
How to Save Your Family from Ruin and Destruction

By David Wilkerson

June 30, 2003 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The Bible tells us very clearly that in these last days, the church of Jesus Christ faces the wrath of a raving-mad devil. Satan knows his time is short, and he’s bent on devouring God’s people. “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Revelation 12:12).

Where does the devil direct his wrath? He’s taking aim at families, both saved and unsaved, all over the world. He’s roaring like a ravenous lion and pouncing on homes to devour them. He’s hell-bent on destroying marriages, alienating children, pitting family members against each other. And his goal is simple: he wants to bring ruin and destruction to every home he possibly can.

Jesus referred to this demonic work when he described Satan, saying, “He was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). Indeed, we see the enemy’s destructive plan against the very first family. It was the devil who entered Cain and convinced him to kill his brother, Abel.

And this murderer is still at work. The past few years reveal this in horrific ways. Four years ago, the devil took hold of two teenage boys in Colorado and drove them into raging destruction. When the two boys stormed into Columbine High School on a hellish killing spree, the world was stunned. They shot one girl at point-blank range while she was on her knees praying, a girl they knew and respected. Who but Satan himself could have driven them to do this?

I think of the ruin brought upon the families of both the victims and the killers. There have been suicides, mental breakdowns, divorces, traumatized siblings. The destruction of that incident still reverberates beyond belief. And the parents and friends of all involved will grieve for a lifetime.

A year later, Kathleen Hagen, a Harvard-educated pioneer in the field of urology, crept into the bedroom of her aged, sleeping parents in Chatham, New Jersey, and smothered them under pillows. Her father was 92, her mother 86. Hagen then lived in the house for several days, ignoring the dead bodies in the bedroom. When she was taken into custody, she appeared confused and disheveled. But she showed no regrets for what she’d done. Psychologists were at a loss to explain why such a well-educated woman would asphyxiate her parents and then go about her life as if everything were normal.

Think of the devastation that never got mentioned in this horrible crime story. The pain of family members, the heartbreak of grandchildren — what awful ruin and destruction. Who but Satan could have driven such a respected woman to kill her parents, for no apparent cause?

A few years ago, the New York Times printed a disturbing report: “Despondent Parents Giving Up Their Children.” The article told of frustrated parents streaming by the dozens into a sixth-floor Manhattan courtroom, to voluntarily give up their children to foster care. They simply couldn’t control them anymore. One father couldn’t handle his teenage son after the boy’s mother died. Another father gave up his teenage daughter because she was living wildly, totally out of control. Court officials who heard these cases were bewildered. One judge asked a mother who had brought in her daughter, “Don’t you want her? Wouldn’t you like to take your daughter home?” The mother wearily shook her head no. The young girl then burst into uncontrollable sobs.

The article pointed out that families were breaking up at an accelerated rate. And New York's Family Court was being overwhelmed with the cases. Many of the children being placed in foster homes soon spiraled into a worse condition. Some of them ended up running away and living on the streets.

Especially shocking was another news story, telling of a new breed of drug addict. The headline read: "Kids Doing Drugs at Home With Parents." Evidently, 30 percent of addicts today say they got hooked at home by their parents, who introduced them to drugs. How on earth could such a thing happen?

These parents had been drug users in their teens. Then later, when their children became teenagers, the parents thought, "We did drugs, but we survived. And we're doing fine today. It's better for our kids to do drugs at home rather than on the streets. And it's better for them to learn how to handle drugs from us than from their inexperienced friends." So they taught their children how to smoke pot, snort coke and use needles. That way, they reasoned, they could control their kids' drug use.

But then payday arrived. Their children got hooked, and their lives have spun out of control. Many have left home and are living on the streets. They're mad at their parents, disillusioned by their horrible counsel. And they're disheartened by society, having no future. Now the parents are heartbroken, guilt-ridden, crying tears that are much too late. I ask you, how could any parent ever make such a foolish choice? They've brought ruin on their own family. Who but Satan could have blinded their eyes?

The tragedies plaguing families today are simply beyond belief. And the examples I've mentioned are only those happening in America. All over the rest of the world, a raving-mad devil is wreaking absolute havoc. And he won't stop until he devours every family in his path.

Amid all this destruction, Satan hasn't overlooked Christian homes. Many believing families have been wracked by chaos, sorrow and pain. And the demonic devastation has come in many ways: through divorce, rebellious children, addictions of all kinds. Yet the result is always the same: a once-happy family is ripped apart and devoured.

I saw this firsthand for over forty years, as addicts and alcoholics came to our ministry's drug centers and farms for help. It was a joy to see these devastated men and women get marvelously saved and be delivered from their bondage. Jesus supernaturally changed them and made them into new creatures.

One of the surest signs of a genuine conversion was when a young man or woman began to look back and see what the devil had stolen from them. They sobbed as they clutched a tattered photo of a former spouse, or a child, or a parent. As addicts, they hadn't cared about losing their family. Their only concern was alcohol and drugs. But now they wept great tears over what they'd lost. They pointed to the photo and said, "Pastor Dave, that's my wife. She loved me, and I loved her. And this is my little boy. But I don't know where they are now. Look at what I lost..."

It was tragic, devastating. In such moments, you realize Satan's destructive power on these families. Indeed, the greatest tragedy was never about the addicts' devastated bodies, their gaunt appearance, their vacant expression. Rather, it was what had been stolen from them: a spouse, a child, a future. Even worse was what had been stolen from those addicts' children: a chance to grow up in a godly home, to know the love of Jesus, to be loved and nurtured by caring parents, to be taught by example to live for the Lord.

Thankfully, many of these former addicts have been blessed by God with restored families. Or, in some cases, they've found a new family in their fellow ministry workers. But I still grieve with them over the destruction they've seen.

Now let me return to the title of my message: "How to Save Your Family From Ruin and Destruction." Here is what the Holy Spirit has revealed to me on this matter.

In any troubled home, someone has to get hold of Jesus. There comes a time when certain life situations are beyond human hope. There is no counsel, no doctor or medicine, or anything else that can help. The situation has become impossible. And it requires a miracle, or else it will end in devastation.

At such times, the only hope left is for someone to get to Jesus. Somebody has to get his ear, his attention. It doesn't matter who it is, father, mother or child. That person has to take the responsibility to get hold of Jesus. And he has to determine, "I'm not leaving until I hear from the Lord. He has to tell me, 'It's done. Now, go your way.'"

In the Gospel of John, we find just such a family in crisis: "There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum" (John 4:46). This was a family of distinction, perhaps even royalty. A spirit of death hung over the home, as the parents nursed their dying son. There may have been other family members in the home, perhaps aunts and uncles, or grandparents, or other children. And we're told the whole household believed, including the servants. "(The father) believed, and his whole house" (4:53).

Someone in that troubled family knew who Jesus was, and had heard of his miraculous power. And somehow, word came to the household that Christ was in Cana, about twenty-five miles away. In desperation, the father took it on himself to get through to the Lord. Scripture tells us, "When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him" (4:47).

Over the years, dozens of mothers in our church have come to me weeping over their devastated family. Maybe the husband had abandoned the family, or a son was in prison, or a daughter was prostituting herself to support a drug habit. Often, the mother is the last hope that the family has to get to Jesus. So she takes on the responsibility to intercede. And she's determined to pray until the Lord brings deliverance. She enlists others to pray with her, saying, "It's past the point of hope for us. We need a miracle."

The nobleman in John 4 had that kind of determination. And he got through to Jesus. The Bible says he "besought (Jesus) that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death" (4:47). What a marvelous picture of intercession. This man set aside everything to seek the Lord to provide a word.

Yet Christ answered him, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (4:48). What did Jesus mean by this? He was telling the nobleman that a miraculous deliverance wasn't his most pressing need. Instead, the number-one issue was the man's faith. Think about it: Christ could have gone into that family's house, laid hands on the dying son and healed him. Yet all that this family would have known of Jesus was that he worked miracles.

Christ desired more for this man and his family. He wanted them to believe he was God in flesh. So he said to the nobleman, in essence, "Do you believe it's God you're beseeching for this need? Do you

believe I am the Christ, the Savior of the world?" The nobleman replied, "Sir, come down ere my child die" (4:49). At that point, Jesus must have seen faith in this man. It was as if Jesus said, "He believes I'm God in flesh." Because next we read, "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth" (4:50).

Sadly, many believers go their way before they ever hear from Jesus. But this man went away in faith. What was the difference? He had received a word from the Lord. He had sought God and waited on him in faith. And he wouldn't leave until he got a promise of life. "The man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way" (4:50).

We can weep for the whole world and yet ignore family members who are dying in sin. The church of Jesus Christ is supposed to be occupied with winning souls. And most Christians are faithful to do this. We pray for lost nations, for revival in our cities, for our non-Christian neighbors. I thank God that his people are doing this vital work.

Yet, let me ask you: who is praying faithfully for your unsaved father, mother, sister, brother, cousin, grandparent? Prayer for our loved ones ought to be of the utmost importance in our lives. After all, the responsibility for such prayer rests with those who have the Lord's ear, who are close enough to him to make requests. Now, if that isn't you, then who is it? Who will fervently pray for your family's salvation, if you don't?

Maybe you say to yourself, "I've witnessed to my family for years. I've faithfully lived out my testimony before them. They know what I stand for. I just have to entrust them to Jesus now." It's true we need to entrust our unsaved loved ones to the convicting ministry of the Holy Ghost. But trusting the Spirit doesn't mean we abandon urgent prayer for our family. If we stop interceding for them, we're saying, in effect, "This is hopeless."

Trusting the Lord means doing just the opposite. If we truly believe him for their salvation and deliverance, we'll cry as the nobleman did: "Please, Jesus, come now. Act quickly, before my loved one is lost forever." Only aggressive, fervent praying can combat Satan's destructive aims to ruin our family. Halfhearted prayers won't bring down his strongholds. We have to be shaken out of our own concerns and get serious about praying. And we have to stay near Jesus until his word comes.

When Christ was on the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, "a woman of Canaan came out...and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil" (Matthew 15:22). Satan had moved into this woman's home and possessed her daughter. The word for "grievously" here comes from a root word meaning depraved. In short, the girl was vile, wicked, being driven by Satan.

Now, this was not an evil mother. Even though she was a Gentile, she believed. After all, she addressed Jesus as "Lord, son of David." In effect, she was saying, "You're the Savior, God's Messiah." At this point, a question arises: how does Satan gain access to the child of a believer? How does he possess children who live in a godly home?

Perhaps you're a Christian parent. You've raised your child in church and done your best to show him the right way. But now, after years of attending Sunday school and hearing anointed sermons in church, he has become cold and indifferent to the things of God. He couldn't care less about serving Jesus. And you wonder, "Lord, how could this have happened?"

Over the years, I've seen this occur with many children of ministers. Multitudes of these young people

entered our Teen Challenge drug centers after being strung out with addictions. They were raised in godly homes, but somehow they went bad. Their lives began to be driven by demonic powers. And they grew addicted to drugs, alcohol, pornography, prostitution.

As you read this, you may be breathing a sigh of relief, thinking, “Thank God, that’s not my son, my daughter. I’ve got good kids. I’ve been careful to raise them in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. They know the right way. They may not be on fire for Jesus, but at least they’re not using drugs.”

Such parents are right to be thankful. Yet they never fear that their child may be lukewarm toward Jesus. According to the Lord himself, being lukewarm is as terrible a condition as being demonically oppressed. When Christ warned, “I will spew you out of my mouth,” he wasn’t addressing drug addicts. He was speaking to lukewarm believers in his church (see Revelation 2-3). Jesus knows that a lukewarm spirit can lull any believer into demonic temptations from hell.

Your children may be kind, polite, well-behaved. They may shun the wrong crowd, respect their elders and be morally upright. But if they’re not wholehearted in their love for Jesus — if they’re just drifting along spiritually — they’re in danger. You see, any child who’s raised in a believing home is already a prime target of Satan. The devil goes after those families who are most fervent in their love for Jesus. But now your child’s lukewarmness has made the enemy’s job easier. He’ll delight over how easy it is to snare your son or daughter into sinful bondage.

Even the most devoted Christians — including ministers — can be blind to the trap Satan has laid for their spiritually passive children. The enemy is constantly looking to snuff out even the small spark of spiritual life that’s in them. I urge you, Christian parent: don’t let the devil get to your child. Get on your face daily, and surround your young one with intercession. God has given you the power to shake them out of their lukewarm state.

When my children were teenagers, I thought I could simply love them into God’s kingdom. I told myself, “I’ll be there for my kids. I’ll be a pal to them. I just need to be available to them, so they can communicate their needs to me.”

Then one day my oldest son, Gary, came home from school, sobbing. He went straight to his room and threw himself on his bed. When I asked what was wrong, he answered, “Dad, I don’t believe there’s a God. It’s all a myth.”

I knew then that all the love in the world couldn’t resolve this kind of demonic attack. And simply being able to communicate with my son wasn’t going to take care of the problem. I couldn’t merely tell myself, “This is just a phase. Gary will grow out of it. He’s a good boy. And he knows I love him.”

No, I had to come to grips with what I saw going on before me: Satan was trying to rob my son of his genuine, fervent faith. I had seen Gary give his life to Jesus at age five, and I knew his faith was precious. Now the enemy wanted that faith. And he was trying to use doubt and unbelief to destroy it. Indeed, Satan was aiming for the very nerve center of our family: our confidence in Jesus.

I knew I had only one option. I went to my prayer closet. And I closed the door behind me, got on my face, and settled in for battle. I determined, “Satan, you’re not going to have my son.” From that day forward, I cried out to the Lord on Gary’s behalf. I pleaded, “Lord, keep my boy from the wicked one.”

The change that eventually took place in Gary didn’t happen overnight, or within a week, or even

months. He still battled with confusion. But the time came when Gary's confidence in Jesus was restored. And if you've read my messages for any length of time, you know that Gary has served in full-time ministry since he was a teenager. He has been a devoted lover of Jesus. And for the past year, I've had the privilege of preaching alongside him to gatherings of other ministers.

Each of my other three children has had their own unique trials of faith. But just as happened with Gary, the Lord has been faithful to see Debbie, Bonnie and Greg through as well. Like their brother, they also grew to become godly lovers of Jesus and servants in ministry. Yet my intercession for my family has never stopped. Now my wife, Gwen, and I have joined our adult children in praying for our ten grandchildren.

By all appearances, Jesus ignored the mother's plea. The woman with the vexed daughter persisted in seeking Jesus. Finally, the disciples urged their master, "Lord, send her away, get rid of her. She won't stop bothering us." Note Jesus' response to the woman's pleas: "He answered her not a word" (Matthew 15:23). Evidently, Christ ignored the whole situation. Why would he do this? We know our Lord has never turned a deaf ear to the cry of any sincere seeker.

The fact is, Jesus knew this woman's story would be told to every future generation. And he wanted to reveal a truth to all who would read it. So, he tested the tenacity of the woman's faith. When he finally spoke to her, he said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). Christ was saying, in short, "I came for the salvation of the Jews. Why should I waste their gospel on a Gentile?"

Now, this statement would have sent most of us on our way. But the woman didn't budge. Her daughter's condition was a matter of life and death to her. And she wasn't going to give Jesus any rest until he gave her what she needed.

I ask you, how often do you give up on prayer? How many times have you grown weary and reasoned, "I've sought the Lord. I've prayed and asked. I just didn't get any results"? Well, was it a matter of life and death to you? Did you truly seek the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, knowing there was no other source?

Consider how this woman responded. She didn't reply with a complaint, or an accusing finger, saying, "Why are you denying me, Jesus?" No, Scripture says just the opposite: "Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me" (15:25).

What follows next is hard to read. Once again, Jesus rebuffed the woman. Only this time his reply was even harsher. He told her, "It is not meet [right] to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs" (15:26).

It's important for us to understand that Jewish believers of that day considered Gentiles to be no higher than dogs in God's eyes. Of course, Jesus didn't accept this; he wouldn't cast a racial slur at any child of the Creator Father. But he knew this woman was aware of the Jews' attitude toward Gentiles. And, once again, he was testing her.

Now the mother answered him, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (15:27). What an incredible reply. This determined woman was not going to relent in her pursuit of Jesus. And the Lord commended her for it. Jesus said to her, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour" (15:28).

Beloved, we're not to settle for crumbs. We have been promised all the grace and mercy we need for our crises. And that includes every crisis involving our families, saved or unsaved. We've been invited to come boldly to Christ's throne, with confidence. And we're to present to him our every need, whether it's an unbelieving parent or a rebellious child. We may not see every loved one get right with the Lord or turn their life around. But we can erect great roadblocks around them, to stop their race to hell. We can pray down conviction on them, and pray up protective hedges around them. We can also pray people into their lives to witness to them.

Yet, there's one thing I can assure you: these things will never happen if we simply resign them to fate. We may try to convince ourselves, "I just have to take the matter on faith now." But that's a phony alibi. All it does is keep us from spilling our spiritual sweat and labor in intercession for our loved ones' souls.

I urge you, make this your prayer: "Lord, if one of mine is lost, it won't be because I didn't pray. It won't be because I took your Spirit's work in their lives for granted. And it won't be because I didn't weep over them. Whatever it takes, I'm going to do battle in intercession for them, till one of us goes home to be with you."

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