

# The Pastor and His Older Children: The Potential and Perils of Parenting Teens

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## I. Introduction

- A. Why this is so important for pastors.

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (1 Tim. 3:4-5)

"When public ministry promises to get crowds into heaven, but personal ministry fumbles the struggles of real individuals amid the exigencies of real life, then all ministry verges on irrelevancy." David Powlison, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling, Summer 2005, Vo. 23, Number 3, pp 4-5*)

- B. Parenting teens is one of our greatest opportunities for growth in sanctification and faith.

- C. Two common misconceptions

1. "When we hit the teen years, we can sit back and enjoy the fruit."
2. "During the teen years, the best we can do is survive."

These are the years of penetrating questions, the years of wonderful discussions never before possible. These are the years of failure and struggle that put the teen's true heart on the table. These are the years of daily ministry and of great opportunity. (Paul Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 19)

## II. Two Relevant Scriptures

- A. Deut. 6:1-9

1. Not a parenting passage, per se. These are God's instructions to ensure that Israel remains faithful in future generations
2. But as members of God's covenant people, we can derive principles for parenting our teens.

- B. Eph. 6:4

**III. Parent with God in the picture. (Dt. 6:2, 4-9; Eph. 6:4)**

- A. Keeping “God in the picture” cultivates a fear of God.
1. Our parenting is simply one part of God’s greater plan to redeem a people for his glory.
  2. We don’t parent to look good in the eyes of others or to produce good, moral citizens.
  3. We will give an account to God for the souls of our children.
- B. Keeping “God in the picture” inspires faith.
1. Apart from God, parenting becomes mere techniques and rules.
  2. God has called us to this task of raising *our* children, and he will supply the grace we need.
  3. Discouragement and weariness come quickly when we doubt God is at work.
- It is faith that enlivens our work with perpetual cheerfulness. It commits every part of it to God, in the hope, that even mistakes shall be overruled for his glory; and thus relieves us from an oppressive anxiety, often attendant upon a deep sense of our responsibility. The shortest way to peace will be found in casting ourselves upon God for daily pardon or deficiencies and supplies of grace, without looking too eagerly for present fruit. (Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 178)
- C. Keeping “God in the picture” produces peace.
1. Being an “instrument in the Redeemer’s hands” isn’t the same as being the Holy Spirit.
  2. Our job isn’t to keep our children from sinning, but to teach them how to deal with their sin in light of what Christ has done.
  3. Our children are ultimately accountable to God, not us. Therefore, we don’t have to be personally offended by their sin.
- D. Keeping “God in the picture” motivates prayer.
1. Our inability to produce true heart change in our children should lead us frequently to the throne of grace.
  2. We pray that our children would come to a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ and bear fruit for his glory. (Col. 1:9-14)

*Which is more prevalent in my parenting — the fear of man or the fear of God? Where do I lack faith for my role as a parent? What steps can I take to make sure that God is in the picture of my parenting?*

**IV. Focus on the heart – yours and your teen’s. (Dt. 6:5-7)**

- A. The primary question in Deut. 6 is, “What do you *love*?”
- B. The primary heart to focus on is mine.
  - 1. Dt. 6:6 highlight the importance of God’s commands being in our hearts first.
  - 2. Col. 3:21 implies that I can lead my children in a way that provokes and discourages them rather than helps them. I can communicate right things in the wrong ways.
  - 3. Common temptations include sinful judgment, self-righteousness, anger, self-centeredness, fear of man (or teen).
  - 4. Be sure to involve others who can help us discern more accurately what’s in our heart – our spouse, care group, others, even our children. God gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6; Prov. 4:23)
- C. Know the common temptations of teens in general, and a pastor’s teen in particular: pride, self-centeredness, lovers of pleasure, fear of man, comparison.
- D. Focusing on the heart is crucial to navigating many of the “gray” areas (music, friends, clothes, Internet use, phone use, events, etc.)
  - 1. We must do more than assign labels (*worldly, rebellious, independent, deceptive*). We must explore the heart.
  - 2. Teach your teen the difference between external responses and inward desires.
  - 3. Take time to ask “why, how long, how much, what for?” questions.
  - 4. The important question is, “In what direction is my teen’s heart headed?”
  - 5. Distinguish between biblical obedience and biblical wisdom.
- E. Focusing on the heart helps define maturity and earning trust.
  - 1. Growth in godliness is a process, not an event.
  - 2. Maturity is mistrusting my heart enough to pursue self-disclosure, teachableness, and counsel on my own.
  - 3. The goal is a humble heart, not mere conformity to present standards.

- F. Awareness of the heart should cause us to excel in encouragement, rooted in the gospel.
1. Focusing on the heart implies not only correction, but encouragement. (Mt. 12:20; 1 Thess. 5:14)
  2. Regularly share observations about what your teen is doing right.
  3. Assure your (converted) teen of the full forgiveness provided through the gospel.
  4. Impart faith in the power of Christ to change us. Our ultimate hope comes from Christ's ability to transform us, not our ability to try harder.

*Whose heart tends to occupy more of my thoughts – mine or my teen's? What do my teens think "maturity" looks like? Are my teens more aware of my encouragement or correction?*

**V. Engage your teen compassionately, creatively, and consistently. (Dt. 6:7-9, Eph. 6:4; Prov. 20:5)**

A. Engage compassionately

1. Engaging compassionately is distinct from lecturing, teaching, correcting, or giving a monologue. It's coming alongside.
2. Paul Tripp – accept, incarnate, identify, enter

Take time to enter the world of your teenager. Know what he faces every day, know how he is emotionally and spiritually gripped by those experiences, know where he is being tempted and where he is succumbing. Understand what the worlds of home, school, work, and leisure look like to him. (*Age of Opportunity*, 197)

B. Engage consistently (Dt. 6:7)

1. Think daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly terms. Without focus, we will miss a lot.
2. Planned as well as spontaneous.

C. Engage creatively

1. Not only one format or time.
2. Meet formally and informally, as a family and individually.
3. Discover and explore. What are you listening to? What did you like about that?
4. Look for an activity you can do together.

*Does my teen feel I seek to engage them consistently? If not, what are the hindrances? What could I change to create more opportunities to engage with my teen?*

**VI. Make trusting in Christ appealing. (Dt. 6:2-3)**

- A. Model a functional love for the Savior and the gospel.
- B. Model a functional love for God's Word.
- C. Model a functional love for fellowship.
- D. Model a functional trust in God's sovereignty.
- E. Make sure your teens understand the difference between being moral and being saved.

Parents should care more for the loyalty of their children to Christ than anything besides, more for this than for their health, their intellectual vigour and brilliance, their material prosperity, their social position, their exemption from great sorrows and great misfortunes. (Francis Foulkes, quoting Dale in *Ephesians, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 166).

*Do my teens see and appreciate how I have benefited from knowing Christ as the Savior? In what ways could I make trusting in Christ more attractive?*

**VII. What if My Teen is in Rebellion?**

- A. Doesn't negate the principles we've already covered.
- B. Increase the amount of time you give to prayer.
- C. Take time to evaluate your heart and your parenting practices.
  - 1. A rebellious teen is a prime opportunity to discover who I'm trusting, what's in my heart, where my parenting is flawed, how much I believe God's Word, and more.
  - 2. Pursue what is *most important* in your relationship with your teen.
  - 3. Don't withhold affection nor eliminate blessing your teen. God causes the sun to shine on the evil and the good. (Mt. 5:45)
- D. Seek the counsel and observations of others.
  - 1. Go sooner rather than later.
  - 2. Share with others before you think you have everything figured out.
  - 3. God may use people we don't know that well to give us insights into our parenting.
  - 4. We're wise to open up our lives to counsel before a crisis comes.

- E. Respond in ways that demonstrate a trust in God
1. Cultivate a heart of thankfulness to God for the work he's doing in you, your marriage, your family. Consider the many ways God is using this season.
  2. Draw together as a couple,
  3. If necessary or advisable, decrease ministry responsibilities to devote greater time to your family.
  4. Continue to trust in God's faithful sovereignty and the power of the Spirit, working through his Word and the gospel, to change hearts.

### **Suggested Reading**

#### *Parenting:*

Age of Opportunity – Paul Tripp  
 Instructing a Child's Heart – Tedd and Margy Tripp  
 Everyday Talk – John Younts  
 Hints for Parents – Gardiner Spring (Tedd Tripp, ed.)  
 Duties of Parents – J.C. Ryle  
 Get Outta My Face! – Rick Horne

#### *General:*

War of Words – Paul Tripp  
 Instruments in the Redeemers Hands – Paul Tripp  
 Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health – Don Whitney  
 How Can I Be Sure I'm a Christian? – Don Whitney  
 Living the Cross Centered Life - C.J. Mahaney  
 Humility – C.J. Mahaney  
 The Enemy Within – Kris Lundgaard

#### *For Girls:*

Girl Talk – Carolyn Mahaney, Nicole Whitacre, Kristen Chesemore, Janelle Bradshaw  
 Feminine Appeal – Carolyn Mahaney

#### *For Guys:*

Holiness – J.C. Ryle  
 Thoughts for Young Men – J.C. Ryle