

Your mother has the right heart but her actions are wrong

written by Dave Ramsey |

Dear Dave,

I'm beginning to feel some bitterness and resentment toward my parents for their recent decisions and financial irresponsibility. Fifteen years ago, while I was still in school, they left good-paying jobs to enter the ministry. They both took pay cuts when they made this decision, and they've been regularly asking for money for living expenses from my husband and me ever since. Sometimes, they even try to make us feel guilty if we can't give them the amount they ask for. My mom, especially, constantly brings up their call to the ministry, adding that we should want to help them. We believe in their calling, but we also feel they knew they would have to live on less money, and they're being irresponsible with the money they make. What should we do?

Abigail

Dear Abigail,

What I'm hearing is giving money to your parents isn't necessarily a financial hardship for you and your husband, but that by consistently giving or loaning your parents money you're losing respect for them. This is not a healthy situation. Your relationship has become strained, and that's a tough thing for anyone to deal with — especially in a parent-child scenario.

Make no mistake, going into the ministry with the right heart is an admirable thing. However, in the Bible, Paul made tents while he conducted his ministry. I'm paraphrasing, of course, but his line was to the effect of, "If you don't work, you don't eat." He had a job. So, I don't think suggesting your folks think about working outside the ministry while trying to do God's work is unfair in a situation like this.

I'm sure your mom is a good person, but no one should do this to their child. On top of it all, she sounds like a travel agent for guilt trips — like she's working you over while implying it's all really for God. That's not only toxic, it's just plain wrong.

It's going to be hard to unravel it all and turn this into a respectable situation where they're not constantly asking for money, and you're not feeling pressure and falling victim to the guilty feelings that enable this behavior. I hope all of you will consider sitting down with a reasonable, objective third party and talking things through. I also hope you'll take some time to read a book called "Boundaries" by Dr. Henry Cloud. It will open your eyes to a few things.

God bless you and your family, Abigail.

—Dave

Dave Ramsey is a best-selling author, personal finance expert and host of The Ramsey Show, heard by more than 20 million listeners each week.