

BIBLICAL PARENTING STUDY ELEVEN

Suggestions for Parenting Grown-Up Kids

Ephesians 4:25–32

Your grown-up sons or daughters deserve to hear the truth from you, not necessarily what they may want to hear but, at the right time, what they need to hear.

—Charles R. Swindoll

GREAT anticipation and excitement mark the beginning of marriage. Then challenges arrive with the birth of children, which require the couple to learn parenting skills without a handbook. With each stage of their child's growth—from preschool through elementary school, middle school, and high school—parents must fine-tune their skills if they hope to sustain harmony in the home.

Then, after all that adapting, a new set of challenges arises when the children reach adulthood. Can there still be mutual respect and meaningful relationships in the family? Can harmony continue between parents and their grown-up kids? Absolutely! Let's look to Ephesians 4 for God's direction.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The goal of all our relationships is harmony. “How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony,” exclaimed the psalmist (Psalm 133:1). The same can be said of parents and their adult children! Take a moment and pray for harmony between you and your children as we open our study.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The theme of harmony winds through Ephesians 4 and flows into six practical principles about relationships in the church that we can apply to families with adult children. To uncover these principles, we'll use the steps in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, beginning by observing the divine source from which all family harmony flows.¹



Observation: The Goal Is Harmony

Read *Ephesians 4:3* to find the divine source. What does this verse say?

Paul's command to church members, "Keep yourselves *united in the Spirit*," is particularly fitting for family members. The Holy Spirit joins us to our adult children with a power that is stronger than any family tie. No rift is too cavernous to cross. No issue is too complex for God through His Spirit to solve, because "nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37 NASB).

Not only is the Spirit with us, He equips us. According to Ephesians 4:7, the Spirit "has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ." What is the purpose and result of using these gifts? Read verses *12–13* to find the answer.



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There's our word again, *unity*. We achieve more and more unity as we *build up* one another, *grow up* in Christ, and *measure up* to His standard.

Finally, we experience the benefits of unity. List these benefits as you find them in *Ephesians 4:16*.

As each family member matures into who God made him or her to be and contributes his or her unique gift, the whole family becomes “healthy and growing and full of love” (Ephesians 4:16). Now that's harmony at its best!



Interpretation: Six Principles for Relating to Adult Children

An ear pressed against the door of your family home may not hear harmonious voices. Paul's melody of unity within church and family is possible with God's help, but it takes effort on our part—specifically, by putting into practice the following six principles.

Speak Truth

Think of the “neighbor” in the following verse as your adult child.

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR**, for we are members of one another. (Ephesians 4:25 NASB)



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Versions of the Bible follow different formatting rules to indicate special cases in translation. For example, the NASB version uses small caps to indicate that a New Testament author quoted from the Old Testament and italics to show which words don't appear in the original text but have been added to clarify the ancient syntax for modern-day readers. In this verse, you can see the added words in italics, as well as the phrases that the translators believe Paul borrowed from *Zechariah 8:16*. Why do you think Paul quoted this verse to support his point?

Your grown-up son or daughter needs to hear the truth from you. Talk straight. Don't fudge the truth by saying something is okay when it isn't. Don't hold back your honest feelings (about the person he or she is dating, for example). Don't shade your better judgment when asked for advice on a moral dilemma.

Have you been sidestepping an issue with your adult child? If so, raise your right hand, and swear to tell the whole truth from now on! Here's some space to write down what you may need to say.



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Get Passionate

The next verse may surprise you with Paul’s opener: “Be angry . . .” (Ephesians 4:26 NASB)! The form of anger Paul describes here isn’t an out-of-control temper caused when a person doesn’t get his or her way. Instead, what do you think Paul means?

Let your adult children see your tears over evil and the resolve in your heart for what’s right and good. Find a cause that lights your fire. If you can’t find one, borrow a spark from your adult child’s enthusiasm and join his or her cause!

Stop Stealing

Paul adds, “He who steals must steal no longer” (Ephesians 4:28 NASB). Parents may not be pocketing their adult children’s cash, but they can swipe other valuables. Their adult children’s *freedom* is one example of a treasure parents sometimes steal:

- Freedom to make their own decisions
- Freedom to think independently
- Freedom to do for oneself

What other freedoms do parents of adult children sometimes take away or not allow?



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Stealing adulthood's *freedom* leads to a second theft: stealing *consequences*. When we rescue adult children to spare them the pain that naturally follows poor choices, we steal an opportunity for growth. In addition, we contribute to a mind-set of entitlement in which the adult child expects and then demands unearned privileges—which is a form of stealing!

Pause here and use the space below to reflect on the rest of verse 28: “use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need.” Adult children must learn hard work and generosity. Have you unintentionally discouraged hard work by doing too much for your adult child? If so, how can you restore what should belong to them by granting freedoms and allowing consequences?

Quit Yelling

Read *Ephesians 4:29*. Unwholesome words can take many forms: cursing, threats, sarcastic putdowns, caustic comments. Parents resort to outbursts when they feel disrespected, but a volcano reaction just enflames an adult child's rebellion and sparks eruptions of disrespect.

Without resorting to angry words, what are better ways to work out your feelings when relating to your adult children? What does the latter part of verse 29 advise? Write a principle based on your interpretation.



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Give Grace

Can you sense the spirit of grace in *Ephesians 4:29–30*? Parents steeped in grace hold their tongues when an adult child suffers for making a mistake. “I told you so” is not a good or helpful response. Just as God identifies us as His own and redeems us by His grace, so also we pour soothing oil on a tender wound for our adult children when we show grace to them.

What do good and helpful words of grace sound like in conversation with your adult child? List in the space below some redemptive, life-giving phrases.

Be Kind

Read *Ephesians 4:31–32*. With this list of imperatives, Paul wraps a reminder string around our finger with a summary statement: *be kind*. Simple as that! You can express kindness through a warm embrace, thoughtful listening, and asking and offering forgiveness.

Make “be kind” a habit by practicing kindness daily. Is there an act of kindness you can show your adult child today?



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Correlation: The Father’s Love Displayed through Christ

Remember the source of our relational harmony? The Holy Spirit. Read *2 Corinthians 6:6* and write down the qualities that Paul mentioned to the Corinthian believers as fruit of the Spirit working in him.

No challenge in any family is impossible. “With God nothing will be impossible.” That’s not meant to sound like a platitude or some kind of pious phrase; it’s a statement said no less than four times in different ways in the Scriptures. So take heart. Whatever may be your circumstance, no matter how difficult, you’re not facing an impossible situation. It’s challenging but not impossible. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Responding to the Rebel in Our Family

The application for this study is simple. Put into practice some of the points you’ve written in your answers. As you take the first step, the Holy Spirit’s power in you and your family will come alongside to slowly tear down what may seem like impassable relational barriers. As the Spirit works, unity and harmony can return if it has been absent.

Start by memorizing the list of principles: speak truth, get passionate, stop stealing, quit yelling, give grace, and be kind. Share the list with a friend and ask for prayer as you make these principles routines in your relationship with your adult children. Then enjoy the benefits of a harmonious family that is “healthy and growing and full of love” (Ephesians 4:16).



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in the fast-paced race of life, it is easy for us to run beyond the essentials. Truth, kindness, forgiveness, love. Remind us that we're a family. Fill our family with the unity that is possible only through Your Spirit who is our common bond. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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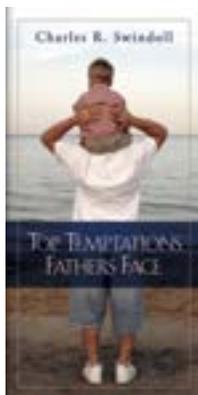
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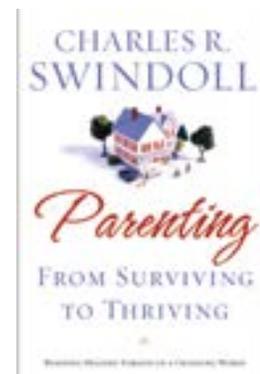
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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