt roller coaster and were riding without safety harnesses or lap bars. They'd better get ready for a wild ride. Number twelve, the parent must be, listen to this, the parent must be committed to long-range change and not simply a quick fix.

Now the amazing thing about these principles is how quickly they work. Most rebels will turn around in about two weeks. The danger at that point is that they work so well so quickly that parents let up and the

child winds up worse than they were before they started.

I could give you some sad testimonies of parents who have listened, who have done what I said but did not continue to do it and now their child is in a bigger mess than they were before they started. Matthew chapter 12 verses 43 through 45 talks about an unclean spirit leaving a fellow for a short period of time. The spirit returned later and found a clean house.

So he got seven other spirits more wicked than himself and moved back in. I believe the worst rebels you will ever find are rebels who were changed temporarily by parents who themselves refused to permanently change. I might add right here I believe these principles will work even with a runaway child.

But only if the parent can first find a definite way to keep them at home, I have some ideas about that I don't have time to share right now, without them running away again. Such a thing could be very difficult especially with the legal climate of our day. Michael's parents continued their story.

Here it is. They had called me on December the 21st, you remember? His mother writes, On December the 22nd, Mike left after 11 p.m. We waited till 3 a.m. till he came home. We searched through his room.

We found many things we were not ready for. And they list them here and honestly, I cannot tell you publicly the things that they found. It became obvious that he was totally out of control.

That was the worst night of our lives. We were sure that Mike was now only to talk to us. We were now his best and only friends.

Christmas was only three days later and Christmas was hard. At the family get-together, he sat between us and never left our sight. Thankfully, this family also told me that their family, their extended family, was very supportive of them through this.

He wasn't allowed to talk to anyone at church and like I said, the folks at church wondered what was going on. We were able to get Mike under a week of preaching at camp and by the end of the week, God got a hold of him. We were really ready to do everything God wanted from us.

Through it, we learned a new love for our family. Here in detail are the things we did. Number one, we got rid of Mike's TV, VCR, tape player and radio.

Could I insert something right here personally? I believe one of the most dangerous things a parent can do is to allow their child to have a TV or radio in their own room. I think you are almost guaranteeing that you will lose your children. Number two, we went to all the video stores and refused to allow our name or our children's names on any list to check out videos.

Number three, no car. Number four, no friends. Number five, no phone calls.

Number six, we chose some godly men that we did know to start helping Mike in choosing better friends. Number seven, Dad started spending lots more time with Michael. Number eight, there was no trust but lots of love.

You catch that? No trust, lots of love. Number nine, we encouraged reading about godly men. We all became best friends.

If Mike wanted to see a friend, it was only done if we were around. God truly did the work in Michael's heart and in ours. Michael felt called to Bible college.

Only the first month was hard. After that, things changed. At age 18, Mike's headed off to Bible college to be a preacher.

At school, Mike met a fine young lady, and this year, this is just in the past few weeks or months, they were married. After she wrote this letter, she called her son, and she said, Brother Davis, this letter is less than two weeks old. This happened two years ago.

She said, a little over two years ago, she said, my son wanted me to add these things. First of all, he said, our determination to fight him is what changed his heart. He said, things would have never changed had we not done the things listed earlier and had he not seen that we were not giving up.

Michael said, if parents say that the child is 16, 17, 18, or whatever age, and that they're old enough that there's nothing the parents can do, Mike said, tell them they've lost the war. We never gave up. If we weren't just fighting our son, we were fighting for the very soul of his future generations.

She said to me on the telephone yesterday, she said, Brother Davis, I kept thinking about Michael's children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and I didn't want this going on down as a family curse to the generations to come, and I kept fighting not just for him, but for his future kids and for the generations to come. If our love would have driven him away, then so be it. But if we had done nothing, there would have been no hope.

She underlines no hope. She said, everybody tells you that when they turn 16, there's nothing you can do. She said, boy, were they wrong.

And she winds up with this. Our second child has been a real joy. We're now doing things to prevent problems.

I work at home and part-time from 4.30 to 8.30 a.m. so I can be at home. God has blessed us so much it's unbelievable. My daughter is my best friend.

We as a family have adopted new standards that we will not date at all. Our daughter is very happy with that. In fact, I could tell you more about that, but I don't have time.

The daughter gave me a testimony about that the other day. A boy asked her for a date. She gave him one of my tapes and said, listen to this.

He came back and he said, hey, that's pretty incredible. All of us are happy with these. I'm so thankful for God's love toward our family.

Absalom's story did not end as well as Michael's and his parents'. Absalom's men fought against David's men and 20,000 of them died. You see, when a person becomes a rebel, they not only sweep themselves up in their rebellion, very often many others are swept up and it brings destruction to many lives.

Then Absalom fled on a mule and his long hair caught in the boughs of an oak tree. He found himself dangling helplessly between heaven and earth. David had pleaded for his soldiers to deal gently with the young man for his sake, but General Joab, finding out where Absalom was, went straight to helpless Absalom dangling in the tree by his hair, shot three arrows in his chest while he was yet alive, and then ten

other soldiers drew their swords and hacked Absalom's body to pieces.

When the messengers came to tell David of the death of his son, the Bible said David was much moved. He walked weeping up some stairs to a little room, and the people heard him crying out as he went, Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, oh Absalom, my son, my son. We don't have to live with rebellion and disobedience.

God has given us his word and we can deal with it. If we're willing to pay the price as parents, we can indeed raise godly children. I close with one question.

Do you love your children enough to pay the price to raise godly children?

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