

willing to go to rescue (or keep) their children from a tough or dangerous situation?. Should we be willing to do almost anything for them? Should our focus be on punishing our children for their mistakes or should it be more on their well being and our desire to provide a way for them to return to a loving relationship with us? *God* doesn't delight in punishing *us*. His desire is that we *return* to Him.

*"The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* (II Peter 3:9 NIV)

That's quite a level of commitment God has made to us — not to mention the sacrifice Jesus made to provide the method of reconciliation. As parents, do we do all that we *can* to be sure that our children are given *every* opportunity to remain safe and secure as long as they are in our care — even when it may be extremely inconvenient or perhaps even costly for us? How great *is* our level of commitment to our children? How much *are* we willing to sacrifice for *them*? Maybe even *more* importantly — how much do *they* think we're willing to sacrifice for them? Do *they* perceive that our *real* goal in life is to retire comfortably and *they're* not much more than something to be endured until they are old enough to be "out of our hair"? Do they perhaps feel that they are mostly "in the way" of us having the time to enjoy the things we *really want* to do — like play more golf or have the money to buy nicer clothes? Just how important do *they* believe they are to us? Do *they* see parents that are so busy with their *own* lives that there is little time to devote to *them* and *their* interests? Do they see parents that are unwilling to take the time or perhaps spend the money to help *them* accomplish *their* goals or pursue *their* interests? Have we demonstrated a *sacrificial* kind of love toward them? Do they believe that *their well being is the most important thing* to us? Have we provided an atmosphere that would allow our children to feel comfortable enough to call us at 1:00 a.m. and ask us to pick them up at a friend's house because they had been drinking and didn't think they should drive home? Do our children *believe* that we would be *willing* to go to the police station at 3:00 a.m. because the "slumber party" they were attending had been raided and the underage drinking occurring there had resulted in them being taken to jail? How far do *they* think *we* would go to give *them* a way out from a really bad choice on *their* part? How far did *God* go to give *us* a way out from a really bad choice on *our* part? These are all questions parents can only answer for themselves. But you get the picture. Should the mission of parents *sometimes* be to create an environment that *allows a way out* that is not punishing but instead provides a *safe and easy* way to be back in a loving relationship with them? Isn't that what God our Father has done for *us*? Will we have to endure the fires of hell even though we make numerous poor choices — or is that punishment suspended *IF we choose to accept the method of reconciliation* that He has provided? Just give it some thought.

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# DILIGENCE

*"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11*

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

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Issue 2

## A Lamp — Some Money — A Choice

In the previous issue of *Diligence* we discussed the fact that God provides us with a choice that allows reconciliation with Him when we fail to act in a responsible way. We noted that even if we succumb to temptation, God provides His children a way to return to a loving relationship with Him *if we choose to accept the method of reconciliation* that He has provided.

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (I John 1:9 NIV)

We posed the question that if God our heavenly Father sees fit to offer a way back to a loving relationship with Him — no matter *how* irresponsible our choice — should we as parents do anything less for *our* children? That previous article attempted to make the point that parents should begin — when their children are *very* young — *training* them *how* to make good choices *on their own*. Parents who have some level of confidence that their children have *learned* to make good decisions on their own *before* they reach those teen years, will find a degree of reassurance as those children branch out further and further away from the eye sight of the parents. As we concluded that previous issue, the question was asked as to how parents can meet the challenge of dealing with the natural concerns that go along with those somewhat frightening teen years that we all face with our children — concerns like — who are they with?, who is driving?, is anyone drinking?, etc. What if they *do* make a bad choice — or the friends they are *with* make bad choices? What can parents do that will get their youngsters home *safely* rather than have them end up wrapped around a tree as a result of getting into a car with a drunk or unsafe driver?

We believe that parents can devise a plan that will make it *easy* for their youngster to *not* get in the car with a drunk or unsafe driver. How? Well, let's think about this a minute. If you were a teen ager and was with a friend who had been drinking and it was 2 hours past your curfew — what would *you* do? Would *you* call your parents *knowing* that you'll probably be grounded for *weeks* (not to mention the friend making fun of you for calling "mommy and daddy") or would you take your *chances* on getting home without them ever knowing about it? There's not really a *good* choice here, is there? One choice is almost *certain* to evoke parental discipline and/or wrath and the other could very easily end in tragedy. So what parents have to do, is make it *easier* for the teen to *admit* that he or she "messed up" rather than *die* trying to *hide* it. In our case, we devised a plan that would give our sons an option that *they* would view as an *easy* escape from a serious mistake — a plan that would provide a way back into a wholesome relationship with us *if they choose*

to accept the method of reconciliation that we provided. So what did we do? Well, the few of you with whom we have shared this story over the past few years have encouraged us to share it with all who read this publication. So here it is.

Each son was told that there would *always* be money under the base of whichever lamp in the house was nearest to the front door. The money we kept there would *always be more than enough* to pay for a cab ride home from *anywhere* in the metro area. We instructed them that if at any time they ever felt that they had made a bad choice of *any* sort — whether it was the friends they had chosen to be with or their *own* irresponsible behavior, they could either call us to pick them up (*no matter* the hour of the day or night) or if *that* was too embarrassing in front of their friends, they were to call a cab and pay the driver with the money under the lamp — it would *always* be there. But that wasn't the end of that arrangement. They knew that we had great trust and confidence in their ability to make good choices, but *if* there ever *was* a need for them to use that money or to call us to pick them up, we believed that the humiliation they would experience from having to *do* that would be punishment enough for them. *There would be no parental wrath: no questions asked; no explanation required about the circumstances that led to the occurrence and no further punishment — IF they chose to take that way out of the bad situation!* It was pretty much a “no brainer” from their perspective. It was indeed a *good* way out. It's not too hard to tell a friend “nah — you're pretty tipsy — let's call a cab and go to my house. We'll call your folks from there and get the car tomorrow.” — or — “no way, call me ‘chicken’ if you want but you drive like a maniac. I'm calling a cab to get home.” Easy, huh? Our *first and foremost desire* was to be sure they didn't put their life (or the lives of others) at risk in an effort to *hide* their poor choice from us. The agreement was that our reaction in such a case would be one of *relief* that they had mustered the *courage* to admit to making a bad decision. Our desire to have them alive *far exceeded* our desire to punish them for making a poor choice — and they knew that was the way we felt — and that our promise would be kept.

Well, many of you know that those boys are now grown and married. Like all parents, we had some nervous evenings during the teen years — but the money under the lamp was never used and there was only *one* night time call (one son and his *brand new* car had an “argument” with a pole in a parking garage on Prom night. We told him what to do for insurance purposes, not to worry about it and enjoy the rest of the evening). We never *really* knew if the money under the lamp — coupled with the promise of no punishment if it *was* used — ever made much of an impression over those years. That is, we never knew until the summer of 2002. That summer, one of those sons was home with several of his friends from college. Their goal that summer was for all of them to visit each of their respective parent's homes and take a sort of “memory tour” of their particular town and home — visiting their old high schools, their old hang outs, etc. and sifting through “memory boxes” that each of them seemed to have accumulated over their lifetime. Much to our surprise, as our son was “touring” our house with his friends and pointing out

various things that were important to him, he stopped at the lamp nearest the door and said to his friends; “Without even looking, I'm betting there's money under that lamp.” He lifted the lamp — and there it was — just as it had been all through high school. He explained to them why it was there and that there were a few times just *knowing* it was there gave him the *determination* to make appropriate decisions so that he didn't *have* to use it. It was an encouragement to him to know that *his well being was so important to us* that he was *assured* of total forgiveness *if* he simply made the decision to not put his life (or his friends' lives) at risk. *THAT'S* what was important. That money caused him to put the pressure on himself. He truly *had* learned that the responsibility to make good choices was *his!*

Well, of course, the time has long passed when we might expect either of those boys to use that money under the lamp — but it's still there. For sure, it's no *longer enough* for a cab fare from hardly any where in the city but we suppose there will always be money under the lamp nearest to the front door of our house as long as we live. Perhaps it now serves as nothing more than a testimonial to the fine Christian young adults they have become. Mostly, though, we are grateful to God for bestowing that blessing on us. Parents should never miss a day praying for their children and for the wisdom needed to raise them to become Christian adults. The money under the lamp was *our* method of stating that we had trust in our youngsters but at the same time recognized that people *do* make mistakes. Perhaps, *today* parents would have to say, “we don't care *how* big the “hit” is on the check card — just *use* it, get home *safely* and *we'll* cover it.” In *our* case, the money under the lamp was what indicated to them that *they* were what mattered to us. Their *well being* was far more important than punishing them for making a bad choice.

We should point out here that this kind of training can probably not *start* at the teen age level. If it does, the teen *may* possibly *abuse* the confidence and trust that the parents would be attempting to demonstrate to him or her. So, as we previously stated in this series, training needs to begin early for this to be a useful idea. Teens who have never *learned* to make responsible decisions on their own may not *start* doing so because of implementing some sort of money under the lamp idea.

Now with all this talk about children making choices for themselves, we want to be sure to make one thing perfectly clear. Parents have a *responsibility* to *TRAIN* their children *HOW* to make wise choices. This means that parents *MUST NOT* just sit back and say things like “let 'im figure it out the hard way like I did” or “Well, if he *does* do (this or that) I'll bet he won't make that mistake but *once*” or any other “cop-out” excuse for failing to “...bring (their children) up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:4 NIV). That is a *command* given to parents by God.

As God' children, we know that He gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross *so that we would have a method of reconciliation* to return to a loving relationship with Him when we make poor choices in our lives. We know the agony and the suffering that Jesus endured to make that path possible for us to travel. If God our Father and Jesus His Son were willing to do *that for us*, how far should parents be