

RESET — FOR — PARENTS

HOW TO KEEP YOUR KIDS FROM BACKSLIDING



TODD FRIEL

What Others Are Saying about Reset for Parents . . .

Hard hitting. Theologically sound. Desperately needed.

— Ray Comfort, Living Waters

If more parents understood their biblical responsibility in the discipleship of their children, there would be less 1 John 2:19 teens roaming around on the university campuses. Todd Friel is not just a good radio and television show host, he knows the Bible and is a good communicator of biblical truth. This book is a helpful resource for the church today.

— Dr. Josh Buice, Pray's Mill Baptist Church

Todd is “at it” again. Thankfully, that is a good thing. Why? Because Friel’s weapon of choice is not his own wit or wisdom (which he has gobs of), but rather, it is the Word of God. In *Reset for Parents* you will be able to “hear” his voice, one desperately wanting its readers to believe the good news about parenting. If you want minimalistic moralism, go elsewhere. If you want a book laced with the tincture of the Gospel, grab a comfy chair and be prepared to be graciously tilted.

— Mike Abendroth, Pastor of Bethlehem Bible Church and host of No Compromise Radio You

Reset for Parents is far more than just a solid, biblical resource — it’s a counselor, an encourager, and a wise mentor that deals with the heart of the problem — which is the problem of the heart. This book is a magnum opus on gardening. But it won’t teach you how to whack weeds at ground level; it will show you how to go for the root. It will instruct you in how to till the soil of your children’s hearts in such a way that they will be primed to receive the seed of God’s Word — bringing about an abundant harvest of eternal fruit for the glory of God. Its principles are a must-learn, a must-do, and a must-share.

— Emeal Zwayne, President, Living Waters

Too many evangelical books on parenting focus entirely on the work of training our kids to *behave*. While that’s an important aspect of every parent’s duty, Christian moms and dads have an even higher calling: teaching our children to *believe* — modeling the faith for them, faithfully living by the truth of God’s Word, raising our kids in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and thereby pointing them to Christ. Todd Friel brilliantly summarizes the essential whys and hows of gospel-centered parenting.

— Phil Johnson, Executive Director, Grace to You

This book will bring you to your knees and lift you up to serve your children with more intentionality and more humility.

— Tedd Tripp, President, Shepherding the Heart Ministries

“Target your parenting toward salvation, not behavior.” If you are a parent, that single sentence tells you why this book is not optional. I’ve never seen a parenting book so rich in theology, church history, and tactics for engaging our kids not only in their daily hiccups, but on the foundational questions of life. I’m not surprised. Todd’s book is well-written because his life is well-lived. I know this to be true. I’ve worked with Todd in the studio. I’ve seen him in times of great joy and under tough deadlines behave as a gospel-driven soldier for Christ. I trust him to speak candidly into my life, to challenge me, knowing I will be a better man for it. And you can trust him to speak to your parenting through a crystal-clear biblical lens.

— Scott Klusendorf, President, Life Training Institute

“Training youth in the truth” is more than just a slogan today. It’s more important than ever that we equip our children and teens with biblical truths: we must counteract the huge exodus of young people from our churches. Our research has shown that even in middle school, many of our teens are beginning to doubt the accuracy of God’s Word. And in many of their minds, they are already checking out of church. I praise God that Todd has a passion to help parents and church leaders rescue their youth and have them walk in truth, especially the truth of the gospel. Parents will find Todd’s book to be a powerful Bible-based how-to guide in improving their parenting skills.

— Ken Ham, co-author of the book *Already Gone*, on why teens and young adults are leaving the church

I love *Reset for Parents* and wish it was written 25 years ago. Authored by a seasoned parent, this thoughtfully written and well-paced book comes with loads of specifics and practical examples. But at its core is a transcendent gospel paradigm, rooted in Law and grace, that can be applied in all situations for the benefit of parents and children alike. If you want to raise self-righteous Pharisees, this isn’t the book for you. But if you want to raise good repenters who believe the gospel and cherish it deeply, then you will find much help for yourself on these pages.

— Milton Vincent, author, *The Gospel Primer*

This new book, *Reset for Parents*, is a much-needed antidote for the plague that is crippling the Church today, namely the tragedy of children raised in Christian homes, but who abandon the faith when they go away to college. Every parent needs to take this message to heart and implement its truths in their childrearing. I have been privileged to be in the Friel household and have seen firsthand the positive results of this biblical teaching at work. This is a man who practices what he preaches.

— Dr. Steve Lawson
Founder and CEO of One Passion Ministries

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Dedication

To my beloved children, Emily, Haley, and Jack. I am over the moon excited that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 4). I love you profoundly and I only wish I were half the parent this book describes. I am a million times sorry for all of the times I have failed you. I beg your forgiveness. May you do a thousand times better than your dad did.

To my wife, who knows I am not the man this book describes, thank you for being patient with me. I love you more every day.

To Dr. Tedd Tripp, your fingerprints are all over chapter 3. Thank you.

To Rick Thomas, 1 Corinthians 6:1–8 forbids lawsuits against fellow believers. Keep that in mind as you read my plagiarism of your excellent work in chapter 2.

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Introduction

Why Parents Need a Reset

Before you know it, your son or daughter will be moving out, possibly to attend a university or tech school. Would you like to hear how your child is likely to sound after being out of the nest for three months?

Me: Hello young person.

Your child: Hello, Sir.

Me: Are you a born-again Christian?

Your child: Yes, I am.

Me: If someone is not a born-again Christian like you, will that person go to hell?

Your child: I don't want to judge.

Me: Sigh.

I have had that conversation hundreds, possibly thousands, of times. I have also had this dialogue with countless “Christian” students:

Me: Hello young person.

Your child: Hello, Sir.

Me: Are you a born-again Christian?

Your child: I used to be, but I'm kind of re-thinking all that stuff.

Me: Deep sigh.

And finally, there is this heartbreaker:

Me: Hello young person.

Your child: Hello, Sir.

Me: Are you a born-again Christian?

Your child: I'd rather not talk about it.

Me: Why not?

Your child: If my parents find out what I have been doing here, they wouldn't be happy.

Me: Very deep sigh.

All three of these conversations reveal that these kids really don't understand biblical Christianity, even though they were raised in a Christian home like yours. The odds that your child won't apostatize and talk exactly like those "backslidden" kids are not in your favor.

Pick your favorite pollster and you will be horrified to discover that the MAJORITY of our Christian youth will spend their formative years at church playing gross-out games, only to leave home and notoriously "lose their faith." Today's headlines makes this crystal clear.

Headline: Young Christians Highly Involved in Porn (one-newsnow.com)

Headline: Christian Teens Are Viewing More Porn Than Ever Before (patheos.com)

Headline: Most American Teens Hold Positive Opinion of Bible but Rarely Read It, Survey Finds (Christianpost.com)

Headline: Why Young Christians Can't Grasp Our Arguments against Gay "Marriage" (Lifesitenews.com)

Headline: For Millennials, Out-of-Wedlock Childbirth Is the Norm (Slate.com)

On and on the headlines go, all pointing in the same direction: we are losing an entire generation of Christian youth. The statistics that state 60 to 80 percent of our kids "lose the faith" reveals that Christian parents are producing more false converts than true.

Clearly, we are doing something radically wrong. It is time for an examination of our Christian parenting methods and ask, "Do I need a parenting reset?"

The Goal

Reset for Parents is NOT about:

- Teaching your children manners.

- Changing your children's behavior.
- Getting your unruly children under control.

Instead, *Reset for Parents* is written to help you lovingly and relentlessly pursue the one thing every parent wants more than anything else: to see his or her children walking in the truth.

Reset for Parents is written for you to consider your parenting priorities, and possibly reorient and aim toward one overarching goal: *the salvation of your children*.

- *Reset for Parents* is not a parenting manual; it is a salvation guide.
- *Reset for Parents* will not help you change your child's diaper; but it will help you apply your faith to the heart of your child.
- *Reset for Parents* aims to encourage you to stop raising well-behaved children and start raising children who love Jesus . . . who will then desire to be well-behaved.
- *Reset for Parents* is not about changing your children; it is about changing YOU.

What you are about to read is not the musings of a Christian father who raised his kids perfectly. Instead, you are going to read about the consistent excuses I have amassed after witnessing to hundreds (perhaps thousands) of university students who "backslid."

You can avoid those mistakes. You do not have to become a member of the prodigal children club. However, you are likely going to have to reset your parenting approach and raise your children in a radically different fashion than you currently are.

Let me applaud you for making the effort to accomplish the most important assignment a Christian parent has — to raise up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6: 4).

Reset for Parents cannot guarantee that your child will get saved. But it does promise that if you apply what you are about to read, you may hear the sweetest words that anyone can hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant [Matthew 25:21], your children will be here soon."

Are you ready for a reset?

Chapter 1

Stop Disciplining and Start Discipling

Dear Mom and Dad, if you want the joy of watching your child grow in love for the Lord and obedience to you (Proverbs 29:17), I beg you to thoughtfully consider this advice:

Every interaction with your child should have one overarching goal: that your words and actions would lead them to love and fear the Lord more than they currently do.

In other words, stop striving for peace, quiet, and well-behaved children. Start focusing primarily on your child's salvation. That one thought will forever change you, your child, and your home. If your family is like ours, this will likely require considerable adjustments in your parenting strategy. So, let me phrase this negatively:

If your interaction with your child doesn't end with more love, joy and peace than when you began, then you have failed in your one and only assignment with your child.

The salvation of your child is eternally more important than compliance.

- Who cares if your child holds his fork right, but dies and goes to hell?
- Who cares if your child never uses a potty word, but spends eternity crying out for a drop of water?
- Who cares if your child gets accepted by an Ivy League school, but experiences the wrath of God forever and ever?

Because the salvation of our children is the most urgent issue for our children, doesn't it make sense that you and I focus tenaciously on that objective? What does it profit a parent if their child never gets arrested, but languishes in an eternal prison?

God wants your children to love Him. God wants your children to run to Him. God wants your children to find their hope, joy, and peace in Him. If you and I are not working with God to that end, then we are working against Him. Let's begin the reset.

Disciplining Vs. Discipling

This may be the most radical Christian parenting advice you will ever hear: NEVER discipline your child; instead, ALWAYS disciple your child. Let me 'splain myself, Lucy.

What I am not saying:

- I am not saying you should never spank your child.
- I am not saying you should never give your child orders.
- I am not saying you should never correct your child's behavior.

What I am saying:

- If you spank your child without discipling him/her through the process, then you are not parenting; you are just being a bully. Gulp.
- If you only give your child orders without explaining the biblical motivation that should drive their behavior, then you are treating your child like Pavlov's dogs, not as image bearers of Almighty God. Double gulp.
- If you only correct your child's behavior, then you are not parenting like a Christian. You are, triple gulp, parenting like a pagan.

Discipling your child may involve consequences, including corporal punishment, but Christian discipline should never be dispensed without discipleship as the overarching goal. The only way you can biblically discipline your child is by discipling your child at the same time. The two words are almost synonymous and should be considered that way.

- Discipline serves discipleship.
- Discipline is a part of discipleship, but it must never stand alone in the Christian home.
- Discipline must be administered and received as discipleship, or you are simply not parenting biblically.

Christian parents should NEVER punish their children. Ever. Yes, you may administer the wooden spoon in the discipleship of your child, but spanking should never be administered to punish the child. Jesus already bore the punishment for your child's sins.

Christian parents who punish their children confuse the gospel. If our children think they are being punished for their naughtiness, a.k.a. sins, then they are left to wonder why Jesus died on a Cross. Punishing our children tells them they can atone for their own sins. Oops.

Punishment took place at the Cross, and it has been dealt with completely. Our role as Christian parents is not to whack our kids for crimes committed against us, but to disciple them to love Jesus more.

God does not punish you for your sins; He punished Jesus for your sins. God never blows up and gives you a smack. Yes, God disciplines you, but it is only as a loving Father who seeks your spiritual growth.

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor faint when you are reproved by Him;
for those whom the Lord *loves* He *disciplines*,
and He scourges every son whom He receives.”

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you *as with sons*; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? . . . Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not *much rather* be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but *He disciplines us for our good*, so that we may *share His holiness*. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards *it yields* the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:5–11; emphasis added).

If that is how God disciplines His children, isn't that how we should discipline our children? When we parent our children the way God “parents” us,

then we are acting like God. If we do not, then we distort the very essence of our faith.

If we are not parenting biblically, then we will not see the peaceable fruit of righteousness; we will see begrudging compliance until they no longer have to submit to our authority. If we do not play our role as God's representative faithfully, we should not be shocked when our children become untethered.

Permit me to illustrate this life-altering truth with three very common parenting scenarios. You might think this is too cheesy to be true, but I offer you a money-back guarantee on this free advice — if you start talking more like a Christian parent, whose only goal is to increase your child's love and fear of God, your home will never be the same.

Scenario 1

Pagan parenting: Hey, quit hitting your sister or you're going to get a spanking.

Christian parenting: Whoa there, Sport, did I just hear you hit your sister? Then I am very concerned for you. We better sit down privately and talk about this.

I remember when I was your age; I hit a girl named Rhonda and made her cry. Yep, your dear ol' Dad made someone's precious daughter cry. I share that with you to remind you that I am no better than you are; I am a sinner just like you. Let's see if we can figure out why we do such wicked things.

The Bible explains exactly what was going on in our hearts when you and I decided to slug a girl. James 4 tells us that if our desire to get what we want is thwarted, then we murder. That is what you did to your sister. You wanted what you wanted, and when you didn't get it, you didn't kill her, but your attitude was murderous. Not only that, you physically harmed an image-bearer of God.

That is bad enough, but you and I did something even worse. First Peter 3:7 tells us that men are not supposed to hurt women; we are supposed to protect them. That means you committed a triple sin. So did I.

Best I can tell, the people sitting on your bed are two very bad sinners. Maybe we should talk to God about our wicked hearts.

Scenario 2

Pagan parenting: Pipe down back there or I'll turn this car around.

Christian parenting: Hey Gang, I am going to pull over at this gas station so everyone can use the bathroom. Hurry back to the car so we can talk about the rest of our trip.

Did you all wash your hands? Good, but I still want you to use this germ-killer.

While you are passing around the Purell, did I ever tell you about the time that your Dad drove to Chicago with your great grandparents? I thought I was being a perfect angel, but the reality is that I was fidgety and whiny. The police would have understood if my grandparents had left me on the side of the road in Milwaukee.

Do you know why your Pop was such a beast? Because I was only thinking about myself. The reason I acted like a spoiled brat was because I was only loving myself in the moment. In other words, I was being an idolater, and the idol was me.

Maybe you didn't notice, but ever since we left the Ark Encounter, you guys have been really loud. It made it hard for me to concentrate on driving and have a conversation with your Mom. In other words, you were acting the same way your Dad acted on the way to Chicago.

When we act in an inconsiderate way, we tell the people affected by our bad behavior, "I don't care about you. I only care about me." Knowing that Jesus humbled Himself and always put others first, do you think you could be a bit quieter in the back seat?

Now, does anyone want some of this stale licorice I just bought?

Scenario 3

Pagan parenting: Clean your plate. There are children starving in Africa.

Christian parenting: Honey, do you know what food your dad hates? When I was your age, my stepfather made me eat a

tomato and it actually made me throw up at the dinner table. I share that disgusting detail because I understand there are some foods that none of us like to eat.

I am looking at your plate and I notice you are barely touching things you normally enjoy. Is there a reason for that? Have your taste buds changed? Did you sneak a treat before dinner?

Maybe you are just a little burned out on mac and cheese. That happens to all of us. So let's do this; while you are eating as much as you can, tell me what foods you really despise and I won't act like my stepfather and force you to eat what you hate.

Please note, in the last scenario there was no theology offered that helped the child love Jesus more. But here is what that Dad didn't do; he didn't make his child angry and resentful. Instead, he modeled the way God deals with us.

As God's representative to your child, forcing him/her to choke down a dish he/she despises isn't really showing the love of God. Conversely, your thoughtful, loving, gentle kindness models the way God treats His children: thoughtfully, lovingly, gently, and kindly.

If these scenarios sound too fantastic for you, I understand. It is much easier to issue commands and demand obedience. Been there, done that. So here are a few thoughts that will help you practice the self-control that this parenting approach demands.

1. Remember that your child is going to go to hell if he/she doesn't understand the gospel and respond rightly in repentance and faith.
2. Remember that you were no better than your child. Your parent's offspring were just as beastly as yours.
3. Remember the joy you experienced when you responded to the gospel. How spectacular would it be to watch your child have the same joy?
4. Remember that God deals very, very, very lovingly with you. All the time.
5. Remember Jesus' promise that He is preparing a place for us (John 14:2). Think of what it will be like to dwell with God and not have your children with you.

Does every encounter with your child have to include a mini-devotion? No, but if you are not regularly disciplining your child, then you are not leading them to the Cross. And that is precisely where Jesus wants them.

What about Consequences?

I am not suggesting you become a Bohemian who never gives consequences for naughty behavior. The Bible is clear: if you love your child, you will even lovingly spank your child (Proverbs 3:12, 13:24).

Regardless of the consequence you rightly impose, if you do not sentence your child with a desire to see his/her love for Jesus grow, then you are biffing it.

- If you yell at your child, you are not parenting; you are sinning.
- If you only issue orders to your child, you are not acting like Christ; you are acting like a nag or a jerk. Sorry.
- If you spank your child in anger, you are not being biblical, you are being abusive.

We have all been there; your child does something sinful and you snap. With trembling in your voice you seethe, “Go to your room. I will be up there in a minute.” You find your preferred implement, like a spatula or belt, and you charge to their room.

Now imagine this. On your way up the stairs, you stop and remember, “That stupid *Reset for Parents* book said I should only spank my child if I can lovingly discipline him with an eye on growing my child’s love for King Jesus.”

Do you think that might change the way you enter your child’s bedroom?

Call It What It Is

Christian children are never naughty. Yes, you read that right. Christian children are never naughty; Christian children commit sins. Labeling your child’s behavior biblically will change the way you engage with your child when there is a ruckus in your home.

When you think your child is simply being a brat, it is easy to scowl, yell, or even hit. But when you remember that your child’s conduct is a sin against God, you no longer see bad behavior as something that must be curbed. You will now see your interaction with your child as a rescue mission.

When your child sins, he/she does not need to be yelled at. Your child needs to be taken to the Cross where a sin/forgiveness transaction can take place. Go ahead, try to scream at your child when you are teaching them about Jesus' amazing sacrifice for their sins.

The next time you hear screaming in the other room, before you shout, "Knock it off, or I will give you something to scream about," remember, they are not being naughty; they are sinning. In other words, your parenting is no longer about conformity to your rules, it is about rescuing your child from the wrath of God. This is earnest business.

Typically, we want our kids to stop being naughty for the following reasons:

- They are getting up your nose.
- You just want some peace and quiet.
- You want to do something and they thwart your goals.
- You are worried about being embarrassed in public by their bad behavior.

If you begin to see your children as image-bearing sinners who need the gospel applied to their totally depraved hearts, then you will respond to your children's naughtiness differently.

- Instead of getting angry, you will be concerned for their spiritual well-being.
- Your desire for peace and quiet will be overwhelmed by the desire to help your child understand God's grace better.
- You will put your earthly desire behind your heavenly desire to see your child spend eternity with Jesus.
- Your embarrassment will diminish because you are on a rescue mission for your child's very soul. Who cares what the servants think when you are on a mission from the King?

Parenting with salvation in view forever changes the way you treat your child. Think of the amazing impact this will have on your little reprobate sinner:

- They will stop saying, "Yes, Ma'am" and then do the very thing you commanded them to not do the second they are out of your sight.

- They will obey the omnipresent God who never loses sight of them.
- They will no longer see your unrighteous anger and have a servile fear of you.
- They will not think that God is a simmering pot, ready to boil over.

On the other hand:

- They will see the gospel in action.
- They will understand the earnestness of salvation.
- They will see that you have been affected by God's grace.
- They will see you as a loving representative of your loving God.

Is this approach to parenting easy? No way; it demands much of us.

- It is one thing to talk about the gospel; it is another thing to live the gospel.
- It is one thing to teach your child the gospel; it is another thing to show them the gospel.
- It is one thing to sing about the gospel; it is another thing to put the power of the gospel to work in your life and home.

Hard? Yes. Worth it? Absolutely. And here is a bonus for you. If you start learning how to think “gospel” when you parent, God will sanctify you as you focus on your child's justification. You will stop being angry, disgusted, frustrated, annoyed, snarly, and mean. That is a hefty bonus.

Danger, Danger

God has not instructed us to disciple our children so we can have well-behaved kids. God wants to do far more than that in your home. God wants to change children, and He wants to change YOU.

Your home can be one of two places: it can be an endurance marathon with much anger, frustration, and fighting, or it can be a school of character. God wants the latter, not the former.

God wants you to love and appreciate Him to the point where you cannot help but parent with your eye on salvation. The only way that can happen is to first focus on your own salvation.

In order for you to genuinely do any of the things recommended in this book, you must first be affected by your faith. If you simply adopt this book as your latest parenting strategy, then you will have missed the point. You will have missed not just what God wants to reveal to your child, but what He wants to do for you.

Do not read all of the scenarios in this book and think, “That’s it! I will memorize those speeches and start preaching them to my kids every time they are naughty.” Don’t do that.

There are as many parenting scenarios as there are children. You can’t give a memorized speech to your child when they sin in their own special way. This is not about parroting another parent. This is about genuinely speaking truth to your child in an effort to help them understand the Savior who has so affected and changed you.

God does not want gospel to be used simply as the latest 1-2-3 Time-out! God wants the gospel to affect radical change in everyone in the home, starting with you, Mom and Dad.

- Remember what God has done for you.
- Remember how He bled and died for you.
- Remember how He rose from the grave for you.
- Remember how He has provided every temporal blessing for you.

Then approach each combustible situation with one thought: “When I am done, I want my child to love and fear the Lord the same way I do.”

Then disciple your child.

That is what the rest of this book is about.

– Reset –

*Target your parenting toward salvation,
not behavior.*