

Breaking the Law (Teen Rebellion)

Many if not all have had the experience of being pulled over by a policeman and rolling down the window only to hear him say, "is there a reason you were(fill in the blank). Sometimes it's because we were speeding, or we didn't stop at a stop sign, or we ran a red light. Depending on the severity of the offense determined the cost of the ticket. Think about the last time you received a ticket for breaking the law. You made a conscious choice to speed on the highway or you decided not to stop at the red light, so you hit the pedal to the medal. My point is we decide in a split second what choice we are going to make and many times we get away with that choice. Because we got away with that choice you feel comfortable about doing again until you get caught. The moment we get caught we stop in our tracks and have to think about the consequences. So too our teens have a habit of making decisions quickly and deliberately without thinking about the consequences. Often times they will get away with their poor choice and because they didn't get caught from their rebellious choice, they will continue to do it. However, once they get caught it will either stop them in their tracks and they will obey the consequences of their offense, or they will think it's no big deal and continue their rebellious nature. Something must happen to the teen to make them want to be obedient. We will take a look at what things have to happen in order for our teens to learn from their mistakes and not develop a rebellious nature. The three areas we are going to look at in our analogy are when they get caught speeding when they get caught running a stop sign or red light, and if they ever get caught drinking while driving, metaphorically of course.

Most of our teens when showing signs of rebellion, get caught in the speeding or running a stop sign/red light stage and can recover from the ticket they receive. However, when a teen moves over into the DUI stage of rebellion it's much more serious and difficult to recover from such an event in life for both the teen and the parent.

We all know there are different consequences for different offenses. For example, you may get caught speeding on a highway 10 miles over the posted speed limit. Even though you were going 85 miles an hour it was only 10 miles over the speed limit, so the cost of your ticket was \$120. However, what would be the cost if you were caught going 10 miles over the speed limit in a school zone? The penalty usually is at least double the fine due to the severity of speeding while children are present. It's the same way in the life of our teens when it comes to breaking rules/laws in our homes. The severity of the offense should determine the cost of the consequences. There is a big difference between breaking curfew a couple of times and driving while drunk or sleeping over in her boyfriends' bed. The "fines" should be consistent and plainly stated just like the cost of a speeding ticket is clearly stated on the ticket for each mile over the speed limit.

As stated earlier we are going to look at "teen rebellion" or "teen defiance". How does a parent respond when their teen becomes rebellious or defiant? We are going to look at ways to help our teens through this potentially difficult stage in their life. Teens have such a strong desire for independence that sometimes it pushes them into rebellion against parental rules and values.

What do I mean by rebellion? Rebellion in our discussion will mean when a teen willfully determines to say things, perhaps do things, or believe things that are contrary to the things of God and rebel against those who are placed in authority in their lives.

Proverbs 17:11 says, *“An evil man seeks only rebellion, and a cruel messenger will be sent against him.”* Now I could say the “evil man” is your teenager and the “cruel messenger” is you, the parent. Your teen becomes a little devil when they are rebellious, and you will deliver a very cruel message to them when they get home. That sounds a little humorous but, as we’ll see throughout this chapter, rebellion is not funny. What the above passage in Proverbs does say, is that rebellion and evil go hand in hand. Once a teen makes rebellion a pattern in their life, they will display certain evil characteristics. As I said earlier when I am referring to rebellion, I am not talking about those far and few situations when your teen pushes your buttons and comes home late from a party. A teen who displays signs of consistent rebellion is well aware of the consequences of their choices, and it does not bother them when they break the rules. It’s almost like they refuse to pay the ticket for their offense and when a warrant is issued for their arrest they could care less. We will delve into this form of a rebellious nature later in this chapter.

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the definition of rebellion is "opposition to one in authority or dominance", or “refusal to obey rules or accept normal standards of behavior, dress, etc...” Sounds like a teenager to me, doesn't it to you? We must be able to separate the difference between a teen's desire to become independent by pushing our buttons to see how far they can go, versus a teen's desire to openly rebel against parental rules and values. Teens will challenge the values of a parent as well as certain rules because they want to know if the value or rule is worth having.

Throughout the next few pages, we will be discussing whether our teen is having temporary moments of rebellion against our leadership due to their immaturity, verses a full scale long-term rebellious nature. How do we determine whether it’s immaturity that leads to temporary rebellion or true deep-seated rebellion that could stay for years? The rebellion will be temporary or long term depending on.

1. **How mature or immature are they in non-rebellious activity?** For example, how mature are their thought process and general outlook when it comes to grades, friends, work, finances, politics, school, and church? If your son says, "Why do I have to make good grades in math? Nothing I’m learning now will make a difference 20 years from now. Besides, I’m going to be a pilot. They don’t have to learn math." That’s immature. If your daughter says, “Johnny is too a good boy, why else would he be doing community service on the weekend?” That is immature. If they show signs of immaturity in these areas and just make poor choices that are not well thought out, then chances are their future rebellion will be short-lived. As they mature, they will see the need for change in order to succeed. On the other hand, if they are very mature in their outlook in these areas then there is the potential for a well-thought-out plan on how to become a rebel and take a stance against

what is right in their eyes. I am not saying if your teen is very mature in their thought process that they will be rebellious. I am saying that most rebellious teens are usually rebels because they have thought through and believe what they are doing what is best for them and will defend their position with fervor.

2. How consistent are they in their rebellious nature? In other words, much like a two-year-old who refuses to quit asking over and over and over again to do something until the parent feels like they have to give in so the child will be quiet, so it is with a teen. Not so much verbally because teens hardly speak, but in their actions, how consistent are they in refusing to obey your leadership, your discipline? Do they fight you and maybe call you names, slam doors, and say you're being unfair when you require them to obey your rules, but eventually submit and slowly change? Then their rebellion is due to immaturity. If they consistently refuse to submit to your leadership in almost all areas over a long period of time with no real change in behavior, then there is the possibility of a true rebellious nature developing.
3. How prideful and arrogant are they? Do they have a superior attitude and think highly of themselves that it's extremely obvious to all? Do they look down at others due to some gift they have from God such as a high intellect, athletic superiority, and musical ability? When an attitude of pride enters the soul of a teen that is not managed with humility then rebellion has a way of creeping into the life of the teen. They will take the position, even against the parent or anyone in the authority of, "who are you to tell me what's right or wrong? I know what's best for me." (prodigal son syndrome).

Let's take a look at our first analogy, speeding.

Speeding

What do I mean by "speeding"? Metaphorically, a speeding violation relates to their desire to be independent before they are mature enough to handle all their choices. In other words, they want to be an adult quickly and will try and speed the process up. This immaturity leads them to take a risk by breaking rules. Risk is adventurous and exciting and it's a teen's way of taking a chance for their independence. So, a teen tries to get to a place in their life faster by taking potentially defiant risks, rather than slowing down and obeying the rules set down by the parent. This lack of maturity will many times get them in trouble with the law (the parent). I want to make it clear that much of this risk-taking is part of growing up, and immaturity is not rebellion. Rebellion comes into play when they knowingly show defiance consistently against their parents' rules or value system. The keyword is consistent. A one-time mistake or testing the limits does not make a rebellious teen.

A teen starts speeding when they decide to take matters into their own hands without thinking about the consequences, for example, consistently breaking curfew. They rebel against

their parent's wishes of getting home by the assigned curfew. The teen feels like they are old enough to stay out as late as they want and should not be restricted. They think by having to be home by a certain hour they are being treated like a child. After all, their parents get to stay out as late as they want. When they go off to college they will stay out as late as they want so my parents might as well start getting used to it is their thought process. There is a great passage in the Bible found in Galatians 6:7 that says,

"Don't be deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

This passage on the surface is clear. You reap the type of lifestyle you sow. But I'd like for us to look between the lines of this passage and ask a few questions. First, how do you mock God? This passage says God cannot be mocked. We think we mock God by living a lifestyle that ignores God's principles. It's like when we speed and get away with not getting caught, we mock the speed limit law. But God says, you only deceive yourself when you think like that. Sooner or later you will reap what you sow. If you speed a lot, you will eventually get caught. Teens speed a lot metaphorically and they get away with a lot before they get caught. One way they try to mock God is by ignoring some very key principles from God's Word, such as learning to obey your parents. One such principle is found in Ephesians 6:1, *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."* If a teen can't consistently obey their parents, they are robbing themselves of the opportunity to learn a life skill of submission. They will have to submit in numerous ways when they are an adult but as a teen, they don't see the need for such. They believe it's all about the parent wanting to limit their freedom and fun.

It's clear that this passage doesn't say only obey when your parents are right, or it agrees with what you think. Where most teens blow it with their parents and where most parents blow it with their teens is how they interpret this passage. The parents often will say to their teen that they MUST obey them because the Bible says so. The teen says to the parent they don't want to obey all the time because "you're not always right". Soon strong disagreements will arise, and yelling matches begin. The key to the above passage are the words, "in the Lord." A teen cannot obey their parents consistently if they don't have the right attitude spiritually. It's not that they MUST obey their parent because the parent "says so". They obey the parent because they are "in the Lord". A teen is "in the Lord" when they are walking with Him daily and are living a spirit-filled life. Obviously, when a teen is living in a rebellious state they will not be controlled by the Holy Spirit and will quench their walk with Him.

Let me also mention at this point that many parents use this verse improperly to force their children to obey them. They forget a couple of verses later in Ephesians 6:4 it says, *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* Too many times parents will frustrate their teens by the way they talk to them, instruct them, and discipline them. There is a requirement on the parent's part when they are trying to deal with a rebellious nature in their teen. It's clear by this passage that they are literally to train them up by instructing them "in the Lord". Notice both parties have the responsibility of being "in the Lord".

Many teens get pushed out of the home and some parents blame the teen's irresponsible and defiant behavior. There is no doubt that much of the problem lies with a rebellious teen, but there are times a parent is also responsible because of their lack of spiritual control in their own lives. How can a parent expect their teen to live a certain Godly life of submission if the parent doesn't live a Godly life that shows the example of submission?

There's good news for parents when it pertains to a teen that is becoming increasingly rebellious in their nature. You have a partner who is not pleased with such behavior and takes rebellion very seriously. God will stand with you and help you take on the task of doing what is right. There is a story in the Old Testament found in I Sam. 15: 22-23 and it says, *But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. **For rebellion is as the sin of divination**, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."*

Did you pick up what God calls rebellion? He says it is like the sin of divination. The word "divination" refers to demon worship or demonism. That's kind of harsh, isn't it? In the later part of the verse, the word "arrogance" can also be translated in Hebrew as "insubordination." God says arrogance or insubordination is like the evil of idolatry. Here is a very strong warning to all parents about their teens. **When arrogance is a prevailing character flaw of your teen and stubborn and rebellious nature is CONSISTENTLY present, this is a serious matter.** This behavior is not a laughing matter and something, "they'll grow out of", and should not be viewed as just "teens being teens." When true rebellion exists, God takes the matter very seriously and doesn't mess around and neither should a parent. Remember, don't confuse the natural and normal daily growing pains a teen and parent go through as they help their teen develop independence. The teen has to learn how to eventually set their own curfew, handle their own finances, and in a way learn to govern their own self. I am talking about when a teen decides to use intimidating methods to control the home and get their way no matter who gets hurt. The parent at this time must take rebellion as seriously as God does at this point. So, when a teen tells a parent they won't respect the parents' wishes for a curfew then the parent now has to take steps to stop this type of behavior. Speeding tickets are usually more associated with immaturity and a desire to be independent of rules than true rebellion. One quick test you can take in matters like curfews and other offenses, is how consistent are they in continuing to disobey your request and how belligerent are they in accepting your consequences? Every teen will disappoint and push parent's buttons as they try to speed in life. When they get their "ticket" for breaking the law how do they respond? Do they accept the penalty, though they will not be happy, or do they throw the ticket away and say "come after me with a warrant? If you notice that they refuse to pay the price of their ticket and refuse to obey the rules consistently, and that's the key, then you must accept the fact that unless their attitude is changed they might find themselves not only speeding but soon will be running red lights and driving under the influence. I will share more of this when we get to the section in this chapter called "Traffic Court."

Sidebar: Parents let me take a sidebar for a moment pertaining to dealing with a rebellious teen. We all agree that we must deal with rebellion quickly and thoroughly. Many parents don't want to deal with a rebellious teen because it's hard and difficult and they would rather just do their best to ignore it. Dealing with a rebellious teen is not fun. It will be heartbreaking, frustrating, and in many ways, you'll feel like you're at your wit's end. But rebellion must be dealt with and it must be dealt with firmly. A parent must learn how to "stand firm" in their convictions to not allow true rebellion to exist in the home. You as the parent cannot allow your authority in the home to be undermined.

This leads us to the second type of traffic ticket.

Running a Stop Sign or Red Light-

What is the purpose of a stop sign or red light? It has two major purposes. The first is to manage cross traffic so people do not kill each other and protect them from harm. The second reason is to help manage the flow of traffic, so things run smoothly. Now put that in perspective to the home. Teens are told to "stop" when showing signs of rebellion in order to make sure family members don't kill each other and get hurt. Secondly, they are told to stop so things run smoothly within the home. When consistent rebellion is allowed in the home it disrupts the unity of the home and people get hurt. A teen must learn how to stop their defiant behavior so others can move forward. When a teen refuses to modify their behavior and refuses to work hard at stopping, as the scripture told us in I Samuel; arrogant and insubordinate activity, trouble in the home will exist.

An example of a teen refusing to stop their rebellious nature would be a teen girl who is dating a boy against her parents' wishes. In addition to dating a boy that her parents disapprove of she also dresses provocatively and goes to parties against their wishes. Right now, she has just gotten a ticket for not stopping at a parental stop sign or red light. She is refusing to listen to their counsel as to why dating this boy can lead to all sorts of problems. She is starting to show signs of a rebellious nature and due to her immaturity, thinks mom and dad just want to rob her of enjoying life. Because she refuses to stop this behavior, she is becoming a potential DUI candidate, which we will address later in this chapter. Mom and dad will need to take her to "Traffic Court" and hope she listens and responds to the rule of law or there is a very good chance she will in this instance become sexually active. Once mom and dad know she is sexually active it will become a very volatile situation in the home. There are lots of doors slamming and many nights where mom and dad wonder where their daughter is and when will she come home. They feel lost as parents and are frustrated because they can't seem to get things under control. The daughter has an attitude that basically says, "I'm going to take what's mine in life and I don't care what you say." She is saying "I want to get the heck out of this place as soon as I can and I don't want any restrictions in my life." This sounds like the story of the prodigal son in the Bible except it's a girl rather than a boy. The daughter, in this case, is not taking an inheritance but she is rebelling against the status quo of the home.

We all know the story of the prodigal son found in Luke chapter 15. I recommend you read the whole story, but I will give a brief summation. The youngest son wanted his inheritance so he went to his father and demanded he gives it to him so he could leave and go do what he wanted to do and when he wanted to do it. Amazingly the father gave it to him and allowed him to leave. I will share some very difficult counsel from Dr. John White later in this chapter that deals with letting a rebellious child go. His counsel is gripping and hard to grasp but worth evaluating.

Let's get back to our story. The young man took his portion of his inheritance and left town. He hooked up in another town and eventually went through all his money. Maybe he lived in an apartment that was way too expensive. Perhaps he bought nothing but the best in clothes and fine food. He probably spent way too much money on girls and he more than likely partied all night and as often as he could. Life was great and he could not be happier. Meanwhile, we gather from the story that the father was always looking for the return of his son. I imagine there were many months that went by and as he looked out the window, he never saw his rebellious son. I can imagine his heart was broken and he had no idea if he would ever see him again. But reality kicked in and the immaturity of the youngest son eventually caught up with him. His money ran out and he had no real-life skills to help him get a decent job. He did not think through very well what would happen when the money ran out. He was forced to live on the street and eventually was eating the slop of the hogs. In other words, he was what we call dumpster diving looking for anything he could to eat. Life was no longer great. All the parties went away and so did the girls. Then in verse 17 of chapter 15, it says, "when he came to his senses." So, if he had to come to his senses he must have been out of his senses, almost like temporarily insane. Think about this very carefully parents.

In our example of our rebellious teenage daughter who is dating the wrong type of boy and is sexually active, we can see similarities to the prodigal son. She refuses to listen to the counsel of her parents. Perhaps it's because she is out of her senses. It's almost impossible to reason with a rebel who refuses all counsel from their parents. You can punish a rebel, you can warn them, you can ground them, you can correct them, you can put your foot down and demand obedience, and you can even help guide them in the right direction. But *you can't force them to change*. Just like the rebellious son in Luke, some teens are so hell-bent on rebelling that they are unreasonable because they are basically temporarily out of their senses.

In our story of the prodigal son, we don't know how long he lived on the street, but it was evidently for quite some time. He was a very prideful young man and he was not going to give in easy. Mom and dad, I want to let you know that it may take years for your rebellious son or daughter to come to their senses. There is no guarantee that they will come to their senses. Sadly, many a teen left home estranged from mom and dad only to live a life of destruction. It may take years of painful experiences through natural consequences before they come to their senses. Usually, it will take a traumatic experience to snap a rebellious teen back to reality. Parents hate

the thought of watching their child suffer so needlessly, but if you try to protect them from this suffering you will more than likely enable them to continue their rebellion.

Okay, I'll try to get back to the story. Finally, after the son comes to his senses, Luke tells us that he wanted to go back home. He was humiliated and felt that if his father would only take him back as a servant he would at least eat well. Do you know what I find interesting by the son's comment before he came home? The son did not talk about getting back to his room or any of the things in the home. All he talked about was how he wanted to see his father. What the son missed the most was a relationship with his dad. Believe it or not, parents your child wants YOU more than anything else you can offer them. We know from the story that the father was always watching for the son to return. When he saw his son far off, he didn't wait for the son to come to him. Instead, the father ran to him with open arms and welcomed him back not as a servant but as an heir. Notice he didn't run to the son yelling at him "it's about time you came to your senses, I told you so." Instead, he offered him mercy and compassion. The reason why the father was able to offer compassion was he understood that only Godly action would break through a broken spirit that has been rebellious. I said earlier that a rebel can't be reasoned with because they are not in their right mind. Many times, the only thing that will allow a rebel to come to their senses are the consequences of their poor decisions. It is extremely important that the parent accepts the broken child back offering compassion and mercy and not judgment. Compassion and mercy will break through their cold and stony heart. Believe me, a broken and contrite teen knows better than anyone that they have done wrong and wants help breaking free from this sin. The humility required to make the decision to come back into the fold is very difficult for them and they need all the support they can get.

The story ends as you know in a wonderful way. The son can hardly get his apology and confession out before his father stops him and brings him in the house. The scripture says, "They embraced". Some of you probably have an image of a hug. But the Greek word for embrace is kissed repeatedly. The picture is the father and son kissed each other over and over and over again due to the excitement and joy of his return. We know the father brought his son in the house and had him put on the finest of garments and he threw a feast for him. The greatest verse in the entire story at the very end says, *"Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.* I will put this passage in 21st-century lingo. What he is saying is here is my son who didn't believe as I believe, who refused to listen to my counsel, who was selfish and arrogant, and he didn't live as I raised him. It was as if he were dead. But now he's been raised to a new life. The passage ends by saying they celebrated and celebrate they did.

Rebellion is not a pretty picture and is almost impossible to control when it gets out of hand. Some of you might be saying, "What are some practical tips you can give us to help us if and when our teen becomes rebellious?" I want to reiterate that there is no magical formula that works as one size fits all. Rebellion is the most difficult thing to deal with when it invades the life of our

teens. Sometimes you can try everything under the sun and your teen still exhibits signs of rebellion. As stated in the story above, sometimes only natural painful consequences are the only thing that wakes your kid up and back to their senses. However, there are certain things you can do to make sure you are firm in your stance while still exhibiting compassion during their rebellion. As stated earlier we'll talk about that in "Traffic Court" at the end of this chapter. In the meantime, let me share with you one of the worst kinds of tickets your teen can bring into your home.