

a serious consequence would remain for that sin.

“Nathan replied, ‘The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die.’” (II Sam. 12:13-14 NIV)

As parents there are some valuable — though subtle — lessons we can draw from these examples. We can note that God followed a pattern in the way He treated mankind. We don’t have a checklist of what to do — but a pattern we can imitate. As we look at Scripture, consider God’s ways. First — He instructed in a way that was clearly understood by His children. Second — He allowed His children to *choose* whether or not they would follow His instruction. Third — when His instructions were *not* followed, He chose to either 1) use discipline, 2) allow the natural consequence to occur, 3) punish the offender or 4) instruct again.

We know that in the example of Noah and Lot’s family, instructions were given and the failure to adhere to the instructions met with destruction. In the case of David, although God forgave the offense, there was nevertheless punishment. With Joshua, the wrong had to be corrected. With the Israelites, God gave them chance after chance even while punishing the guilty. The most amazing part about God is that to the very end, He was always hopeful of a good outcome.

When we as parents have exhausted every effort, and all of our energy is spent doing our best, we must conclude that we *have* done our best. Having done so, we must accept that even God *could* not and *did* not gain the respect of many of those with whom he was *directly* involved. These Biblical examples tell us that even God had to concede that with some people — even *He* could not get them to do right.

God is no less God because some are drawn more to their own worldly lusts rather than to Him. That *is* the very nature of the being that God created. God *gives* us the freedom to *choose* our *own* direction in life. Parents are no less parents when all has been done that *can* be done and children still choose a life of destruction. The very nature of that child allows him or her to *choose* — even if the parents have done *everything* perfectly. After all, God is surely the perfect Father — and yet we saw in these examples that some of His children chose a destructive direction.

One last thought. Just as God hopes for the return of erring children, parents can hope that — in the ways that are possible for the children to return — they will do so. While the physical and emotional consequences of making wrong choices may continue for all of ones life — those consequences *need not be eternal*. David made some *terrible* mistakes yet he was said to be a man after God’s own heart (I Sam. 13:14). Setting the Godly example of welcoming the return of a repented sinner may be the lesson they can take to another generation.

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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

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Consequences

The price we pay for our actions — or lack of actions, can be *very* costly. In a spiritual sense — it can result in our *eternal* damnation. The Scriptures tell us in I Timothy 2:4 that God “wants *all* men to be saved” (NIV). When we consider this desire of God — who can do all things — it’s hard to comprehend His willingness to allow us to take destructive paths and not intervene.

The power of individual choice is perhaps the greatest power given to mankind. We have the power to accept or reject our very Creator. We have the power to *select* whether we will spend eternity in heaven or eternity in hell. Many people however, simply choose to ignore the reality of God — let alone become involved in learning more about Him and His eternal plan for mankind.

Early in the Scriptures we see the power of choice exercised repeatedly. The Scriptures record the *results* of many of those choices — some good ones and some bad ones. Thus one can certainly not say that Scripture is biased and reported only those instances that demonstrated proper choices. Let us not overlook the fact that it is in the context of reporting the results of both good and bad choices that God risked his only Son to come to earth and be tested in the same way as all mankind is tested.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.” (Heb. 4:15 NIV)

The event of Jesus Christ becoming man and living on this earth was foretold (I Pet. 1:20) and carried out as God had planned. Throughout that process however, the *result* was in the hands of a *man* with freewill to do as He chose. This is a clear example of how willing God was to prove the value of choice and freewill. Although man’s freedom to exercise freewill resulted in many rejections of God by man, we see again and again throughout the Scriptures that God was nevertheless relentless in his willingness to allow mankind to have freedom of choice. The fact that Jesus was a man — *just as we are* — allowed the *opportunity* for Him to chose to *reject* death on the cross (Matt. 26:39-44 and 53-54).

Volumes are written attempting to psychoanalyze the cause and effect of people’s behavior. Many professionals try to figure out how to fix broken people *without* consulting the Designer of mankind. It would of course be ludicrous to suggest that *all* the ills of the current world are related to the rejection of God, but there is a definite tie to the morals of the world we live in today with the lack of respect given to God’s Word as a guide for proper or good behavior.

The question is often asked by parents who have children who seem to be going in a destructive direction, “What are we supposed to do?” The unfortunate reality is that it may be too late to do much by that time. But, before we throw up our hands and conclude that all is lost, let’s consider what God did with His children when they were unruly.

We find rebellion in the *earliest* accounts of God dealing with His children. The very first people *rejected* God’s instructions. The result of Adam and Eve making a bad choice is known by believers and unbelievers alike. But that’s where the understanding of God’s relationship with man ends for many. For the balance of this article let’s consider how God dealt with *His* children and see if there are any clues we can extract for us as parents.

That first example — Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is well known. Very clear instructions were given concerning what was acceptable behavior and what was *not* acceptable. They were given the choice to accept or to reject those instructions. When they were presented with an alternative to following those *God-given* instructions however, they made the choice to *accept* the *alternative* and they therefore paid the consequences as directed by God. The story is all too familiar — they had to leave the Garden and the curse on mankind remains to this day as a result of that bad choice.

The second example — We read in Genesis 6 that God-fearing people began to intermarry with ungodly women *because* they were attractive — even though they were ungodly. They *chose* to fulfill their own desires rather than continue to walk with God. That chapter states that “*the earth was corrupt in God’s sight...all the people on earth had corrupted their ways...every inclination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil all the time...*” Only Noah, his sons and his son’s wives had remained blameless among the people. What was the consequence for those who made bad choices? “*The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth*” and He said “*I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.*” What was the outcome for the few who made good choices? — The Lord said to Noah: “*Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark — you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.*”

A third example — Genesis 18 and 19 tells of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Even though the angels told Lot to warn his sons-in-law that the cities were going to be destroyed, they didn’t believe his warning and were destroyed with the cities. Even Lot’s wife — after being told “*don’t look back*” — did so, “*and she became a pillar of salt.*” They made bad choices.

A fourth example — After the Israelites left Egypt, their thrill of victory quickly subsided as they faced the wilderness with no food or water. They seemed to forget the power God had demonstrated through the 10 plagues that had eventually allowed their departure from Egypt. Because of this apparently short memory they experienced, they began to make one bad choice after another — over and over, again

and again. They murmured about not having water — God gave it to them. They complained about not having food — God gave it to them. Yet time and time again, they failed to obey God and have faith that He would care for them. They had enthusiastically accepted the terms of God’s covenant with them and then promptly made a golden calf to worship while Moses was gone longer than they thought he should be (Ex. 32:1-8). But God renewed the covenant with them saying:

“...The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (Ex. 34:6-7 NIV)

In modern day parenting terms, we might say that God gave the Israelites a 40 year “time-out” between their leaving Egypt and their entering the promised land.

A fifth example — After the miraculous victory over Jericho, it seemed that the Israelites could *easily* take the city of Ai — but they failed. They failed because Achan had kept some of the “devoted things” (NIV) from Jericho for himself even though God had given specific instructions as to what should be done with those items. Joshua was fearful as to what would happen to the Israelites after that defeat at Ai and went to the Lord for help.

“The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.’” (Joshua 7:10-13 NIV)

A sixth example — David’s sin with Bathsheba and then his attempted “cover-up” of that sin greatly displeased the Lord.

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house...’” (II Sam. 12: 7-10 NIV)

While God heard and accepted David’s heartfelt prayer for forgiveness (Psalm 51),