

## Sample Chapter

### Introduction:

### How to Get the Most Out of this Book

#### For Dads

A handful of fidgety people sat in the nearly empty room. We took our seats at the back and after a few moments the bailiff barked his customary, "All rise!" A dark-haired judge emerged from the side door. He seemed to float to his bench in his ankle length black robe. I could feel my shoulders begin to tighten as we nervously sat in courtroom "A."

"Charles and Sherryl Stone vs. Heather Stone: Case number 43. Please come forward," he bellowed.

The bailiff opened the waist-high swinging door that led to the judge's bench. The judge motioned for us to sit at the well-worn Formica covered table in front of his bench. He peered over his black-rimmed glasses. "So, what's the problem?" he asked.

With a dry mouth I muttered, "We just can't handle our oldest daughter anymore. She runs away, stays out all night with boys, uses drugs and alcohol, curses us, and skips school. We've consulted a half dozen psychologists. We've pled with her, fought with her, and grounded her. We're desperate. We need your help."

He glared at her for what seemed like a full minute, glanced down at his notes, looked up, and began his stern discourse. "Young lady, this is serious. I'm placing you under house arrest and assigning you a probation officer. You *will* meet with her weekly. You *will* take a weekly drug test. You *will* obey your parents. You will *not* run away again. Should you attempt to, the monitor we will place around your ankle *will* alert us. And we *will* find you."

With a menacing tone he added, “Don’t let me see you in here again!” The crack of his gavel echoed in the courtroom. As he slammed it onto his desk and said, “Next case.”

This true experience epitomized our six-year battle during my oldest daughter Heather’s stormy teen years. Once a compliant, top-of-her-class, “prim and proper” daughter, within just a few months after her thirteenth birthday she morphed into a drug-using, sexually active, angry, in-your-face teen-aged scofflaw. Navigating her through those years almost drowned us in a vortex of pain, anger, and disappointment. At times we felt we could barely gasp for air between each new conflict. Were it not for a few relationship “life preservers” that we clung to, our relationship with Heather could not have weathered those tumultuous years from age thirteen to eighteen.

When Heather entered her teenage years, my wife and I were prepared to apply all the sound parenting techniques we had read in parenting books. We quoted Bible verses about morality, children, and the spiritual life. We taught often on the importance of obeying parents. We made her attend church and youth group activities twice a week. We sent her to Christian schools. We seldom missed our family nights because we believed the experts who wrote that Christian families bond through quality family time.

Every Tuesday night, my wife, Sherryl, and I would load our three kids in our sand-colored Dodge Caravan and drive to the mall to “bond.” We’d stroll into the food court and each of us would choose our favorite meal. Even before we picked up our orders, our problems would begin. Heather, dressed in her grungiest clothes, combat boots, and bootblack eye shadow, would begin her theatrics. When we asked her to do something she would muster up a made-for-Hollywood performance of “let’s see how miserable I can make my parents” with her sighs and “whatever’s” as she rolled her eyes. Family nights would end up revolving around her. Eventually, she would sit at a table by herself. If we were lucky, she’d sit within twenty feet of our table. So much for bonding.

### **A Tip for Mom**

Mom, to help ease the tension between your daughter and her dad, carve out some time just for you and your daughter. Go shopping or see a chick-flick together.

We also tried to harness Heather with contracts—written lists of behaviors we expected from her. I like lists so much that I even make lists for my lists. I assumed Heather would like them too. I believed that once she followed a few lists, she would experience “conversion-by-list” and become her old sweet, compliant self again.

I designed several contracts with lists . . . year after year. All came with a place for name, date, and two signatures. She signed her line. I signed mine. I created my favorite one with a computer spreadsheet program complete with expectations, due dates, privileges, and status bars. (This helped me feel I got my money’s worth from my engineering degree.) Others included check boxes or bullet points. I often added exclamation points after key expectations hoping to “guilt” her into obedience. I tried to communicate, *Heather, you’d better obey or your dad will die of a massive coronary and you will be very, very sad!* Dumb idea. Guilt didn’t work.

I taped these contract-lists on her bedroom door and her bathroom mirror. I wallpapered the refrigerator door with them. I stuck them on the cabinet shelves where we kept the Fritos and Chips Ahoy. I laid a trail of them in the hall that led into her room. I set them on her bed. I crammed them in her bologna sandwiches. (Not really, but I considered it.)

Although these techniques worked well with my two other children, did they work for Heather? Nope. Not after she turned thirteen. Instead, our experience with Heather gave us . . .

- \* Twenty different psychologists, counselors and psychiatrists who tried to help her
- \* Seven stays in four different programs for troubled teens
- \* A sheriff's escort to one treatment center
- \* Drugs, alcohol, and destructive relationships with boys
- \* Twelve middle and high schools (four kicked her out)
- \* A court-mandated house arrest, complete with a homing device around her ankle that would alert the authorities if she ran away
- \* Weekly visits to her probation officer
- \* Three 911 calls to the police because we feared she would hurt herself or us
- \* Endless arguments, conflict, and verbal fights.

Dads, if contracts, lists, family nights, Bible lectures, and church youth groups work for you, perhaps you don't need this book. If they don't, you've picked the right resource to find help and hope. After those tough years, God did restore my relationship with Heather. Although I'm sure those techniques we originally tried did influence her eventual return, the relational life preservers we include in this book made the biggest difference.

These battle-tested tips didn't magically appear. I learned them through trial and error—many errors. And only in retrospect have I been able to crystallize them. Had I known how profoundly these choices would impact our relationship, I would have more deliberately used them.

This book differs from most other fathering books in several ways. Some authors give advice gained through their experiences with other parents and teens but through no first-hand experience. Other books offer help only from a dad's perspective and not from a daughter's.

This book, however, combines the first-hand perspective of both a father and a daughter. Heather and I want to share with you the nine relational life preservers we

gleaned from our crucible of pain that kept our relationship alive, though sometimes by only a thread. These lessons arose not only out of our successes but our many failures, too. While we focus on the father-daughter relationship, moms and sons will also find these “life preservers” helpful as well.

These simple principles can help bridge the relational void you and your daughter feel. We don’t espouse a simple recipe for success, nor easy 1-2-3 steps that guarantee instant results. We’re convinced, though, that these proven life preservers can help you sustain a positive relationship while you ride out the storm. Like a boat’s life preservers, they don’t get you out of the storm. Instead, they provide something to cling to so that you keep your head above the water when waves of anger, disappointment, and feelings of hopelessness crash over you.

In the next nine chapters you’ll journey with Heather and me as we share our story and apply biblical truth to these nine relational “life preservers.”

1. Respond to the early warning signs; don’t panic!
2. Resist the urge to turn words into weapons.
3. Make the tough calls when you’re at the end of your rope.
4. Stoke the relationship fire to keep love alive.
5. Reconnect through gifts from the heart.
6. Laugh between the tears.
7. Choose your battles wisely . . . and lose some on purpose.
8. Don’t pull the plug when you’re on life support.
9. Soften the re-entry as much as possible.

We’ve organized this book to make it easy for you and your daughter to read and apply its suggestions together. I wrote the chapter sections geared toward dads, and Heather wrote the chapter sections targeted for daughters. Your daughter can go directly to her sections by looking for the funky fonts. The beginning of each chapter will also give her the page numbers where she can find her sections. You will get the greatest

benefit if you both read the book and try the Relationship Lifters at the end of each chapter. So, you might want to purchase a book for each of you. We've also included a "For Dads' Eyes Only" chapter about parental guilt and a "For Daughters' Eyes Only" chapter about the consequences of premarital sex.

Do whatever it takes to motivate your daughter to read the sections written for her, but don't try to force her. My best advice: *bribe her!* Extend her curfew one hour each time she reads a chapter. Let her talk on the phone for an extra hour. Offer to pay her five bucks for every chapter she reads. Go away for a weekend and tell her she can have a party at your house while you're gone. Just kidding.

Consider a conversation something like this. "Honey, I know you and I aren't doing well in our relationship. I want to change and I'm reading this book written by a dad and his 22-year-old daughter who really screwed her life up. She and her dad now have a great relationship and this book tells what they learned that keep their relationship from totally falling apart. The daughter wrote a section in each chapter just for teen girls who struggle with their dads. I was wondering if you'd consider reading those sections? I'd be willing to make it worth your while with (your incentive)."

#### A Tip for Mom

Mom, suggest ways to encourage your daughter to read the book as well. She might listen to you more readily than to Dad. But first talk with her father to determine the best action plan. Neither of you wants to appear pushy.

Heather and I believe that you can brave the storm and come out stronger on the other end. We pray that God will use this book to rekindle a new love between you and your daughter. May one day you experience what Luke described happened between the

prodigal son and his father in their renewed relationship: “And they began to have a wonderful time.” (Luke 15: 24, The Message)

Heather and I know the beauty of a restored relationship. You and your daughter can experience that same joy.

### **A Word to Moms**

My wife, Sherryl, and I formed a united team to deal with Heather’s difficulties. She stood with me at every turn and provided just as much direction for Heather as did I. Because of the unique nature of the father-daughter bond, however, I speak directly to dads. Since a difficult dad-daughter relationship also affects mothers, I’ve designed each chapter with mothers in mind as well. The principles don’t apply only to dads, but also to moms. At the end of each chapter you’ll find a special section, *Mom to Mom*, written from my wife’s perspective. She shares from the heart of one mom to another. Also, you’ll occasionally find a sidebar with a Tip for Mom sidebar, offering a parenting suggestion just for you.

### **For Daughters**

“I never wanted to live in this prison anyway!” I screamed down the hall.

The bookbag on my shoulder was crammed with clothes, makeup, and my mother’s jewelry I had stolen and planned to pawn. I pounded down the hall to the back door. Outside my friend honked his car horn. Hand on the doorknob, I turned, looked my father square in the face with hatred in my eyes, and said slowly, “I don’t need you. I never have. And I never will.”

I turned my back to him, slammed the door as forcefully as I could, and was gone.

I never imagined the man whom I treated this way would one day be my role model, my confidant, and my friend—in short, the most important man in my life.

Who would have thought the fights would be replaced with “date nights,” repulsion would turn into respect, and hatred would turn into love?

It didn’t start out bad. When I was younger, I epitomized the stereotypical “perfect” pastor’s daughter: earner of straight As, neighborhood babysitter, a class president at my Christian school. However, my peers basically ignored and often shunned me. I had few friends. I wasn’t “cool” and didn’t fit in. Kids never invited me to hang out with them, and I always felt inferior.

Perhaps I was fed up with being made fun of, or I finally wanted to be “cool.” Maybe it was just curiosity. One thing happened for sure: when I hit thirteen, everything changed.

Sadly, my story isn’t all that unique. I know many girls who are just as I was—into drugs, sex, alcohol; in and out of treatment centers for delinquents; and at war with their parents.

I morphed from perfect goody-goody to bat-out-of-hell *wild* and stayed that way for many years. In spite of twelve different schools (four of which expelled me), more than fifteen psychiatrists and psychologists, numerous rehabs, years on probation, and twice on house arrest, I hardly changed. It started with smoking cigarettes in my room. (Don’t try it—the smell makes it obvious, even with the windows open!) and expulsion from my Christian school. On to the

drinking, the drugs, the boys, the sneaking out, and the beginning of many stays in programs for “troubled” teens—that became my life.

School? If I would even attend, I couldn’t stay awake because I’d been out all night. If I showed up, I’d usually skip out by lunchtime. I began to fail classes.

Church? God? They were both only a distant memory and an object of my disgust. I didn’t want to hear some religious quick-fix answer for what I was going through. It finally took a literal near-death experience to open my eyes to what I was doing to myself, my life, and my parents. It took a “God experience” to change things truly for the better.

Though I thought I was having the time of my life, my journal indicates something different:

My body just keeps going on and existing kind of like I’m just left behind...I just need a purpose... I am so unhappy. But it’s not like genuine hurt, stinging, aching hurt. It’s a numbness...I feel as cold and limp and dead as the icicles hanging from the trees outside. Cold and lifeless and dead. I feel so much as though I’m on the outside looking in...

I find one journal entry after another that chronicles bitter anger at my father. As I reflect on those turbulent years, however, I now see things in a completely different light. My dad defended me to principals, counselors, and my probation officer. He was always a constant in my life, no matter how many problems I caused, no matter how many rehabs I was put through, and no matter how many times I

failed. My friends all went their separate ways. The drugs wore off, the boys left, and the alcohol almost killed me. Who was it that never stopped loving me unconditionally? God and my dad.

You may feel that your dad is so crazy he should be committed to the nearest mental ward. He may act weird. (My dad has fake rotting teeth he wears to play jokes on people.) He may dress strangely. (My dad's favorite "accessories" include his red-checked fanny pack and his double-brimmed fishing hat.) He may irritate you, try to control you, and, at times, seem unbearable. But one thing I learned: his behavior is not *designed* to irritate you. I can promise you that he loves you more than you know. Although I despised my father, disrespected him, and shunned him for years, I finally realized that he was the one who came through for me in my times of need. When no one else was around, I could always count on Dad to be there.

If you're the daughter "gone wild," I've been where you are now. My past not only includes difficult times with my father, it also includes consequences that I still live with today. I vowed that I would have no regrets about my past as long as I could use my experiences to help someone else. My greatest hope is that you can learn from my experiences and avoid many of the mistakes I made without having to experience the consequences yourself.

I'm not going to preach to you, and I'm not going to give you unrealistic suggestions. I want to help you realize that growing up doesn't have to be a constant dad versus daughter battle. If you only give him a chance, you will discover that he can be one of your greatest allies.

We wrote our book with separate sections for fathers and daughters. My dad writes the section for your father, and I write the section for you. At the end of each chapter, we will include a few items we've called Relationship Lifters. These are simple, practical ideas for bettering you and your dad's relationship. They're things that worked for my dad and me when we were going through our hard times, and I hope that they will work for you.

Perhaps you've found the book first, and you want to convince your dad to read it. Offer to take him on a "date" or to clean your room if he'll read some of the chapters with you. (My dad will do anything to get me to clean my room!) It might take a little convincing on your part, but I'm sure it will be worth it.

You know, things will never be perfect. Dad will always be . . . well, a dad . . . and you will always be you. The two of you will always have your differences, and this book will not turn your relationship into a fairy tale. However, with a little give and take, you can rediscover the relationship you were meant to have with the hero in your life you've been overlooking—your dad.