

## Guardrails

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As a parent, I am always looking for new ideas and tips on how to raise respectful, God-fearing children. This is probably the leading topic of any conversation I have. When our boys were younger (they are ages 12 -almost 20 now) we were in the trenches of consistency. My husband and I had to make sure we were both on the same page, that discipline was swift and meaningful, that we modeled respect to one another, and above all, that our children knew we loved them. Also at the top of our list is teaching our kids that choices have consequences, both good and bad. So, one of the most important things we can do for our kids is teach them how to make good decisions. I know like me, you can probably list on two hands the number of people you know or once knew, who have paid the price of a foolish decision. Someone who may be living a life full of regret and remorse for what could have been. Perhaps they were not the one who was acting foolish, but were in the wrong place with the wrong "friend."

Some time ago, I was fortunate enough to come across a brief video presentation from pastor, Andy Stanley. I was only able to hear a small snippet of his sermon, but it was powerful, and extremely applicable. The title of his seminar was, "Guardrails." Now, I don't remember his definition for the word, but, checkout what the dictionary says, "A guardrail, sometimes referred to as guide rail or railing, is a system designed to keep people or vehicles from (in most cases unintentionally) straying into dangerous or off-limits areas...and can provide both support and the protective limitation of a boundary. "Wouldn't it be great if life came with a set of those rails that pop up at the bowling alley, keeping the ball heading down the straight and narrow and not allowing it to fall off into the gutter?"

In Pastor Stanley's sermon, he talked about how the guardrail principle wasn't necessarily biblical, but just based on common sense and life experience. We can all use a system that keeps us from straying into dangerous or off-limits areas, right? How much more important is it then that, as our children get older they are able to use a method to determine when they may be up against a guardrail or headed for the infamous cliff? If you're close to my age, you may remember Eddie Haskel from the television show, "Leave it to Beaver." Eddie was the model citizen as he talked with Beaver's parents, but when they weren't looking, he was always walking into some kind of trouble. My boys have friends that resemble Eddie (I pray every day that my own boys don't become an "Eddie Haskel!") and when we remind them not to do something foolish because they're with someone who might, they inevitably respond with, "I'd never do something stupid like...fill in the blank."

That is probably true for most of our kids. But look at the warning we are given in Proverbs. Chapter 3, verse 19 says, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm." Reading this verse we see that wisdom is contagious! Hanging out with

wise people helps us become wise. But, heed the warning. Those who are friends with fools can suffer the consequences of their foolish behavior. This isn't saying that being with fools makes us fools. It says we can suffer the consequences of the foolish decisions they make. You can probably think of a few people who were in the wrong place with the wrong person. Some of them paid for it with their life. Even though they weren't being foolish, they were hit with the shrapnel of foolish behavior.

Using the "guardrail" system we are asked to consider five things before blazing a trail with a fool. Pastor Stanley says your consciousness should sound an alarm if you have any of the following thoughts:

1. It dawns on you that your (foolish) friends don't seem to be moving in the same direction as you want your life to be moving.
2. You hope the people you care most about don't find out where you've been or who you've been with.
3. You begin to think about compromising to do something that has formerly been off-limits.
4. You say to yourself, "I'll go, but I won't participate."
5. You catch yourself pretending to be someone other than who you really are.

These thoughts should trigger your conscience to say, "Hold up!" and reflect on what you're doing and why. Hopefully, these relational guardrails can keep us from straying into areas where we can be irreparably harmed by alerting us to dangerous situations before we're too far gone.

I hope these tips provide both you and your kiddos with some practical ideas and strategies for determining ways to avoid becoming part of a foolish consequence. It only takes one bad "wrong place, wrong time" to change a life forever. As parents, we can be in prayer to petition God for wise, Christian friends and peer groups, and for a discerning spirit that acts as a protective guardrail.