

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

[Dr. Leon Yuan] Good afternoon. This seminar is “Ordinary Parents” and extraordinary Heavenly Father, and my name is Leon Yuan.



Angela & Leon Yuan

[Angela Yuan] And I am Angela Yuan.

[Leon] Thank you for coming to share the next hour with us.

[Angela] When our sons were young, every summer we attended a Christian family camp, even though we were not Christians at the time. And I remember the camp organizer Mrs. Yang, an older Christian lady, and one day she said to me, “Angela, all these kids could grow up and turn rebellious, but not yours.” [She laughs.] And I could not disagree because our sons were straight-A at school, and state champion in gymnastics, and took first place in a state piano competition. So, as a young mother when I heard this it made me more proud and confirmed what I believed—I really was an extraordinary mother. Who would have ever thought that both of our sons—one after the other—would rebel after entering the college?

Most of us know or have known a prodigal, and perhaps we were once a prodigal ourselves. But no one feels the pain more than the parents of a prodigal, and I know this because Leon and I have been through and survived the years of waiting for our prodigals to come home. So what do we do when our prodigal broke our hearts and kept breaking our hearts? And what helped us get through those difficult years? And what helped bring our prodigals to our God, our Heavenly Father? So Leon and I would like to share with you some lessons God has taught us over the years when our prodigal was in a far country.

[Leon] When we first found out that our child turned rebellious, and like most of the parents, we didn’t know what to do. Also, we were at a total loss, and not only we don’t know what to do, we probably did many wrong things. So how should we react then as a Christian parent? First and foremost, we need to have a paradigm shift, that is, to change our attitude, change our thinking, and change our heart. And there are four paradigm shifts that we have learned so far.

First One: I AM NOT THE CAUSE.

And we need to understand as parents we are not the main cause for our children to rebel. Certainly, the parents do have the influence for our children, but we are not the main cause for their sinful behavior. And many of us carry and deal with a lot of guilt, so we blame ourselves, we blame our spouse, and worst of all, sometimes the people in the church, the brothers and sisters, judge the parents of the prodigal as if we have failed our children. In other words, that they rebelled because we must have done something wrong.

However, be encouraged! Even perfect parents may have children who rebel—just look at Adam and Eve. God only gave them one commandment, “Do not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” And after a while God found out that they had an apple break, so God asked Adam, “Didn’t I tell you not to eat the fruit?” “Uh-huh.” “So why did you?” Adam pointed his finger at God, “The woman *You* gave to me, she started it!”

[Angela] Did not!

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

[Leon] Yeah, you did. [Laughter]

[Angela] Did not!

[Leon] Having had enough of them, God taught Adam and Eve a lesson by allowing them to have children of their own. So that's the pattern that was set and never changed. If Adam and Eve can give God a hard time, what makes us feel that it's a piece of cake for us to raise our children? And, uh, Adam and Eve had a perfect Heavenly Father and lived in a perfect environment, but they still sinned and they still rebelled. Certainly, parents, we do have room for improvement but we cannot undo the past. Paul says in Philippians 3:13:

³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,"

~ PHILIPPIANS 3:13

We all need to have that kind of attitude.

[Angela] **Second, I AM NOT THE CURE.**

Which means we as parents are NOT able to change our children. I was always very confident and proud that I was able to accomplish what I put my heart to. And if I just tried hard enough, I could get my own way. If there was a problem, I could find an answer. And this kind of attitude and mindset applied even more when it was to do with my son. So when Christopher told us he was gay, I was going to fix my son and solve his problem. And I thought I could control the situation and I could prevent or change my son from being gay. So I gave him an ultimatum, "You must either choose the family or choose homosexuality." But to my dismay and shock, Christopher did not choose the family. Instead, he picked up his bags and left. I was devastated. In addition to my broken marriage, I was crushed.

[Leon] In the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15, we read the parable of the prodigal son. The father did not pursue his son to the far country and he did not try to change his son, and he did not disown his son or make him feel unwelcome at home. And he did not say, "I told you so." He knew only God could change his son so he allowed God to do the work. So he waited patiently and persistently. Most importantly, his son must face his own consequences of his own actions and reach the rock bottom. If we as parents continue to try to interfere and try to change our children, they will often despise and resent us. And worst of all, God may not be able to use the consequence to turn them around.

[Angela] So we all should learn from this father of the prodigal son to accept the fact that we as parents cannot change our children and bring our prodigal out of a far country.

So Third, OUR CHILDREN ARE NOT MY OWN.

This was very difficult for this mother because my children had become the most important part of my life and I did everything for them and my life revolved around my children. So in reality, my children were my prize and possession. In reality, in other words, they had become my idol. So after I understood who God is and surrendered my life to Christ, and I realized that everything we have belongs to God—including our children. We are stewards of what God has given to us. God has allowed us to bear and raise our children who ultimately

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

belong to Him. So if our children are not our own, we must “release” our children to God and “surrender” to God’s plan for our children.

[Leon] Well, many of us know the story of Abraham and his son Isaac in Genesis Chapter 22. God told Abraham to take his one and only beloved son, Isaac, to the mountain of Moriah where Abraham was supposed to sacrifice Isaac there because God wanted to test Abraham because God knows that like most other parents, we love our children so dearly sometimes our children become our idol and get in the way between our relationship with God. So are we willing to be like Abraham and lay our son on the altar? Give our son to God? Even though it’s very hard, but we must do it. We cannot lay our son on the altar and later on when the problems start we take them back. And Jesus says in Matthew Chapter 10, verse 37:

^{37b}“Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

~ MATTHEW 10:37b

[Angela] After many years of rebelling and running away from God, Christopher was in the far country of Atlanta and he found himself—he was arrested for drug dealing and found himself in jail. But back at home Leon and I were growing in the Lord and pursuing an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. And while studying the book of Genesis at BSF¹ I knew that we needed to be like Abraham to let our son go and release him to God. Although difficult, I had to lay my “Isaac” down on the altar.

So on the day Christopher was sentenced, Leon and I flew to Atlanta and I testified in court and I told the federal judge in front of Christopher that: “Your Honor, we are not here to plead for a shorter sentence for our son, but we are here to ask that our son’s time in prison will be just long enough for him to turn his life to God.” So you see, actually I was pleading this to God in front of the federal judge.

So we need to communicate clearly to our children that our main goal is not to point them to success in the world or even turn from their sin and rebellion, but our main goal is to point them to a life that is fully surrendered to God.

[Leon] **Fourth, LOVE IS NOT ENABLING.**

Many parents consider helping our children to avoid facing the consequence of their act and consider that as an act of love. Let me repeat. Many parents consider helping our children to avoid facing the painful consequence as an act of love. Unfortunately, some of these parents may find out later that the outcome could be even worse.

So what is enabling then? Enabling is doing something with the intention to help or to protect our children but it actually perpetuates the problem.

[Angela] Here are some examples of enabling our young children. For instance, defending our child when the teacher tells us about our child’s inexcusable misbehavior in class and believing, rather, that the other children are at fault and our child is being wrongly accused. Or making excuses or blaming the teacher for our child’s poor grades. Or finishing our child’s homework, or calling in sick for our child when he or she had not finished their school work.

¹ Bible Study Fellowship

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

So now I am going to bring some other examples of enabling our adult children. For instance, continuously bailing out our child from jail. Paying for their living expenses. Giving them an allowance when they are disrespectful of us and disregard the clear boundaries and house rules. Or we still allow them to use the computer and car which we bought. Or continuing to pay our child's college tuition when they show no respect to God or us. So the result of enabling is that our children do not learn to take responsibility and face the consequences of their rebellious actions, or do not become aware of their own behavior and the need to change.

So enabling actually makes the situation worse, not better. So in reality, what we're doing is hurting our children, not helping or protecting them. Simply put, enabling often pushes our children further away from God.

[Leon] In the Old Testament in 2nd Samuel Chapter 13 it recorded a tragedy which happened in King David's house. His son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. Later, his brother Absalom took revenge upon him and killed his half-brother. Even though his half-brother was guilty, Absalom should not have the right to murder his half-brother, so he fled away. What did their father King David do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

King David, like most of the parents today, feared to confront his son face to face with his sinful nature. He allowed Absalom to return later but he did not punish his grave sin and even refused even to see him. King David enabled his son by not allowing his son to experience the consequence of his own actions. This is enabling. We might say, "Oh, my child isn't a murderer and is not that bad." However, we must understand that our children must face the consequence of their sin whether big or small. Sin is sin. If our children do not learn this lesson earlier from home, they will most likely face many greater problems later in life.

[Angela] Christopher was busy going to the clubs, doing drugs, and flying from city to city selling drugs, and not showing up in his dental school clinic for his scheduled patients became a norm. So three months before receiving his doctorate he got the notice of expulsion from the dental school and my motherly instinct as a tiger mom would have wanted to do whatever it took to keep him in school. Especially Christopher had already passed the national license board exams. And besides, becoming a doctor and following in his dad's footsteps was our plan for Christopher's future. In addition, how shameful for me to face relatives and friends if they found out that my son was expelled from the dental school. So Leon and I flew down to Louisville to meet with the Dean.

And, of course, Christopher was confident that his parents were going to fight and threaten the school with a lawsuit so that he could still graduate in three months, and this is what I would have done if I had not fervently prayed and fasted to seek out God's will because I knew and I believed God's plans were greater than mine. And I needed to "let go and let God." And most importantly, I did not want to hinder what God might do in our son's life.

So in the Dean's office I told the Dean, "It is not important for Christopher to become a dentist. What's more important is that Christopher becomes a Christ follower." So Leon and I had to surrender to God's plan by not enabling our son but allowing God to use consequences to turn his life around. If we tried to fix the situation and avoid Christopher to face and experience the consequences of his bad choices, we would be getting in God's way.

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

[Leon] So, have we ever thought about the real problem of our children's rebellion? The deeper problem rests on our willingness to completely surrendered to Christ and fully submitted to God's authority. Let me repeat this important point: Rebellion is someone who refuses to completely surrender to Jesus Christ and fully submit to God's authority, instead giving in to the temptations of the flesh.

Our experience helped us to realize that our children's behaviors, the real problem is not their rebellious behavior like taking drugs, bad grades, sex, drinking, homosexuality, etc. These behaviors are not only the symptoms of a deeper problem; the deeper problem is our children's unwillingness to surrender and submit. But honestly, all of us struggle with this. Everyone struggles with the same thing—our unwillingness to surrender and to submit. So what are parents to do?

And here are some suggestions, that means we need to reflect Jesus in our daily lives. We need to reflect Jesus in our daily life. Although parents are not the main cause of our children possibly walking away from God, nor can we even cure their rebellion, but we still hope to have some influences, godly influences, even if they are in the far, far country. Because godliness is not taught, but caught. Besides, the goal of a Christian parent is not to produce godly children; the goal of a Christian parent is to be a godly parent. So let me say perfect parenting does not guarantee perfect children.

[Angela] First – DO WE REFLECT JESUS THROUGH OUR OWN BROKENNESS?

We must understand that we are just as capable to sin as our children, and our own sin is not any better or worse than our children's sin. And our sin may seem insignificant or harmless, whether it is pride, jealousy, gossip, slander, envy, greed, complacency, or idolizing our job, or our children, or our bank account, sports, TV programs, or computer games, or even pets and so on and so forth. But they are just as odious in God's eyes. So realizing our own brokenness in front of God may lead us to a place of humility.

[Leon] In Luke 18, Jesus tells us a parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector. Both went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed:

¹¹ "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector."

~ LUKE 18:11

And we can also add, "We are not as bad as our prodigal children." Many of us parents sometimes may act like a Pharisee and cannot even see our own pride and self-righteousness in front of our children. Psalm 51:17 states that God does not despise a broken and contrite heart.

¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

~ PSALM 51:17

And Isaiah 42:3 says:

³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

~ ISAIAH 42:3

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

I am convinced that God will listen more intently to those parents who are broken and contrite. And maybe God isn't listening to our prayers because we are proud and self-righteous attitude. As parents, are we not just as broken with our own sin?

[Angela] God convicted me of my own sins in many areas through Christopher's rebellion, so then I realized that Christopher's sin was not any worse than my own. So if we want our children to humble themselves before God, is humility evident in our own lives? If we want our children to change, has there been change in our own lives?

[Leon] **Second – DO WE REFLECT JESUS THROUGH OUR DAILY DEVOTION?**

While preparing for this workshop I came up with a few questions I continue to ask myself. First one, can our children see Christ in our daily lives? Can our children see Christ in our daily life? Are they able to tell our testimony? Is our relationship with God vibrant and real? Are we new creations and continue to be renewed each and every day? We shouldn't be the same as we were 10 years ago, 10 months ago, or even 10 weeks ago.

Do our children see without a doubt that we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind? Do our children know that we pray and study the Bible? And also, do they see that we live out the Bible when others are not even watching? Do I show excitement when I talk about God to others? When was the last time that our children saw us sharing the Gospel with somebody else?

We shouldn't be a "Sunday only" Christian and our faith should be impacting every day of our lives. If we want our children to take their faith seriously, we must begin with us. To study the Bible, praying, fasting should become part of our daily life. God is the master of our household and our lives. We should take heed of Joshua when he said:

15c "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

~ JOSHUA 24:15c

This should not be forced or a chore, but a joy and a desire. We should pray for our children, pray with our children, and pray over our children.

[Angela] Our relationship with Christ will never be any greater than our relationship with God's Word, and our minds need to be renewed every morning. And this was where BSF (Bible Study Fellowship) helped our spiritual journey and faith. And we had daily passages from the Bible to study, Scripture to meditate, and most importantly, to challenge us to live out God's Word in our lives. And I did this as part of my daily morning devotions. Not only did it keep me focused on God's attributes and His promises, but it also helped keeping my faith vibrant and alive.

So during those difficult years I began to fast every Monday in obedience to God with a hunger to seek His face and hear His voice. By the grace of God, once I fasted 39 days interceding for Christopher and many others. For me, fasting just naturally flowed out of a persistent prayer life; a persistent prayer life is naturally out of personal devotion. And personal devotion is naturally flow out of faith, loving God, and being immersed in God's Word. So as a result of our personal revival through vibrant devotion to God, our son Christopher certainly noticed the difference in his parents. Then I realized that we parents had become a living Bible for our prodigal and a light to shine into Christopher's dark world.

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

[Leon] Third – DO WE REFLECT JESUS THROUGH OUR MARRIAGE?

A marriage based on biblical principles reflects the perfect love between Jesus and His bride, the church. Our home should be a haven, a safe place to dispense God's love for our children who want to come home.

Do our children want to come home or do they want to run away from home? I wish I had learned and worked on this when I first got married. For most of us, we spend more time arguing or picking on our spouse rather than showing love, honor, respect, caring, and respect. But if we do not love, honor, and respect our spouse in front of our children, why should we expect our children to love, honor, and respect us? It is rare for—I grew up, I did not hear my parents say, "I love you" to each other, but our children need to hear that. The more we express the love to our spouse, the more our children will see home as a haven.

Many young adults we've met told us that they grew up with very little relationship with their fathers, and that their fathers are mostly distant or disconnected with their children. They leave the childbearing responsibilities to their wives. But as we studied the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 6:7, God commanded the fathers to teach their children to fear the Lord and to live according to God's ways.

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

~ DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9

So it is the father's job to teach our children, not only the mother's job. So I learned that many, many God's wisdom; one is that God gives the father the responsibility to teach our children to fear the Lord and to live according to God's ways. Therefore, I constantly ask myself: Do I fear the Lord? Am I acting according to His will? Especially, do my children see it? Without a father's godly influence, these kids are more susceptible to be led astray and fall into drugs, sex alcohol, etc., to fill their emotional vacuum. Or they will simply walk away from God. So we must understand their emotional needs.

And also, very importantly as I mentioned before, we have to demonstrate a tangible love that we show to our spouse. I think that is the best gift that we can give to a child. What our children would appreciate the most in the long run in their life is that we express tangible love to our spouse. It will make a life's difference to our wife and to our children.

And the love that we show for each other should not be dependent upon how we feel or even what we have been treated. It is only dependent upon the covenant we made and the commitment we made years ago on our wedding day. And Paul tells us this in 1st Corinthians 13, we all are familiar:

⁴ "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

fails.”⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.

~ I CORINTHIANS 13:4-8A

Love is patient, love is kind—all those things—does that describe how we love our spouse? Most of us didn’t realize that it is the love, honor, and respect that we show to our spouse not only provides security for our children, but it also serves as an example for how our children will love, honor, and respect us.

[Angela] Fourth, DO WE REFLECT JESUS THROUGH OUR GRATEFUL HEART?

1st Thessalonians 5:18 We must give thanks in all circumstances, not just for the good times, but also through the difficult times.

¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

~ I THESSALONIANS 5:18

When Apostle Paul was in the prison, he sang praises to the Lord because he had his mind fixed on God, not on his own circumstances. So when trial comes our way, look to God and focus on God’s promises.

On the mirror in my bathroom I posted lyrics of a hymn:

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus²

Refrain:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

So as I wake up every morning I am reminded of where my focus must be today—it must be on Jesus.

So December 8, 1998, I was just returning from Bible study, BSF (Bible Study Fellowship) and my heart was filled with joy after a morning of wonderful Bible teaching and fellowship. And when I walked in the house the phone rang and it was a collect call from the Atlanta City Detention Center, and Christopher was arrested and found himself in jail. And my heart sank and tears ran down my cheek. But at that moment, the hymns we sang earlier that morning came to mind, “Count your blessings, name them one by one.” So, I tore off a small piece of adding machine tape from the calculator next to the phone and I wrote down these very first blessings:

Christopher is in a safe place and he called home for the very first time.

² Helen H. Lemmel, 1922, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” refrain lyrics retrieved from https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Turn_Your_Eyes_upon_Jesus/

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

So I was convinced I could always see God's blessings even in the midst of trials. So as Christopher's time in prison passed I kept counting the blessings and adding the blessings to this list of blessings. So this list of blessings not only it helped me to remind me not to focus on the hopelessness, but I had to count the blessings what God has given to us. When we're facing difficulties it's very easy to give up hope, we fear it's hopeless. But now when you try to, just purposely, counting the blessings and you will find many blessings that God has given to us. So, even in the midst of difficult circumstances, we could still have a grateful heart.

So now we would like to end with this song which helped us keep things in perspective. Carefully listen to its lyrics. I hope that it will encourage but also challenge us. The storms of our lives may actually have blessings in disguise because our extraordinary Father is always there to carry us ordinary parents through the valleys and storms of life. And may this be our prayer.

[Music: Laura Story | "Blessings" | Listen on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/XQan9L3yXjc>]

Blessings³

We pray for blessings
We pray for peace
Comfort for family, protection while we sleep
We pray for healing, for prosperity
We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering
All the while, You hear each spoken need
Yet love is way too much to give us lesser things

'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near
What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

We pray for wisdom
Your voice to hear
We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near
We doubt your goodness, we doubt your love
As if every promise from Your Word is not enough
All the while, You hear each desperate plea
And long that we'd have faith to believe

When friends betray us
When darkness seems to win
We know that pain reminds this heart
That this is not our home

What if my greatest disappointments
Or the aching of this life
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy
What if trials of this life
The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
Are your mercies in disguise

³ Laura Story, "Blessings," lyrics retrieved from <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/23104378/laura+story/blessings>
Lyrics © Capitol Christian Music Group. Lyrics licensed and provided by LyricFind

ORDINARY PARENTS

Guest Speakers: Dr. Leon & Angela Yuan | 7.1.2019

[Leon] Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for being a truly living Father, and You choose us to be your children. You promise us that You will be with us either on top of the mountain, on the bottom of the valley, You will never forsake us. Please help us, we, the ordinary parents to love our children with your unfailing love. Love them as You love us. Teach us how to love our children by your ways, not by our ways. Most importantly, help us to glorify your name in front of our children.

We pray this in your Son Jesus' Name. Amen.

Watch on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/bRNbXqSzaR0>

Watch on Calvary's website: <https://www.cfdowningtown.com/watch>

SCRIPTURE QUOTATIONS ARE FROM THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
COPYRIGHT ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 BY BIBLICA, INC.® USED BY PERMISSION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED WORLDWIDE.

Keywords: blessings, rebellious, prodigal, humility, self-righteous, pride, respect, honor, love, enabling
--

COPYRIGHT © 2019 – LEE WIGGINS – ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

COPYRIGHT © 2019 – DR. LEON & ANGELA YUAN – ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.