

### The Downward Spiral of Rebellion . . .

Ever since James Dean burst onto the American movie scene with his dangling cigarette and black leather jacket, he epitomized the glamour of the rebel in popular thought. But even before then, rebelliousness was always seen as attractive, especially among the young. It's daring. Adventurous. Brave.

Like most popular stereotypes, however, this picture is false. The ultimate end of rebellion is darkness, confusion, and death. For parents or caretakers who have to watch a young person spiraling downward toward this end, it is also a study in pain and anxiety.

But there is hope, for God Himself has promised, *"I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me"* (Jeremiah 33:8).

### Characteristics of a Rebel

- Insolent
- Defensive
- Distrustful
- Resistant
- Independent
- Greedy
- Unbelieving
- Complaining
- Defiant
- Resentful of authority

### Q: "What will break the cycle of rebellion?"

Brokenness before God . . . breaking the willful attitude . . . praying, "Lord, I want to stop living out of my own resources. I'm letting You have rightful rule over my heart and life."

*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God,  
you will not despise."  
(Psalm 51:17)*

# The Rebellion Cycle

## Conceited

“I want what I want because I’m important.”

- independent living (“I” oriented)
- pleasure seeking (temporal values)

## Calculating

“I’ll do whatever it takes to get it.”

- deceptive (lying, cheating, stealing)
- manipulative (using guilt tactics)

## Condemning

“You don’t care about me!”

- complaining (“You’re too hard on me.”)
- blame shifting (“It’s all your fault.”)

## Calloused

“I don’t care who it hurts.”

- apathetic (toward loved ones)
- resistant (toward God)

## Contemptuous

“I hate those who get in my way.”

- disrespectful (irreverent, disobedient, foul-mouthed, messy)
- rule breaking (extremes in sex, drugs, money, hostility)

## Controlling

“I won’t give up what I have.”

- possessive (uses power plays because of emotional insecurity)
- abusive (verbally, emotionally, physically)

*“They are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD.”  
(Isaiah 30:9)*

# Characteristics of Parents with a Rebellious Son or Daughter<sup>1</sup>

*“If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.*

*When I thought, ‘My foot slips,’ your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.*

*When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.”*

*(Psalm 94:17–19)*

## DEJECTED

**D**isappointed  
over what could have been

**E**motionally dead  
to things that previously brought joy

**J**udgmental of themselves  
with much false guilt

**E**nvious of others  
who have excellent relationships

**C**ut to the heart  
with never-ending pain

**T**hreatened by permanent rejection  
disapproval, disrespect

**E**mbarrassed  
humiliation, disgrace

**D**esperate  
a loss of confidence and hope

*“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted  
and saves the crushed in spirit.”  
(Psalm 34:18)*

## Surface Causes of Rebellion

**Legalistic** homes where grace is not lived out

- $R + R - R = R + R$   
Rules plus Regulations minus Relationships equals  
Resentment and Rebellion.<sup>2</sup>

**Permissive** homes where discipline is not established or enforced

**Abusive** homes where there is substance or sexual abuse

## Key Verses to Memorize

Help for one in rebellion:

*“Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!”  
(Psalm 25:7)*

Hope for one hurt by rebellion:

*“For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.”  
(Psalm 62:5–7)*

## Key Passage to Read and Reread

Luke 15:11–32

## Do's and Don'ts for Responding to Rebellion

- **Don't** excuse or condone the behavior.  
**Do . . .** Be confrontive toward the conscience. (James 5:19–20)
- **Don't** threaten rejection.<sup>3</sup>  
**Do . . .** Convey unconditional love and acceptance. (1 Corinthians chapter 13)
- **Don't** bargain for appropriate behavior.  
**Do . . .** Insist on a system of accountability with consequences. (Hebrews 4:13)
- **Don't** let unwholesome talk come out of your mouth. (Ephesians 4:29)  
**Do . . .** Determine the important battles—be firm in those areas. (Matthew 23:24)
- **Don't** withhold encouragement.<sup>4</sup>  
**Do . . .** Establish communication on the feeling level. (Proverbs 20:5)
- **Don't** embarrass or shame the rebel.  
**Do . . .** Open your heart to your own motives. (Jeremiah 17:9)

## Related Topics . . .

- Anger:  
*Controlling the Fire Within*
- Conflict Resolution:  
*Solving People Problems*
- Lying:  
*How to Stop Truth Decay*
- Parenting:  
*Steps for Successful Parenting*
- Rejection:  
*Healing a Wounded Heart*
- Teenagers:  
*Helping Teens through Turbulent Times*

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**Rebellion:**  
*Reclaiming the Rebel.*

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For prayer encouragement and biblical counsel call 1-866-570-HOPE (4673).

1. See Margie Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *The Hurting Parent*, 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).  
2. David A. Seamands, *Healing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1988), 97.  
3. Lewis and Lewis, *The Hurting Parent*, 60.  
4. Lewis and Lewis, *The Hurting Parent*, 58.



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