Wildenberg's "Messy journey: How grace & truth offer the prodigal a way home" (Book Review)

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When my daughter Anna was 16, I was visiting with her as she dressed to start a new job at a local burger restaurant. The oldest of four children, Anna is gregarious and easy to talk to, but that morning she was unusually quiet.

Before I went downstairs to make breakfast, Anna looked at me and mouthed two words, “I’m pregnant.” I understood her perfectly. As she left for work, I sat on the stairs staring after her, full of shock, hurt, and fear for my daughter.

That unexpected grandchild is now a 7th grader. Grace is smart, artistic, and her presence has changed our family for the better. However, a dozen years ago, the unexpected teen pregnancy created challenges for which my daughter, her siblings, and her parents were not prepared. Wildenberg’s book would have provided much-needed biblical guidance for that time in my family’s life.

The author, a licensed parent and family educator, fills twelve engaging chapters with anecdotes told by parents who are heartbroken by the actions of children who veered away from their Christian upbringing. Wildenberg offers practical suggestions for communication and supportive Scripture references. But, most meaningful for me is the perspective of the author’s daughter, Courtney, who has chosen a lifestyle contrary to her parents’ beliefs.

Wildenberg details encouragement for parents dealing with their children’s drug use, sexual sin, and rejection of faith. Hope is the message for families of “prodigal” sons and daughters. Assuring parents who seek God’s direction in the lives of their wayward children, Wildenberg echoes her own daughter’s advice to “never give up” on God’s unfailing love.

In the appendix, a “Prodigal Chart” clarifies parents’ understanding of troubling behaviors, and several indicators of abuse, substance use, and parenting tips. The group discussion at the end of the book would be useful to an adult Sunday School class or reading group by giving structure to the emotional issues addressed in the book.
Courtney’s words provide compassionate insight into how her mother’s beliefs conflict with her daughter’s feelings, lifestyle, and behavior. “I hope you can take these stories and apply them to your own circumstances,” Courtney writes. “Parents, I ask you to be patient, to listen, to be there, and to love your child. Rebels, I know from experience that this is hard, but give it time. Keep the lines of communication open. I truly hope this book helps to bridge the gap that you find in your relationship with your family and with God.”

**Reviewer**
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