

CoreGroup Guide | The Christian Parent's Field Guide - Part 3

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Welcome

Parenting! In some ways it feels easier to focus on the early years when children's needs are immediate and demand active responses from parents. But these "hands on" duties shift as children grow older and become more independent. So far in this sermon series we have explored the role of parents in a child's earliest years as Captain and the next stage as Coach. As teens mature and leave home, parents face new challenges of "letting go" so older children can navigate their own faith journey. Today we consider parents as Counselors.

Opening Prayer

Dear God, help us to recall the emotions and desires to separate from our own parents that we experienced in our late teens. Use our time together as a group to reflect on our different perspectives and mindsets. Remind us that you guide our maturing children as they become more independent in faith and life. Bless our time and our conversation together. Amen.

Ice Breaker

What was an "out of the box" experience you had as an older teen that you did not tell your parents about?

The Head

Luke's gospel includes the powerful story Jesus told about a son who brashly asked for his inheritance early, left home, squandered his fortune, and later returned when times got hard. Read this recognizable text carefully aloud together as a group. Notice the circumstances, attitudes, and motivations of the three family members.

Luke 15:11-32

¹¹ Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. ¹² The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the inheritance.' Then the father divided his estate between them. ¹³ Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.

¹⁴ "When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, but I'm starving to death! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands." ' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. ²¹ Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! ²³ Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting ²⁴ because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. ²⁷ The servant replied, ‘Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then the older son was furious and didn’t want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. ²⁹ He answered his father, ‘Look, I’ve served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you’ve never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’ ³¹ Then his father said, ‘Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.’”

- Describe the initial attitude of the younger son who asks for his inheritance early.
- How does the younger son’s attitude change with his circumstances?
- Sum up how the father receives his younger son when he returns home.
- How does the older son react to the welcome his younger brother receives from their father? Why do you think he has this reaction?
- Who is Jesus talking to when he originally shares this parable (see Luke 15:1-2). What lesson or wisdom was he trying to communicate to them?

The Heart

In the later teen years, most children are trying to navigate life more independently. Whether it’s driving on their own or leaving home for higher education/work, these young adults rely less and less on parental assistance. But that does not mean they do not need (or want) support from the trusted adults in their life! This season may seem far away for some, or very “in the moment” for others, but the perspectives of all group members are helpful here.

- How do you feel about the father’s decision to give his younger son an early inheritance?
- The son’s unexpected return home brings up a lot of emotions in the family. Based on this text, which family member do you resonate with the most?
- Think about the young adults in your life. How might their reaction differ from your own?
- How has your understanding of this story shifted as you’ve aged and matured yourself?
- Do you think the story of the Prodigal Son is more about parenting or about God’s grace? In what ways does our understanding of one inform the other?

The Hands

We heard in this week’s sermon how parents can serve as Counselors for older teens who are asserting their independence. As we consider the Luke text and our lives today, we can reflect on this lesson and evaluate its applicability to parenting older teens.

- How would you describe the role of “counselor” for an older child who is preparing to leave home or who has already left the nest?
- What challenges do you envision in shifting your role from being a Coach on the sidelines to becoming a Counselor, on call as needed, but not observing every play in the game?
- Do you think the father made the right parenting choices along the way? How does your response to this question influence how you relate to God in this season?
- All children (and adults!) have different strengths, challenges, and support needs. How might families navigate this stage of parenting differently based on the unique abilities of their young adults?

Closing Prayer

Lord God, only you are able to parent children perfectly. Allow us to recognize the personal challenges we face in allowing our children to pursue their faith apart from us. Help us to trust you, God, as we step aside and watch them navigate their faith path independently. We love you and rely on you. Amen.

Going Deeper

The memory verse for this series is Proverbs 22:6 from the Common English Bible (CEB):

*Train children in the way they should go;
when they grow old, they won't depart from it.*

Here are three simple ways to practice memorizing a verse:

1. **Write it** (one time a day on a notecard, in your notes app, or on your mirror).
2. **Say it out loud** (at the same time daily - driving, brushing teeth, before bed).
3. **Pray it** (turn the verse into a one sentence prayer for yourself or someone you love).

Additional Resources

Intrigued by this Bible story? Consider reading: [Return of the Prodigal Son](#) by Henri Nouwen

From Pastor Charity

Here are a few things you can do to keep the group love going this Summer:

- Join a [Summer Hang](#) or consider hosting your own in July. There's still time!
- If you know anybody interested in starting a new CoreGroup or a new Wellness Group, invite them to the Lunch & learn on July 19.
- Plan on being there for Leader training on August 15.

Have a great Summer!