

The Exchange Zone



January 2008

“The Top Twenty List, Part Two”

In January we began a five part series sharing my top twenty principles for parenting teens. Our first four principles included: (1) Provide strong biblical training. (2) Bathe your teens in prayer. (3) Look at your own lives and hearts and shape your parenting by your walk with Christ. (4) Though you retain responsibility to disciple your teens, your role becomes more of a coach as they get older. That newsletter is on the resource page of The Exchange Zone web site if you want to look at it again.

Our next four principles, as much as any we will share, may require a paradigm shift for each of us.

The fifth principle is this, acknowledge your youth are growing and changing. The older they become the more important it is that you trust them as much as you can. If we parent our teens out of the fear that we know bad things are happening to youth in our world today and we merely assume they are “blowing it like other teens,” we run the risk of becoming guilty of what Paul warns us against in Col. 3:21, namely discouraging our sons and daughters through aggravating them. Related to this, the older they become the more important it becomes that we keep God’s chief end for parenting our chief end for parenting, namely that they live for His glory by following Christ as strong disciples. This will give us the freedom to let them appropriately test their wings, take more and more responsibility, and to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. If we are not willing to parent in this direction, we will go against the grain not only of how God made our children, but will short change their spiritual formation.

The sixth principle is one of the most revolutionary of the twenty. See the teen years as an age of wonderful opportunity, not as a time to be dreaded. Stop and think about the resources we have: The very God who created the universe, who knows all things, and can do all lives in and empowers us. He has given us His Spirit and Word by which He transforms hearts. And, what is more, in eternity past He determined to give to you the children you have. Evidently, He believes you are the right match for each other. Finally, He has created teens to change drastically in these formative years (that is an understatement). They are trying to figure out life, how to become an adult, and what view of the world they will take. All this change often makes for some mess and chaos. But think about the wonderful opportunity we have to be used by God to shape their hearts and build a strong worldview and foundation! Please do not see these years as drudgery or wish them away. Instead, understand the open door you possess to shape eternity for these young men and women!

The seventh teen parenting principle is a simple one to state. Teach them their need for the grace of Christ. Yet, it is often hard to accomplish. Our children need to learn that without Christ they can do nothing of eternal significance (cf. John 15:5). Yet, in Christ they can do all things (Phil. 4:13). They must learn that the secret to following Christ is not simply gritting our teeth, trying harder, and being good people (that is a Pharisee). It is the reality that we have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer we alone who live, but Christ who lives in us and the life we now live we live by faith in the Son of God who loves us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20). They must learn from mom and dad that living a fruitful life is not about being perfect or strong, but about faith in Christ. They need to see our struggles and our faith in Christ so that as an adult they are more apt to say, “I saw mom and dad walk with Christ by faith and I know with Him I can do this,” rather than, “I could never walk with Christ because I am not like mom and dad.”

One by-product of a focus upon Christ’s grace is humility which God values (1 Peter 5:5). Rather than looking down upon other people who do not follow Christ with an “I’m-better-than-them” outlook, they understand, “But for the grace of Christ there go I.” Such “sets the table” much better for our sons and daughters to love others.

The eighth principle is short, but very powerful. Parent the child God gave you, not the one you envisioned or thought you would have. So many parents play God by thinking they must force a son or daughter into their image of success or strength, rather than accepting as a gift the children God gave you. Yes, there are biblical principles and goals you should have for them, but this does not mean that all solid Christian teens will look or be alike. If your son is a math whiz, but hates sports, don’t think all is lost, dads and don’t try to change them. If your daughter is more outgoing, mom, than what you thought was proper for a young woman, be careful to discern what are truly biblical principles and what are simply your preferences.

Additionally, if your children go through some faith struggles, it is very important that you trust in God through it all and not bear down upon them with anxiety and fear. Though they need to know you have set boundaries and your bar is set high for them, they also need to know you love them for whom God has made them to be and you will give them room to wrestle with issues and questions, if need be—even if this is not how you expected it to be.

Bottom-line, moms and dads, set the bar high, teach them much by example and by word, bathe them in prayer, expect them to run hard after God, love them passionately, love God deeply before them, and leave the results in the hands of our sovereign God who can see the big picture and who knows the plan and path He has set out for each of them. And remember, none of them will walk a perfect path—just as you have not walked a perfect path since coming to Christ. Ah, but by His grace they can walk a great path for Him!

Joyfully passing on the baton with you,

Tom