



Chapter 1

How I Rejected My Kids

“I hate you!” she screamed.

“I hate you more, your f---ing b--ch!” I yelled back at the top of my lungs, throwing a stuffed Dalmatian at her, missing, and hitting instead my wife on the side of the face, who had been trying to quiet me so the neighbors wouldn’t hear through the opened windows.

“Ow! Oh, Earl, you hit me!”

Great. Now the neighbors think I’m a wife beater, too. I ripped my attention away from my daughter for a second to make sure my wife was okay. “I’m sorry. Are you okay? I didn’t mean to hit you. I was aiming at her.”

“It’s okay,” she said. “I’m alright. Just please, stop fighting. Everyone is hearing us.”

I restored my blazing hot attention to my daughter. “I’m done. I’m done with you,” I sneered at her, point my index finger at her. I turned and walked away, growling, “This makes no sense. I’m out.”

Have you ever dropped your new cell phone, and then bought a cover to both cover up the damage and prevent new damage? Then you can understand how



Healing Tip

Have you hurt your child? We can help. Join prejects.org. Today.

we're all capable of unintentionally hurting the people we love and care about the most, who also happen to be the most vulnerable people in our lives, our children.

I didn't reject my kids in their infancy or their toddlerhood, but once they became a little more independent and it was necessary to relate to them as emerging thinkers and personalities, I began to parent more out of my emotions, displaying anger, and spent less time with them, seeking to make a better living after having concentrated for so long on making a life.

I've had to look long and hard at my *parenting acceptance levels* with my kids because two of the three have rejected my parenting efforts out of hand. Their counter-rejection means they have felt rejection from me on some level; and what matters more than the parent's intent is the child's perception. Their perceptions always trump our intentions. Part of parent impartation is teaching children how to perceive. If I fail to do that, they will misinterpret my intentions and be potentially damaged by them. If that happens, I have to accept culpability.

While my intentions were good, it became clear over time that they perceived my behavior as rejection. Whenever I yelled, they felt rejected. Whenever I disciplined them, they felt rejected.

Whenever I limited or burdened their world in any way, in order to protect them or train them, they felt rejection. This is not to suggest that I should not have yelled at, or disciplined, or limited them in any way. (Well, okay, maybe I shouldn't have yelled. In fact, I definitely shouldn't have yelled, because yelling gives away power, destroys what you are trying to control, and turns words into rods, against their design.)¹ Instead I am acknowledging that if I had augmented my parenting efforts with clear instructions to them about how to receive my parenting



Preject Stat

53% of parents today believe that they are doing a worse job of parenting than their own parents did. (2002 Public Agenda Survey)

¹ *Colossians 4:6* (KJV) Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.



without becoming offended by their feelings of rejection, it would have saved them some of the soul damaging effects of good intentioned parenting received as rejection. After all, doesn't Yahweh do that with His kids? Isn't that what *Hebrews 12:5-11*² is about? Yahweh teaching His kids how to accept His parenting in spite of how it made them feel about Him?

In the same way, instructions about how to receive parenting that may not be well intentioned, or at the very least, devoid of knowledge and care, and poorly executed, can also protect children against soul damage from feelings of rejection. The Five G.R.A.C.E. Steps™ are designed to protect souls against damage even while parents are doing their best to raise their children, regardless of their expertise. By teaching kids how to respond, what to do when they feel rejected by their parent, irrespective of that parent's intent, each child has a chance to survive any kind of parenting experience with their soul intact.

Parenting in Survival Mode

Cain and Abel were born into a family facing hard times, struggling to make ends meet.³ The first human family and every

² *Hebrews 12:5-11* (NIV) And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." ⁷Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

³ *Genesis 3:17-19* (NIV) To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."



succeeding generation of families, to one degree or another have had to confront the challenges of parenting in survival mode, where the primary attention is focused on making a living rather than making a life. My parents did it. I did it; even though I promised myself as a kid that I would never let myself go there. It is a fact of the fall from grace and the garden expulsion and the economic hardships that the entire human race faces in a sin-broken creation groaning and travailing in pain together.⁴

We have to get past survival mode as parents to *surthrival* mode. When parents are so concerned about putting food on the table (or managing investments and holding onto wealth in a declining stock market and harrowing financial times) it's easy to miss the signs of inner hunger in children. We're at a place now where if we want to help our children compete in a global marketplace and give them all the help and advantages we can rather than hindrances, we have to make their inner life and emotional/spiritual health an important part of our care and parenting concern. There was a time when only the privileged could afford to be concerned about their children's emotional and inner health. Now, we can't afford *not* to be concerned about it and make it our #1 priority, because it determines so much.

You might think it's a no-brainer to care for the soul of your child, but we see evidence all around the world that it's not so obvious: infanticide is still a common practice all around the globe. In the U.S. it looks a little different, but it's still infanticide: when you factor in abortion, more kids are killed by one of their parents each year than by disease, disaster or accident put together. This is the modern day biblical cult of Molech sacrificing babies. It's still happening in more subtle forms (spiritual/soul sacrifice). When parents leave children in front of television sets in order to get some 'me time' and recuperate from a taxing work day, or in some other way choose to connect with themselves at the expense of connecting with their children, soul sacrifice occurs.

Part of *carrying* a child requires knowing that child (what is good and bad for the child, etc.). Carrying is caring. If a parent doesn't know

⁴ *Romans* 8:22 (KJV) For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

what's good and bad for a child that parent doesn't care enough and hence isn't carrying that child, which is tantamount to dropping that child. I know that when our son, Omar, is visually over-stimulated (because his genius makes him intellectually spongy and impressionable) he loses focus, gets stuck in the stimulant world, and will only emerge by *force*, or the annihilation of the stimulant world.

Knowing another person can be one of the most powerful, satisfying experiences in this world. Letting someone really and fully know us is the greatest gift we can give anyone. Really taking the time and going to the *full-investment-of-self* trouble to look into and get to know someone who has given us their permission to know them is the greatest gift we can give ourselves and the world around us, because this is what lies at the foundation of communal peace.

Some people are lazy and claim knowledge of others without really taking the time and going to the trouble to do the work. Others are *knowledge bandits* and try to intimately know people without their permission, which often yields an annoying, inaccurate pseudo-knowledge (unless the knower is a prophet). This is the foundation of communal war because it pre-judiciously violates others through laziness and faulty analysis.

Parenting in survival mode creates many knowledge bandits who think they know their kids, but really don't. It is virtually impossible to be fully self-invested in more than one thing at a time (you only have to spread your fingers and hold your palm twelve inches from your face to see that it is impossible to focus on both your thumb and your pinky at the same time), and when a parent is fully self-invested in earning a living for the family it just is not possible for that parent to be equally or sufficiently self-invested in knowing and carrying his/her children. I unwittingly rejected my children by parenting for too many years in survival mode. As they grew to be teens and their material needs



Project Stat

61% of current parents rate their generation as “fair” or “poor” at raising children. (2002 Public Agenda Survey)



ballooned I began to focus more on making money, and lost some of my connection with them.

Family Substitutes

I have long seen the churches I've pastored (my ground, my field, from which I must eat in painful toil as it grudgingly yields thorns and thistles) as the first family I had to cultivate in order to take care of my biological family. And in my attempts to parent my congregations well in order to get the greatest yield, I pushed all my parental chips to the center of the table and fused my family of origin with my current biological family into the dynamics of my church family. I was committed to parenting my congregations the best way I knew how, but because I was an unhealed preject that created a confusion that stunted congregational growth and left me super frustrated. I was dealing with the church as a representation of both my *original* family and my *biological* family, the family of my father and the family I fathered.

I later came to realize that I wasn't just trying to parent my congregations, but that I was subconsciously using them to fix myself. Like Adam and Cain, trying to use something they *birthed* to heal their cistern-soul, I had been trying to use the pastorate to heal my own brokenness. I had considered my congregations *priority families* that enabled me to take care of my biological family, but in truth they had become *substitute families* where I could work out my family drama and finally reach a *denouement* I could live with. The churches I pastored had been substitutes for my parents and family of origin. And so immersing myself in those substitute families meant the abandonment of my biological family by default. Even though I was physically present, I was emotionally absent (just like my own father) as I was so invested in the success and drama of my *other families*. And my children felt my departure before I was even aware of it myself. That's why my youngest daughter, and later my son, began to reject my parenting; because they felt, intuitively, that I had rejected them by choosing over them another family: the church.

I tried to heal my parental rejection through gaining acceptance by a congregation, and in hindsight there were very specific ways in which I made every congregation I'd ever pastored represent my family of origin



to me. The older people represented my parents (hence the difficult, strained and conflict filled relationship I often had with them, which always included an element of rejection: them rejecting me and me rejecting them back). I'd been trying to heal my parental relationships by recreating them in the church, the bride of Christ and mother of the faith. I later learned I couldn't do that, because it was responsible for the lack of connection I felt toward older people in church. It wasn't until I completely forgave my parents that I learned to love and honor the older parishioners.

The disconnect I usually felt with the younger thirtysomethings was consistent with the disconnect I have with my sister. I felt contempt for them, believing they were not on my level and still got breaks they didn't deserve while I didn't get any breaks at all. And the disconnect I often felt with the young twentysomethings whom I would meet with and *father* through counseling, was consistent with the disconnect I'd been developing with my own children, who in varying ways were resistant to my instruction, ungrateful, selfish, and withholding of any *praise* in the face of my *goodness: provision, embrace, and use*. (The fact that I was looking for or expecting praise from my children was an indication of how hungry I was for parental praise.) The disconnect I felt with Pascale was consistent with the disconnect I felt at times with Yahweh, who didn't seem to be willing to give me pleasure when I wanted it, but was withholding and on a different page in terms of concerns, what's important to Him, goals for life, interests, and abilities.

Israel left Egypt with silver and gold, clothes and substance.⁵ They did not come out of bondage empty handed. However, because their cistern-souls were still broken they used their severance substance to rebel against Yahweh in the *in-between-wilderness*⁶ (which does not have to be 16 months long or even 40 days, it can be as short as you are ready for promotion). When I finally *left the pastorate* I didn't leave with

⁵ *Psalm 105:37* (NIV) He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered.

⁶ *Exodus 32:3-4* (KJV) And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. ⁴And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.



substance, but empty materially, so I couldn't use that substance to rebel against Yahweh and do my own thing when I thought Yahweh wasn't moving fast enough, or had me waiting too long and had abandoned me, like my father, even while being present.

There is a reproach on the pastorate and the prophetic, and the world does not receive us, so pastors and prophets have to be in touch with and accept, even revel in, our otherness. This militates against our basic need and desire to build *community* where we minister (and for those of us who are unhealed projects, the need to establish *substitute families* to attempt to heal our own parental rejection). It is paradoxical to try to build community in *otherness*. So what *feels* good is to either give up on community building and become parochial and inwardly focused, or to abandon *otherness* by rejecting the *alienating* values of Christianity and taking on the values of the larger culture (for in most places, Christianity is at best a sub culture, and at times a counter culture). I've been angry for a long time about having to make such a choice when *nobody else* does. So my response was to reject the role of pastor or prophet in order to avoid having to make the choice between becoming parochial, and thus irrelevant, or rejecting Christian values. I was only able to do this once I realized I no longer needed to use the church to heal my soul, because it was healed already.

I had it right in Florida to stay away from the pastorate, but weakness, fear, and circumstances drew me back in. This is the first time I stepped away willingly from a pastorate and did not move back home seeking acceptance from my parents. Everything is different now because along the way my cistern-soul got healed.