

# **Age of Opportunity**

## **Leader's Guide**

# Chapter 1

## Age of Opportunity or Season of Survival?

### Core Principle

We live in a culture of cynicism when it comes to teenagers. This cultural negativity has infiltrated the Christian family as well. This cynicism has its roots in a biological view of teenagers that sees them as little more than a collection of raging, rebel hormones, physically incapable of living responsibly.

### Chapter Goals

Our goal is to help parents identify the ways in which the cynicism of the culture has influenced the ways they think about and respond to their teenage children. This chapter also calls parents to learn to recognize the big moments of change that are embedded in the little of moments of life that we share with our teenagers. We want to look for daily opportunities to be part of what God is doing in the life of our teenagers. Finally, this chapter is meant to help parents recognize attitudes that stand in the way of what God is seeking to do through them in their teenagers' lives.

### Study Questions

1. What attitude do many parents have toward the teen years?

*Fear and dread (p.13).*

2. What does it mean to have a biological view of teens?

*To see teens as if they were nothing more than collections of raging, rebel hormones encased in developing skin ( p.14).*

3. What parenting goal typically flows from a biological view of teens?

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*To somehow hold the hormones back so that parents can survive until the teen has reached age twenty. A survival mentality ( p.14).*

4. What view of God's Word is demonstrated in a biological view of teens?

*That Scripture is not sufficient; it is no match for the teen years ( p.15).*

5. What would be a naive view of the teen years?

*A naive view would think that there are no particular challenges in a teen's life (p. 15).*

6. What does the author mean when he says that the battle raging in the lives of young people is not the battle of biology but a battle for the heart?

*The battle teens are facing is in reality the tendency to exchange worship and service of the Creator for the worship of the created thing (p.16).*

7. Why is the battle for the heart so dramatically important?

*Because what controls the heart will direct the life (p.16).*

8. What does the author mean when he says that the struggle of the teen years is not only about teen biology and teen rebellion?

*The teen is not the only person in the equation. Parents are in the equation as well and these years also expose the wrong thoughts and desires of their hearts. These years pull back the curtain and expose the parents as well as the teen (p.17).*

9. What kinds of things might teens expose in the lives of their parents?

*Self-righteousness, impatience, unforgiving spirit, lack of servant love, weakness of faith, craving for comfort and ease (p.17).*

10. What heart issues are displayed in the father described on pages 18 and 19?

*I must have a reputation as a successful father.*

*I must have the respect I think I deserve.*

*I must have ease with older children.*

*I must be given what I believe you owe me.*

11. What is the significance of the author's statement that we live in the world of the incredibly mundane?

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*We must see small things as opportunities to help the child and prepare him or her to live outside the home. Parents must not have the attitude that it is only the significant, major decisions that require our involvement (p.22).*

12. What three fundamental doors of opportunity exist for every parent of teens?

*Teenage insecurity. Teenage rebellion. Teen's widening world (p.23).*

13. What desires make teenagers susceptible to the temptation to rebel?

*The desire to be an individual and think for himself.*

*The desire for freedom.*

*The desire to try new things.*

*The desire to test the boundaries.*

*The desire for control.*

*The desire to make one's own decisions.*

*The desire to be different.*

*The desire to fit in.*

*The desire to be accepted (p.25).*

14. List some truths that can help teens handle their widening world.

*The sovereignty and providence of God.*

*The ever-present help of the Lord.*

*The nature of biblical relationships.*

*Spiritual warfare.*

*Discipline.*

*Self-control.*

*Contentment.*

*Faithfulness.*

*Trustworthiness.*

*The nature of the body of Christ.*

*The world, the flesh, and the devil.*

*Principles of responsibility and accountability.*

*Biblical priorities.*

*Discovery and stewardship of gifts (p.27).*

15. What truths can help parents escape a cynical view of the teenage years?

*Seeing that change, insecurity, and tumult are things God uses to bring truth to light.*

*Seeing it as an opportunity to face idolatry in our own lives.*

*Trusting that God rules over all things for our sake.*

*Trusting that God is an ever-present help in trouble.*

*Trusting that God is at work in every situation, accomplishing his redemptive purpose.*

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*Trusting that God's Word is powerful, active, and effective.*

## Chapter 1 Application Questions

1. Cite an example from your experience (with others or your own life) that illustrates the way parents see the teen years as something to be dreaded.

2. Evaluate the way you respond to trials. Use the following rating scale:

- 1 - Rarely
- 2 - Occasionally
- 3 - Regularly

With self-righteousness	1	2	3
With impatience	1	2	3
With an unforgiving spirit	1	2	3
With a lack of servant love	1	2	3
Showing weak faith	1	2	3
Craving comfort and ease	1	2	3

3. Think of the last three trials you faced. Describe the trial and then describe what Christ-like (or unChrist-like) characteristics you displayed in each.

4. List the ministry opportunities that are present in the following scenarios:

- The last Pop Tart.
- The cry of nothing to wear half an hour before school.
- The report card crumpled in the pocket of jeans headed for the wash.
- The pouting expression when the parent says “No.”
- The third fender-bender in a month.
- Constant words of discontent.
- “Everybody else does.”

- “I’m the only one whose parents make them...”

5. What biblical principles can help a teen struggling with his or her looks?

## Chapter 2

### Whose Idols Are in the Way?

#### Core Principle

The anger, frustration, discouragement, irritation, impatience, and fear that parents feel during the teen years not only reveal that the teen is struggling, but that the parents are as well. If our hearts are controlled by something other than God, the great opportunities of the teen years will not be viewed as opportunities at all, but as a constant stream of hassles brought on by a selfish, immature person who upsets our otherwise comfortable life. Failure to deal with our idolatry will mean we will turn God-given moments of ministry into moments of anger. We will personalize what is not personal, become adversarial in our approach to our teen, and settle for quick, situational solutions that do not focus on the teenager’s heart.

#### Chapter Goals

The goal of this chapter is best summarized by Proverbs 20:5, “The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.” The goal is that parents would use the mirror of the Word (Luke 6:34-36; Ezek. 14:1-5; James 4:1-10) to examine their hearts. Which of the typical parental idols listed below best describes them?

**Comfort** (“I just wish life were a little easier, a little more peaceful, and a little more predictable.”)

**Respect** (“If it is the last thing I do, I am going to get her to respect me!”)

**Appreciation** (“I have done and done for them and this is the thanks I get? It is about time that I got a little credit for all of my hard work!”)

**Success** (“Do you know what it is like to do all this work and have him behave this way? What are people thinking about our family now?”)

**Control** (“If I had a little more control around here, life would be much easier and he would be in far less trouble!”)

The goal is that parents would understand that they must be willing to start with their own hearts if they want to be used by God to help transform the hearts of their teenagers. If we do not do this, we will be a hindrance, not a help, in what God is doing.

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### Study Questions

1. What is an idol?

*A place where we have tended to exchange worship and service of the Creator for the worship and service of a created things (p.29).*

2. Why is it a waste of time for parents to think about strategies for parenting without first examining themselves?

*If our hearts are controlled by something other than God, we will not view the golden opportunities of the teen years as opportunities at all. Instead they will be a constant stream of irritating hassles brought on by an incredibly self-centered person (pp. 29-30).*

3. What is wrong with wanting life to be a resort?

*Someone with a resort mentality expects to be served. God didn't put us here to be served, but to serve (p.31).*

4. Why will parents who demand comfort, ease, regularity, peace, space, quiet and harmony be ill-equipped to fight the war they are called to fight?

*They will begin to see their teen as the enemy (p.32).*

5. How might an idol of respect manifest itself?

*Parents will believe that the teen's motives are disrespectful instead of believing the best; become sinfully angry when disrespect is shown rather than correcting biblically; be concerned only with treatment of self-- not treatment of a Holy God.*

6. Since children should appreciate their parents, what is wrong with parents having this as their goal?

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*God's goal is for parents to be like Christ. Parents cannot directly control their children's choices. Parents can provide teaching and structure (as they are instructed to do by God) but they cannot directly control what their children will do with the teaching and structure.*

*If parents make it their goal to be appreciated, they are replacing God's goal with one of their own. Sorrow will result.*

*Making this the goal also results in parents becoming hyper-vigilant about getting appreciation. The end of this will be discouragement and anger.*

7. What questions can parents ask themselves to avoid making appreciation their goal?

*Why am I doing what I am doing?*

*Whom am I serving?*

*What things have I come to expect and demand?*

*Whose desires rule the moments of opportunity with my teen -- God's or mine? (p. 34).*

8. What is wrong with the belief that if parents do their part, their children will be model citizens?

*This thinking ignores the child's individual accountability to God and makes the parent responsible. These assumptions pave the way for the parents' identities to get wrapped up in their children. Parents begin to need their children to be what they "should" be so that the parents can feel a sense of achievement and success. They begin to look at their children as their trophies rather than God's creatures. They want to display them on the mantels of their lives as visible testimonies to a job well done.*

*When children fail to live up to these expectations, parents find themselves not grieving for them and fighting for them, but angry at them, fighting against them and grieving for themselves and their own loss (p.35).*

9. Since it is so easy to lose sight of the fact that these are God's children, what should parents remind themselves of regularly?

*These children do not belong to us. They are not given to bring us glory, but God. Our children are gifts from God, they exist through him, and the glory of their lives points to him. Parents are simply agents to accomplish God's plan. Our identity is rooted in God and his call to us, not in our children and their performance. What should make us weep is not that they have rejected us, but him (p.35).*

10. List three truths from God's Word that are vital to remember if we want to avoid an idol of control.

- *There is no situation that is not "under control," for Christ "rules over all things for the sake of his body, the church" (Eph. 1:22).*

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- *Not only is the situation under control, but God is at work in it, doing the good he has promised to do (Rom. 8:28). I do not need to control my teen's every desire, thought, and action. In every situation, he or she is under the control of a sovereign Christ, who is accomplishing what I cannot.*
- *I need to remember that the goal of my parenting is not to conform my children to my image, but to work so that they are conformed to the image of Christ.*

## Chapter 2 Application Questions

1. Do you have an idol of comfort? Give specific reasons for your answer.
  
2. Evaluate the way you respond when your comfort is challenged. Use the following rating scale:
  - 1 - Rarely
  - 2 - Occasionally
  - 3 - Regularly

Fail to be effective and productive in strategic ministry moments.	1 2 3
Tend to see the teen as the enemy.	1 2 3
Tend to fight <i>with</i> teen rather than <i>for</i> him or her.	1 2 3
Tend to do and say regrettable things.	1 2 3
  
3. Give a recent example of a situation in which your comfort was disrupted. Record how you responded.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Rate yourself on how frequently you function as though you were entitled to this "right."<sup>1</sup> Use the following rating scale:
  - 1 - Rarely
  - 2 - Occasionally
  - 3 - Regularly

1. Right to have and control personal belongings.	1 2 3
2. Right to privacy.	1 2 3
3. Right to have and express personal opinions.	1 2 3
4. Right to earn and use money.	1 2 3
5. Right to plan your own schedule.	1 2 3
6. Right to respect.	1 2 3
7. Right to have and choose friends.	1 2 3
8. Right to belong, be loved, be accepted.	1 2 3
9. Right to be understood.	1 2 3

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from *A Homework Manual for Biblical Living, Volume 1*, by Wayne A. Mack (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1979), pp. 5-6.

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10.	Right to be supported.	1	2	3
11.	Right to make your own decisions.	1	2	3
12.	Right to determine your own future.	1	2	3
13.	Right to have good health.	1	2	3
14.	Right to have pleasure.	1	2	3
15.	Right to have comfort.	1	2	3
16.	Right to have ease.	1	2	3
17.	Right to be considered worthwhile and important.	1	2	3
18.	Right to be protected and cared for.	1	2	3
19.	Right to be appreciated.	1	2	3
20.	Right to have time off.	1	2	3
21.	Right to have harmony.	1	2	3
22.	Right to have quiet.	1	2	3
23.	Right to have predictability and a regular schedule.	1	2	3
24.	Right to be treated fairly.	1	2	3
25.	Right to be desired.	1	2	3
26.	Right to have fun.	1	2	3
27.	Right to raise children your way.	1	2	3
28.	Right to security and safety.	1	2	3
29.	Right to fulfilled hopes and aspirations.	1	2	3
30.	Right to be successful.	1	2	3
31.	Right to have others obey you.	1	2	3
32.	Right to have your own way.	1	2	3
33.	Right to be free of difficulties and problems.	1	2	3

Are we really entitled to anything?

5. Do you have an idol of respect? Give specific reasons for your answers.
6. Describe a recent situation in which you were not shown proper respect. How did you respond?
7. Describe a time when you did something for someone else and received no appreciation. What was your response?

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8. How do you generally respond when you are not appreciated?

9. On the scale of 1 to 3 below, rate yourself on the following:

1 - Rarely

2 - Occasionally

3 - Regularly

Do you have an attitude of ownership and entitlement? 1 2 3

Have you subtly become ruled by reputation? 1 2 3

Is it a struggle to love your child? Is your relationship distant because of that struggle? 1 2 3

Are you oppressed by what others might think? 1 2 3

Have you ever doubted the principles of God's Word and wondered why they haven't worked for you? 1 2 3

10. Do you have an idol of control? Give specific reasons for your answers.

## Chapter 3

### What is A Family? A Definition

#### Core Principle

In Deuteronomy 6, God makes it very clear that he intends the family to function as his primary learning community. God has ordained that children would learn the most fundamental facts (truths) of human existence in the context of the family. The family is the best place for this to happen because, unlike a separated classroom, *life* takes place in the family. The many experiences and relationships that make up daily family life present natural opportunities to talk with our children about things that really matter. To understand the importance of the family's educational calling, parents need a biblical understanding of who their children are. Parents will relate to their teenagers based on the way they have defined them.

#### Chapter Goals

The goal is to help parents think in a distinctly biblical way about their teenager's basic makeup as a creature of God. First, the Bible would call us to view our teenagers as **covenantal beings**. This means that teenagers were made for a relationship with God. They were created to be worshippers, and if they do not worship God, they will give their hearts to God substitutes. (See Romans 1:25.) Second, we must see our teenagers as **social beings**. They were made to live in loving community with others. In fact, God has given them the moral responsibility to live with their neighbor's welfare in view. Third, teenagers are **interpreters**. This means that as they live life, they are always seeking to organize, interpret, and explain what is going on around them – and inside them. Teenagers think, so they do not live life based solely on the facts of their experiences, but also on how they have interpreted those facts. Teenagers are always assembling a functional worldview (God, self, authority, responsibility, right and wrong, past, future, etc.) that shapes their choices and behavior. As parents recognize the true identity of their teenagers, the goal is that parents would also recognize the need for the family to function as a vibrant learning community.

## Study Questions

1. What is shocking and sad about the situation in Judges 2:6-15?

*The first generation of children who grew up in Palestine did not know who God was or the amazing things he did to deliver and sustain his people ( p.40).*

2. What does Deuteronomy 6 say is God's purpose for the family?

*To be a place of teaching and learning (p.41).*

3. What are some of the opportunities parents will have to teach as they live with their children?

*Questions asked at bedtime, morning complaints and grouchiness, driving times in the car without the radio, etc. (p.41).*

4. What does the author mean when he says that children are covenantal beings?

*Children are made for a relationship with God (p.43).*

5. If children do not live in joyful submission to God, what will happen?

*They will live in submission to someone or something else (p.43).*

6. What is wrong with the self-sufficient, self-made individualism of Western culture?

*God always talks of people in relationship. Man was not created to be an island (p.44).*

7. What does the author mean by his statement that children are interpreters?

*Children respond to life not on the basis of facts, but on the basis of sense they have made out of those facts (p.46).*

8. What do we need in order to interpret life correctly?

*God's revelation, his truth (p.47).*

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9. What controls our behavior? Support your answer biblically.

*The heart (Luke 6:43-45 [p.48]).*

10. What does the author mean when he says that much of what we call Christian parenting is nothing more than “fruit stapling”?

*It focuses only on ways of changing behavior. It doesn't address the heart (p.50).*

11. If the heart does not change, what kind of fruit will result?

*Temporary and cosmetic (p.50).*

### Chapter 3 Application Questions

1. Describe one of the last times you took the time to learn what your child was thinking. How long ago was it? How often do you take time to do this?
2. How often do you do this spontaneously as issues arise in the course of family life?
3. Describe a situation in which you learned what your children were thinking and worked to instill in them a biblical view of life.
4. Your teen yells, “Someone stole my bookbag!” What biblical principles would help this teen arrive at a different interpretation?  
*God’s involvement in the details of life.*  
*God’s desire to mature us and teach us to depend on him in daily circumstances.*  
*When facing a problem, begin with yourself.*
5. What heart issues might influence a bright student to get poor grades?  
*Lack of self-discipline.*  
*Self-trust that leads him to feel that if he is intelligent, he shouldn’t have to study.*  
*Failure to see his intellectual abilities as gifts that God wants him to use for his glory.*  
*A fear of man that prompts him to downplay abilities that set him apart from his peers.*  
*An unthankful spirit.*

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*A fear of the future. Good grades might lead to future academic and professional expectations that he fears he will not be able to fulfill.*

6. What heart issues might influence a sibling to borrow things without permission?  
*An assumption that one's own desires are needs that have priority over anyone else's.*  
*A failure to consider others better than oneself.*  
*No sense of God's loving concern for both the sibling and him or herself.*

7. What would you say to the teen who mutters that she hates her face so much she is embarrassed to leave the house?

*Passages like Psalm 139 and Ephesians 2:10 point to God's perfect knowledge of each person and his loving purposes in creating them as they are, so that they can accomplish the work that God has tailor-made for them.*

*Learning to get one's identity from the God who loves you leads to a life of fulfillment and purpose; allowing the opinions of others to define you leads to emotional and spiritual bondage.*

8. Give an example of a way that a teen might demonstrate worship, not of God, but of some aspect of the created world.

*Fighting over the telephone.*

*Wanting to die because of a lack of peer acceptance.*

*Absorption in the way one looks.*

9. What would you want to teach the child who takes the last chocolate donut?

*How could you use that situation to demonstrate the love of Christ? How will you handle it the next time?*

10. What would you want to teach the children who did not get the last chocolate donut?

*How can you use that situation to demonstrate the love of Christ? How will you handle it the next time?*



## **Chapter 4**

### **What is A Family? A Job Description**

#### **Core Principle**

To follow God's design for the family, parents must do two things. First, they must approach parenting with an educator's mentality. It is not enough to tell your teenager what to do or to correct and discipline him when he has done wrong. Rather, we are to constantly look for teaching opportunities to help our teenager look at life from God's perspective. Second, parents need to know their subject matter. What are the foundational things that every teenager needs to know about life? This foundational body of thought can be organized into three areas:

**The family as a theological community.** Theology in its purest form is the study of God. All of life is connected to him. God (his existence, his character, and his plan) is the ultimate fact of human existence, and it is impossible to understand life if this fact is omitted. Since the "whole world is filled with his glory," family life presents daily opportunities to talk about him.

**The family as a sociological community.** Here we recognize the Second Great Command by looking for opportunities to teach our teenagers God's way of love. There is no better place to teach a teenager how to love his neighbor as himself, because in the family he is required to live with people with whom he did not choose to live.

**The family as a redemptive community.** Here the focus is on the gravity of our condition as sinners and the glories of God's provision of grace in Christ Jesus. As we teach the teenager to admit his sin, we point him to a God of love who has not offered him a *system* of redemption, but instead has given his Son as Redeemer. In Jesus we find the only true place of hope as we admit that we are fallen people living in a fallen world.

#### **Chapter Goals**

Our first goal is to encourage parents to structure their family life to promote this teaching function. We cannot hope to teach our children such important truths in forty-five second intervals between activities. Our second goal is to help parents to master these biblical themes themselves. A parent cannot give his teenager something that he does not have himself. Our final goal is that parents would grow in their ability to recognize the God-given teaching moments that are sprinkled throughout every day.

## Study Questions

1. Why do we often present Bible passages out of context to our children, in the hope that it will somehow motivate them to do what is right?

*Because we don't know how to apply the Bible to real-life everyday experience (p. 54).*

2. What is theology?

*The study of God, his existence, his nature, and his works (p.54).*

3. What does this statement mean? "It is God's plan that the family function as a theological community."

*The ultimate fact of family life is that God exists and we are his creatures (p.54).*

4. All of life becomes meaningless unless it is rooted in what?

*God (p.55).*

5. Why is there no divine 911 telephone line?

*Because there is never a moment in which God is absent or inactive. There is never a situation, location, or relationship that he does not rule (p.56).*

6. What do teens (and adults) tend to mistakenly believe is most important?

*Their desires (p.56).*

7. When teens express their desires as needs and demand that we fulfill them, how should we respond?

*We must be faithful to turn their eyes from what they desire to what God requires (p.56).*

8. Many teens would say that all they want out of life is to be happy. What is wrong with this?

*Not only does the definition of happiness change regularly, but there is no higher focus than their own pleasure. We were not created for our own pleasure.*

9. Why is it important that teens see their lives embedded in the story of God?

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*Because life is bigger than their own happiness. Life is about God and his sovereign plans. This gives a reason to hope and strength to endure (p.59).*

10. What does the author mean when he states that we live life in the utterly mundane?

*We don't do very many grand and significant things in our lives. We live in the bathrooms, bedrooms, living rooms and hallways of life. This is where the character of our life is set (p.60).*

11. Once one has biblically clarified one's responsibilities, what is the only proper response?

*To obey (p.61).*

12. What is the teen's job in situations that are outside of his or her control?

*To trust God (p.61).*

13. What is wrong with the thinking of the girl who told her mom, "If it's the last thing I do, I am going to teach my brother to stay out of my room"?

*She is confused about God's job and her job. She is trying to control her brother instead of responding to mistreatment as God has instructed. She is neither trusting nor obeying (p.61).*

14. When the parents tried to eliminate their children's arguments over the CD player by devising a weekly schedule for its use, what teaching opportunity did they miss?

*They missed an opportunity to address heart issues such as loving your neighbor as yourself (p.64).*

15. Why is the family an ideal environment to uncover issues of the heart?

*In the family, children are called by God to love people with whom they did not choose to live. They cannot escape the daily responsibilities to give, to love, and to serve. Almost everything around them must be shared. Their desires will conflict with another's plans. Here they will face the utter impossibility of loving neighbor as yourself, apart from the help of Christ ( p.64).*

16. How does facing the harsh realities of the Fall revealed in family life pave the way for something wonderful?

*As we face the reality of sin, we can begin to seek and treasure the riches of God's grace (p.66).*

17. How can the family function as a redemptive community?

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*By promoting grace, forgiveness, deliverance from sin, reconciliation, new life in Christ and hope (p.66).*

18. What is the key to the family functioning a redemptive community?

*Parents who are ready and willing to confess their faults to their children because they trust Christ (p.67).*

19. Why is it helpful to recognize the utter impossibility of fulfilling the law?

*It forces us to see how much we need Christ (p.67).*

20. Why do we often miss opportunities to “do redemption”?

*Because we are too busy solving the problem at hand (just stopping the conflict). Also because we see our children’s sins as personal affronts (p.69).*

21. What are you communicating when you ask a sinning child, “How could you?” or “Why would you?”

*That they have problems to which we can’t relate. That they are sinners and we are not. That we are somehow above such sins (p.69).*

## **Chapter 4**

### **Application Questions**

1. When Joey is mocked because of his “bobo” sneakers, how do you make that a teaching moment?
  
2. When Sarah tells you at 9:45 p.m. that she needs poster board for a project due the next morning, how do you make the most of this teaching opportunity?
  
3. When Josh stands in front of a well-stocked refrigerator and says there is nothing to eat, how do you capitalize on that moment?
  
4. When Pete walks in with hair that he has just dyed with lime Jell-O, what truths do you teach?
  
5. How would you respond to a child who asks, “Why do we have to obey all of these rules?”
  
6. How could you respond to the son who says, “I just have to have those shoes! Dad, I need them!”?

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7. How could you respond to the son who says, “No one wants to be friends with a kid who has character! All of the popular kids at school, all of the leaders, are jerks. They are the center of attention, they get all the girls, and here I am, a nice guy who can be trusted, and I have no friends! I’d be better off being a jerk! Why be good if nobody notices?”
  
8. Your daughter says, “If it’s the last thing I do, I am going to teach my brother to stay out of my room!” In what areas does she need to learn to trust?
  
9. In what areas does she need to obey?
  
10. Give an example of a way a parent might respond self-righteously to his or her teen.
  
11. When was the last time you went to your children and confessed sin?
  
12. How can you model for children that there is a Redeemer who forgives, delivers, reconciles, and restores when they are fighting with one another?  
  
*By requiring them to face one another, deal with their differences, confess sin, ask for forgiveness, and restore the relationship.*
  
13. List two occasions when you shared your struggle with sin to show your children the mercy of Christ.
  
14. For each of the following examples, write out two ways of handling it.  
In column 1 write a quick, surface solution that ignores the issues of the heart.

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In column 2 write a way to address the problem that develops a heart of Christ-like love.

Example	Column 1	Column 2
A fight over the last drop of milk at breakfast.		
A shove in response to an accidental bump in the hallway.		
An argument over time spent in the bathroom.		
A discussion over borrowed clothes that weren't returned.		
Willingness to participate in put-down humor.		
A demand for assistance combined with an unwillingness to help others.		
A lack of willing participation in household chores.		
A debate over who gets the front seat of the car.		

## **Chapter 5**

### **Parents, Meet Your Teenagers**

#### **Core Principle**

We have already concluded that we cannot accept the current cultural definition of our teenagers. It is biologically based and does not recognize the teenager's heart. So we look to Scripture for help in defining our teens. The first several chapters of Proverbs define in practical life terms the typical struggles of youth. In so doing, the Proverbs give us a wonderful, functional definition of the teen years. As we recognize these common struggles, we also begin to recognize that our teenagers' struggles are not far from our own. As we admit this, we realize that, contrary to popular opinion, our teenagers are more like us than unlike us.

#### **Chapter Goals**

The goal is that our interactions with our teenagers would be (1) informed by a biblical understanding of their struggles and (2) infused with gospel hope. We want to become skilled at recognizing the doors of opportunity to lasting heart change that these struggles give us. When we recognize that our primary ministry opportunities come in moments of trouble, God can use us to prepare our teenagers to live responsibly before him, even after they have left our homes. The teenager's lack of hunger for wisdom and correction, tendency toward legalism, lack of wisdom in choice of companions, susceptibility to sexual temptation, lack of eschatological awareness, and lack of heart awareness all provide opportunities to prepare our teens for life by helping them to deal with their own heart issues. The goal is to help parents use the opportunities that are present amid trouble.

#### **Study Questions**

1. In Proverbs, the father emphasizes to his son that one thing is of great value and importance. What is it?

*Wisdom (p.76).*

2. What can parents do to avoid inflammatory confrontations and verbal power struggles?

## Age of Opportunity

*Deal with themselves before they deal with their teen (p.77).*

*Then talk with their teen in the right place at the right time (p.77).*

3. The author states that giving wisdom is not hitting your teen over the head with words. What is it?

*It is putting a lovely garland around his neck. It's giving him the world's most valuable jewels. It is gold from God's pocket to his hands (p.78).*

4. What three things does the author do when his teens are being defensive?

- *He clarifies his actions.*
- *He helps them examine their own defensiveness.*
- *He seeks to be faithful in confessing his sins against them (p.79).*

5. For what things might a parent need to seek a child's forgiveness?

*Irritation, impatience, judgment of motives, name-calling, words of condemnation, raised voices, any situation where the parent has been out of control emotionally or physically (p.79).*

6. What should you do if you begin to lose it while talking to your teen?

*Excuse yourself, pray, get yourself together and then go back to complete the talk (p.79).*

7. How can a parent pursue his or her teens?

*Daily express love. Don't ask questions that can be answered yes or no. Instead, ask questions that require description, explanation, and self-disclosure. Don't just relate to your teens during times of correction. Notice when they do something right and encourage them. Pray daily with them even if it makes them uncomfortable. Always find them in the house and say a warm goodnight before they go to bed (p.80).*

8. In what sense do teens tend to be legalists?

*They emphasize the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law (p.82).*

9. What kind of teaching should parents do to combat such legalism in their teens?

*Talk about the heart issues behind the command. Show them the difference between an inner purity and a pharisaic performance of duty. See it as an opportunity to talk about what it means to have a heart for God and a heart for doing what is right (p.82).*

## Age of Opportunity

10. If you point out legalism and remind teens of the true spirit of God's requirements, how can this encourage in them a hunger for Christ?

*They will see their inability to meet God's requirements and reach out for the help that only Christ can give (p.83).*

11. To what does legalism lead?

*Self-righteousness (p.83).*

12. How do teens tend to perceive a parent's rejection of their friends?

*As a rejection of them (p.84).*

13. Rather than attacking their children's friends, how can parents help their teens in this area?

*By asking good questions that help the child to examine his or her thoughts, desires, motives, choices, and behaviors with respect to friendship.*

14. What is the key in helping our teens remain sexually pure?

*Start early so that by the time the child reaches adolescence, parent and child alike have moved beyond embarrassment or reticence in talking about sex.*

15. What is eschatology?

*A focus on eternity (or end times).*

16. What is meant by the statement that teens don't have an eschatological perspective?

*They don't tend to live with eternity in view (p.87).*

17. How does our culture reinforce the falsehood that life is found in present, earthly, physical treasure and that the successful person is the one with the biggest pile?

*It emphasizes labels, body size, intelligence, athletic ability, possessions and popularity (p.88).*

18. What does Proverbs describe as the control center of our lives?

*The heart (p.89).*

19. What higher agenda should parents have as they work with their teens?

## Age of Opportunity

*To help the teen see his or her heart as it really is, and to be used of God to help produce a heart ruled by nothing but God and his truth (p.89).*

20. What approach to discipline can help teens grow in self-awareness?

*Asking questions designed to break through the deceitfulness of sin and expose the heart (p.90).*

21. How will parents with a survival mentality of the teen years respond differently from those who see these years as a time of preparation?

*Parents with a survival mentality will try to control the child and respond out of anxiety, irritation, and fear. They will respond emotionally and foolishly, try to manipulate the teen into obedience, and initiate unproductive power struggles. Their relations with their teen will disintegrate and the teen's rebellion will increase. They will finally quit parenting while telling themselves that they did everything possible.*

*Parents who see the teen years as preparation will move forward with a confident faith in the Redeemer and his sovereign empowerment. Love, understanding, grace, and hope will be communicated. These parents will ask calm and probing questions, engage in debate without condemning, and correct in a spirit of acceptance, forgiveness, and hope (pp. 93-94).*

## Chapter 5 Application Questions

1. Do you respond to your teen in ways that make wisdom appealing? How?
  
2. Do you make correction sweet? How?
  
3. Teens tend to push parents' buttons. What are some of your buttons?
  
4. What specific things do you do to pursue your teen?
  
5. How could you respond to a teen who attempts to avoid correction by pointing out flaws in your parenting?

*I'm sure there are times when I miss things that I should deal with. But I think you know that I love each of you and I seek to be what God wants me to be in your lives. I would be glad at another time to talk about my parenting. I'd love to let you know what it's like and to learn what I look like from your perspective, but right now we need to talk about you (p.81).*

6. Give two examples of ways you have seen teens emphasize the letter of the law rather than the spirit.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What are some biblical principles of friendship that you would want your teen to know and apply?

## Age of Opportunity

8. At what age will you bring up the topic of sex with your children? What will you do to keep it “on the table”?
9. What have your children learned from you about the sexual relationship?
10. Do you know if any of your children struggle with lust, fantasy, or masturbation?
11. How do your children view relationships with the opposite sex?
12. What are some of the world’s sexual lies?

Have your children been exposed to any of these?

Have your children adopted any of them?

13. In what situations, locations, and relationships are your teens being tempted?
14. Do your teens feel comfortable discussing sexual issues with you? How do you know?

## Age of Opportunity

15. Give two examples of everyday issues your teens face that you can use to teach a focus on eternity.

16. How do you help your child recognize the desires that rule his or her heart?

## **Chapter 6**

### **Goals, Glory and Grace**

#### **Core Principle**

The task of parenting a teenager is often exhausting and discouraging. Clearly, it is beyond the wisdom, character, and strength of every parent. It is very easy to give in to defeat, discouragement, and fear. When we do this, our encounters with our teenager are colored by our own hopelessness. Our only hope of loving and consistently doing what we have been called to do is Christ. In his presence and power we find strength to fulfill our calling. We must learn as parents what it means to live out of the rich resources of the gospel, refusing to give way to discouragement and despair and holding onto his promises.

#### **Chapter Goals**

The goal is to have the present benefits of the work of Christ give us hope as we struggle with our children through the teen years. The goal is to look at them and ourselves through the window of the gospel (Eph. 3:20; John 17:20-23; 2 Pet. 1:3-9). The goal is that there would be no struggle so grave as to lead us to give up, since Christ's work for us daily gives us reason to continue. The goal is that we would see the mountain range of the teen years from the vantage point of the majesty of Christ and his grace.

#### **Study Questions**

1. What encouragement does God's Word give us when we are weary and feel that we lack the strength to do what we have been called to do?

*God is a God of awesome power. Ephesians 3:20: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...." God's power is at work in us! (pp. 99-100).*

2. Why do we often miss the experience of God's power?

*Because we tend to quit when we have hit the wall (p.100).*

3. What kind of family unity is possible because Christ gave us his glory?

*The same unity that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (p.101).*

4. Why, according to 2 Peter 1:3-9, are believers ineffective and unproductive?

**2 Peter 1:3-9:** <sup>3</sup>His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup>Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

<sup>5</sup>For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup>and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup>and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. <sup>8</sup>For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

*Because they are missing the qualities that make for a productive life: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (p.103).*

5. Why do many Christian parents lack the qualities needed to be effective?

*Because they have forgotten they have been cleansed from their sins. They have forgotten their identity (p.104).*

6. Because God has already given us everything we need to do the parenting job he has called us to do, what should we *not* do?

*Don't give in to discouragement.*

*Don't quit.*

*Don't run away.*

*Don't settle for a little bit of faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, brotherly kindness and love (p.104).*

7. What truths can lift us out of weariness and discouragement?

*We have God's awesome power dwelling within – the gift of glory given so that we can be agents of love and unity. We have everything we need to do what God has called us to do (pp. 104-105).*

## Chapter 6 Application Questions

1. How would you characterize the unity in your home? (Circle one the following.)

1 - Rarely is there any evidence of unity. Our home is characterized by discord and strife.

2 - The members of our family don't live in discord and strife but each goes his or her own way. Apathy and indifference would describe us better than unity.

3 - Unity comes and goes in our home. At times we work diligently to be unified but we are easily distracted.

4 - Our home could be characterized by unity. This doesn't mean our home is perfect, but we are all working to grow in this area and we make a conscious effort to seek God's glory, not our own.

2. What would increase unity in your family?

3. Rate your efforts to grow in the following qualities. (Use the following scale.)

1 - I rarely exert effort to grow in this quality.

2 - I occasionally exert effort to grow in this quality.

3 - I make regular effort to grow in this quality.

Faith	1 2 3
Goodness	1 2 3
Knowledge	1 2 3
Self-control	1 2 3
Perseverance	1 2 3
Godliness	1 2 3
Brotherly kindness	1 2 3
Love	1 2 3

4. Rate yourself: how much does each of the following characterize you when you are at the end of your strength?

1 - Rarely

2 - Occasionally

3 - Regularly

## Age of Opportunity

I give in to discouragement. 1 2 3  
I quit. 1 2 3  
I run away. 1 2 3  
I settle for a little bit of faith. 1 2 3  
I grow. 1 2 3  
I remember God's rich resources. 1 2 3  
I seek to do more and better. 1 2 3  
I remember I have been forgiven of my past sins. 1 2 3

## Chapter 7

### There's A War out There

#### Core Principle

Ephesians 6:10-18 provides a much-needed biblical view of life. Paul essentially says that life is war. He is not talking about the fights over situations and relationships that capture our thinking and emotions, but a deeper, more significant war. There is a war for the hearts of our teenagers that takes place in every situation, location, and relationship of daily life. This war is fought on the turf of their hearts. It is fought for control of their souls. Every decision, action, and word of our teenagers reflects this war. It is the great conflict of human life. This war is the reason for all the other wars fought between people. The problem is that our teenagers tend to live in a world that is shockingly physical; that is, they tend to live with little recognition of this great spiritual struggle. Teenagers' lives tend to be dominated by three concerns: appearance, possessions, and acceptance. They need to learn how to understand and participate in the deeper spiritual struggle.

#### Chapter Goals

The goal is to help our teenagers recognize the spiritual struggles beneath the seemingly mundane problems of daily life. In these moments, their hearts are progressively being given over to service of Christ or subtly being enslaved to the world. The goal is to teach our children to see how their words and behavior reflect the war that is going on in their hearts. Finally, we want to encourage them to take on the qualities of a successful spiritual warrior.

#### Study Questions

1. To keep difficult situations from driving a wedge of distance and anger between parents and teens, how should parents view the situations?

*As God-given opportunities to shepherd the hearts God has exposed in the teens (p.109).*

2. Why do parents need a concrete set of goals *before* they face difficult moments?

*We cannot expect to think clearly, biblically, and concretely when the moment is tense and emotions are high. We cannot expect to set long-term goals when we're dealing with powerful feelings of sadness and disappointment (p.109).*

3. What goal should parents avoid?

## Age of Opportunity

*Regulating behavior (p.110).*

4. If the parents' goal is control, how will they begin to function?

*As police rather than parents (p.110).*

5. How might a parent try to motivate a child with guilt?

*By using such statements as, "After all we have done for you, this is how you are going to thank us?"*

*Or, "What do you think the Lord feels as he looks down at what you are doing?" (p.110).*

6. How might a parent try to motivate a child with fear?

*By using such statements as, "Do you know the diseases you might get?"*

*Or, "You do that and there is no telling how I might respond" (p.110).*

7. How might a parent try to motivate a child by manipulation?

*"If you \_\_\_\_\_, we would be much more willing to get you the car."*

*Or "We'll make a deal with you: if you \_\_\_\_\_, we will \_\_\_\_\_ for you" (p.110).*

8. When we seek to inflict guilt, instill fear, and manipulate our children, how does it show that we are trying to do God's job?

*We are trying to control someone other than ourselves, and God has not given us that ability, right, or responsibility (p.110).*

9. Why will a rules-and-regulations approach fail?

*It does not deal with the heart (p.111).*

10. How does a "pastoral" model of parenting differ from a rules-and-regulations approach?

*Parents who use this model will befriend their teens. They will seek to expose the true thoughts and motives of their teens by asking heart-disclosing questions. They will do this in a spirit of humble, gentle, kind, forgiving, forbearing and patient love.*

*Parents who focus on rules and regulations will concentrate on keeping the teen "out of trouble." They will do no more than hand down regulations and enforce punishments when they are broken. They will cross-examine their teens in times of trouble, and be harsh, impatient, and unforgiving (pp.111-112).*

## Age of Opportunity

11. What are some “heart-disclosing” questions parents could ask when their teens do wrong?

*What were you thinking and feeling at the time?*

*Why was that so important to you?*

*What was the most important thing to you at that moment?*

*What were you seeking to accomplish when you did that?*

*What were you afraid of in that situation?*

*What were you trying to get?*

*Why did you become so angry?*

*If you could go back and do something differently, what would you change?  
(p.112).*

12. What attitudes should parents have in their encounters with their teens?

*Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love (p.112).*

13. What two deadly lies do teens tend to believe?

- *The physical world is more real than the spiritual.*
- *The physical world is permanent (p.114).*

14. What is the difference between a peacetime mentality and a war mentality?

*In times of peace, people give themselves to luxury, leisure, and pleasure. They focus on wants and desires. In times of war, people live purposeful lives that are not focused on pleasure, but on a goal (p.115).*

15. What two things keep us from teaching our children to face and fight the spiritual battle?

- *We tend to be more worried about the visible world than the unseen world (p.115).*
- *Cultural misunderstandings about the spiritual struggle lead us to see spiritual warfare as something bizarre, not a daily battle (p.116).*

16. Give an example of how parents might show a greater concern for what is seen than for the unseen.

*They could be more upset that a child lost a job than they are about its impact on his or her heart.*

*They could be more concerned about poor grades than about what those grades reveal about the child’s spiritual condition.*

## Age of Opportunity

*They could get angry about a messy room without caring about the heart behind the mess.*

*They may tell their daughter that her outfit looks ridiculous, or complain that their son drank the last of the milk, and that their music drives them crazy, all the while missing issues of eternal importance (pp.115-116).*

17. What will result if parents are more concerned about the physical, seen world than the unseen, spiritual world?

*They will miss daily opportunities to remind their teens of the spiritual struggle present in every situation (p.116).*

18. What five qualities will be present in teens who understand and participate in the spiritual struggle?

- *They will have a heartfelt, internalized fear of God.*
- *They will be submissive to authority.*
- *They will separate themselves from the wicked.*
- *They will be able to approach life with biblical wisdom.*
- *They will be biblically self-aware (pp.118-122).*

19. What does it mean to have a fear of God?

*Pleasing the Lord is one's single motivation in life. The person acts out of a deep, worshipful love and reverence for God (pp.118-119).*

20. Should we expect and accept rebellion in our teens? Why or why not?

*No. God has established authority for our good. To rebel against authority is wrong and dangerous (p. 119).*

21. If I reject God's authority, what, in fact, am I doing?

*Claiming his authority as my own; attempting to be God (p.120).*

22. Evaluate this statement: If a teen is going to live a God-honoring life, he needs to acquire biblical knowledge.

*What a teen needs is a thorough knowledge of Scripture which he then applies to the many different situations he faces in life.*

23. What does it mean to be biblically self-aware?

*It means to live with an accurate, practical knowledge of personal themes of weakness, temptation, and sin (p.123).*

## Age of Opportunity

## Chapter 7 Application Questions

1. Give two examples of times when you may have tried to motivate with guilt.
  
2. Give two examples of times when you may have tried to motivate with fear.
  
3. Give two examples of times when you may have tried to motivate by manipulation.
  
4. To what extent do you see yourself trying to motivate by guilt? (Circle one.)

- 1 - This would be very uncharacteristic of me.
- 2 - I do this occasionally but not habitually.
- 3 - I do this habitually.

If you gave yourself a 3, take the following steps. Put a check beside each step once completed.

1. Seek God's forgiveness and your teen's forgiveness.
2. Ask your teen and spouse to alert you when they see you functioning this way.
3. When alerted, stop, seek forgiveness, and redo it the right way.

5. To what extent do you see yourself trying to motivate by fear? (Circle one.)

- 1 - This would be very uncharacteristic of me.
- 2 - I do this occasionally but not habitually.
- 3 - I do this habitually.

If you gave yourself a 3, take the following steps. Put a check beside each step once completed.

1. Seek God's forgiveness and your teen's forgiveness.
2. Ask your teen and spouse to alert you when they see you functioning this way.
3. When alerted, stop, seek forgiveness, and redo it the right way.

6. To what extent do you see yourself trying to motivate by manipulation? (Circle one.)

- 1 - This would be very uncharacteristic of me.
- 2 - I do this occasionally but not habitually.
- 3 - I do this habitually.

## Age of Opportunity

If you gave yourself a 3, take the following steps. Put a check beside each step once completed.

1. Seek God's forgiveness and your teen's forgiveness.
  2. Ask your teen and spouse to alert you when they see you functioning this way.
  3. When alerted, stop, seek forgiveness, and redo it the right way.
- 
7. Think of a time when you had a conflict with your child and you asked questions to get to the heart. What specific questions did you ask?

## Age of Opportunity

8. With each of your children, evaluate their three best friends in terms of the following characteristics of biblical friends.

### Characteristics of Biblical Friends

1. My friend is fully devoted to God; he or she has a deep and meaningful relationship with God.
2. My friend is loving.
3. My friend is joyful.
4. My friend is not quarrelsome.
5. My friend is patient.
6. My friend is gentle.
7. My friend is generous, willing to share.
8. My friend is dependable.
9. My friend is kind.
10. My friend is self-controlled, disciplined.
11. My friend is honest.
12. My friend is respected and valued by his or her family.
13. My friend is devoted and loyal to his or her family.
14. My friend is sensitive.
15. My friend fulfills God-given responsibilities.
16. My friend is friendly.
17. My friend builds up his or her family; my friend is an encourager.
18. My friend is devoted to ministering to others.
19. My friend is consistent and steadfast in doing right.
20. My friend is an industrious, hard worker.
21. My friend is unselfish.
22. My friend is more concerned about internal beauty than external beauty.
23. My friend takes care of him/herself physically; my friend is concerned about his or her appearance, but not excessively so.
24. My friend is not overly intense or serious; my friend is a fun person to be with.
25. My friend is content and satisfied; my friend desires growth, progress, and biblical change but is not overbearing about it.
26. My friend is a good listener.
27. My friend is thoughtful of others, putting them at ease, communicating respect and concern for them.
28. My friend's speech is constructive and wholesome.
29. My friend seeks to grow in wisdom, to sharpen him/herself intellectually.
30. My friend exercises foresight; my friend plans ahead.
31. My friend handles money wisely; my friend practices good stewardship.
32. My friend is grateful.
33. My friend is considerate.
34. My friend does not complain.
35. My friend takes care of problems quickly.
36. My friend is forgiving.

## Age of Opportunity

37. My friend is not stubborn.
  38. My friend is not pushy.
  39. My friend is submissive to authority.
  40. My friend is willing to be vulnerable.
- 
9. With each of your children, evaluate their ability to be a biblical friend in terms of the above list of characteristics.
  
  10. Where are your children susceptible to temptation? How can you hold the mirror of God's Word before them in these areas? How can you help them anticipate temptation and teach them how to avoid it?

## **Chapter 8**

### **Convictions and Wisdom**

#### **Core Principle**

Often parents are so busy making decisions for their children that they do not impart to them the critical biblical thinking skills that will enable them to make sound choices after they have left the home. We need to be looking for opportunities to teach our children how to use the commands, themes, principles, and perspectives of Scripture to make sense out of life. To equip teenagers to determine how God would have them respond to the diverse situations of life, we need to teach them two things. First, they need internalized biblical convictions and applicable biblical wisdom. It is not enough to say “yes” and “no” to particular questions. We must show our children how we have arrived at the critical decisions that are so important to biblical living.

#### **Chapter Goals**

The goal is to help your teenager differentiate between boundary issues (issue of conviction where Scripture gives them a clear “thus says the Lord”) and wisdom issues (places where there is no clear command, but many biblical principles that apply). We want to assist our children as they internalize biblical convictions, and we want to help them learn how to apply the wisdom of the Word to the everyday life decisions. To do this, it is not always best to say a quick “yes” or “no” to a moral question. It may be better to see the specific circumstance that prompted the question as a God-given opportunity to help the teenager to develop his internal convictions and apply them to his situation.

### **Study Questions**

1. What are "clear boundary" issues?

*Situations that involve the plain commands of Scripture (p.131).*

2. What does a teen need to handle situations involving clear boundary issues?

- *Knowledge of the commands of Scripture.*
- *A heart committed to doing God’s will regardless of the consequences (p.131).*

3. For each of the following, indicate whether it is characteristic of a conviction or a preference.

Based on truth. *Conviction.*

Based on personal desire. *Preference.*

## Age of Opportunity

Changes with desire. *Preference.*

Constant. *Conviction.*

Demands faith. *Conviction.*

Relies on the emotions of the moment. *Preference.*

P. 131-132

### 4. What are six characteristics of biblical conviction?

- *Always based on a study of, submission to, and application of Scripture.*
- *Always predetermined.*
- *Will not change with the circumstances.*
- *Inflexible.*
- *Bold.*
- *Always lived out (pp.132-133).*

### 5. List six things you can do to help develop a sensitive conscience and a wise heart.

- *See difficult, troublesome, problem situations as God-given opportunities to develop a biblical mind in your teen (p.137).*
- *Resist making the decision for your teen (p.138).*
- *Draw out the heart of your teen (p.139).*
- *Be persistent (p.139).*
- *Help your teen to determine whether he is dealing with a clear boundary issue or a wisdom issue (p.140).*
- *Don't try to tell your teen in one conversation everything you have learned (p.140).*



## **Chapter 9**

### **Life in the Real World**

#### **Core Principle**

Teenagers never live in a vacuum. They are always in contact with culture. Human beings made in the image of God interact with God's world and culture is what results. Culture is all the relationships, customs, institutions, structures, media, beliefs, arts, and values of any society of people. There is no way to escape the cultural struggle. We are always living under culture's powerful influence.

The Christian family has tended to respond to culture in two ways. Some seek to solve the problem of culture by attempting to live in isolation from it. This is a defective choice because the only way to escape human culture is to cease being a human being! (Where people go, there is culture.) This choice also ignores the Bible's call for the people of God to function as salt and light. Others make the choice to assimilate into the culture, thereby losing their distinctive place as ambassadors of Christ. We must teach our teenagers a third way, and show them how to participate in their culture in a way that is redemptive.

#### **Chapter Goals**

We want to teach our children to do five things:

- We want them to understand the power of culture to shape our beliefs, relationships, and decisions.
- We want to help them recognize the influence of the surrounding culture on them personally.
- We want to help them develop biblical analytical and decision-making skills.
- We want to help them to recognize the idol themes of the surrounding culture.
- We want to teach them how to influence their culture in a way that is wise, alert, and redemptive.

### **Study Questions**

1. What does the philosophy, "Evil is in the thing, so avoid the thing" mean?

*Avoiding participation in the secular world wherever possible (p.143).*

## Age of Opportunity

2. What dangers exist in separating oneself from the world?

- *Denying the doctrine of creation in which God declared that all he made was good.*
- *This response tends to miss the core issue of the human struggle with evil.*
- *Tends to promote self-righteousness (pp.143-144).*

3. If evil is not an organic presence within certain things, what is it? Why is this important?

*Evil is the result of the way things are used to express the thoughts and gratify the desires of sinful humanity. Thus the battle against sin is not won merely by avoiding certain things. Our hearts are the problem (p.143).*

4. What is the assimilation philosophy?

*Things are neutral, so there is no harm in participating in the thing (p.144).*

5. What dangers are associated with the assimilation philosophy?

*Nothing is ever neutral. Things always carry some kind of moral freight (p.144).*

6. What is culture?

*It is the result of people interacting with the world (p.146).*

7. Is there any way to escape culture? Why or why not?

*No. We always live our lives in this secondary environment. There is no way to escape dealing with the relationships, customs, institutions, structures, media, products, and beliefs that make up culture (p.146).*

## Age of Opportunity

8. Match the following themes with the correct definition (pp.148-149).

<u>E</u>	Relativism.	A. No sense of innate, natural responsibility to a higher authority than self. No functional recognition of the existence of God and the call to live to his glory.
<u>C</u>	Individualism	B. Focus on the present; living for the moment. Focus on present personal happiness. No sense of delayed gratification, investment.
<u>G</u>	Emotionalism.	C. No higher goal than my happiness and pleasure. No higher purpose than meeting my own needs, wants, rights, and desires.
<u>B</u>	Presentism.	D. No sense of personal responsibility for actions. Belief that I am what my experience has made me. My defects are the result of people and situations outside my control.
<u>F</u>	Materialism.	E. No absolute standard for life. Each person determines what is right for him. Right changes with the situation.
<u>A</u>	Autonomy.	F. No recognition of the spiritual world. Goal of life is experiencing physical pleasure and possessing material goods. Focus on what is seen.
<u>D</u>	Victimism.	G. Feelings are the most influential, important indicator of what is right and best. Feelings as personal guidance system.

## Age of Opportunity

9. Match the following themes with the fruit seen in individuals (pp.148-149).

<u>A</u>	Relativism.	A. No consistency of lifestyle or conviction. No internal restraint. Susceptibility to influence of others. Dislike of rules.
<u>C</u>	Individualism	B. Regular patterns of blameshifting. Excusing, rationalizing bad behavior; defensiveness. Lack of confession. No sense of need for personal change.
<u>E</u>	Emotionalism.	C. Selfishness, self-centeredness, "rights" focus. Lack of commitment to others. Laziness, irresponsibility. Grumbling, complaining.
<u>G</u>	Presentism.	D. Tendency toward rebellion to authority. No real Godward focus in life. Authority and correction seen as negative.
<u>F</u>	Materialism.	E. Teen moved by what feels right; good feelings focus. Seldom acts against feelings. Sensitive to approval or disapproval of others.
<u>D</u>	Autonomy.	F. No independent pursuit of the things of the Lord. No focus on character and attitude. Focus on clothing, beauty, friends, and things.
<u>B</u>	Victimism.	G. A "got to have it now" mentality. No focus on long-term investment. No sense of consequences. Impulsive decisions.

## Age of Opportunity

10. Match the following themes with the biblical alternative (pp.148-149).

<u>F</u>	Relativism.	A. Creaturehood: Life guided by a recognition of the Creator and lived to his glory.
<u>C</u>	Individualism	B. Spirituality: A life shaped by a seriousness about heart issues and one's relationship with God.
<u>E</u>	Emotionalism.	C. Two Great Commands: Life shaped by practical commitment to love God and to love neighbor.
<u>G</u>	Presentism.	D. Sin: Humble recognition of struggle with sin within and temptation without. Thankfulness for the forgiving grace of Christ.
<u>B</u>	Materialism.	E. Biblical Faith: Commitment to test everything by the truths of Scripture.
<u>A</u>	Autonomy.	F. Truth: Willing submission and obedience to the commands and principles of Scripture.
<u>D</u>	Victimism.	G. Eternity: A personal commitment to do everything with an eye toward the reality of eternity.

11. What error do we tend to make in dealing with culture's vehicles?

*We blame the vehicle rather than focus on the idol (p.150).*

12. What strategies does the author suggest for talking to your teens about culture?

- *Don't wait for your teen to talk to you.*
- *Don't settle for non-answers.*
- *Be positive.*
- *Lovingly seek to expose the faults in your teenager's thinking without making him feel ignorant or stupid.*
- *Become a partner in the struggle with your teen by sharing your own struggle to live a godly life in an ungodly culture.*
- *Always point your teen to Christ.*
- *Always remember that you cannot protect your children from culture.*
- *Model the character of Christ (pp.151-152).*

13. In what four ways does the author indicate culture influences our lives?

- *Culture sets the pace of life (p.154).*
- *Culture sets the agenda for life (p.155).*
- *Culture defines and shapes our relationships (p.156).*
- *Culture powerfully influences our spiritual life (p.157).*

## Age of Opportunity

14. What is the alternative to isolation and assimilation?

*Redemptive interaction (p.159).*

15. Why is it important to interact with the culture?

*To redeem it for Christ (p.159).*

16. What are the fundamental objectives of the redemptive interaction strategy?

- *For our teens to thoroughly know and understand God's truth as a protection against enculturation.*
- *To teach them what it means in practical, everyday life to live truth in a way that points to the heavenly Father (p.160).*

17. What are five ways you can prepare your teens to interact redemptively with their culture?

- *Prepare (p.161).*
- *Test (p.162).*
- *Identify (p.163).*
- *Decide (p.164).*
- *Redeem (p.165).*

18. What is involved in each of the above strategies?

*Prepare: instill a biblical view of life (p.161).*

*Test: teach teens to critique, evaluate, interpret and analyze the culture from a biblical perspective (p.162).*

*Identify: recognize the common ground expressed in this piece of culture (p.163).*

*Decide: determine when it is possible to be a redemptive participant and when separation is necessary (p.164).*

*Redeem: take back turf lost to the world by witnessing to the good news of Christ (p.165).*



## Age of Opportunity

- What does this passage teach us about God, his character, and his plan?
- What do we learn about ourselves, our nature, our struggle, and the purpose of our lives?
- What does this passage teach us about right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false?
- What instruction does it offer about relationships, love, authority, etc.?
- What does this passage teach us about life's meaning and purpose?
- What does this passage teach us about the inner man, the heart and how it functions?
- What have we learned from this passage that would guide the way we live and make decisions?
- How does this passage help us understand and critique our culture?

6. After studying Jeremiah 17:5-10, answer the following questions:

- What does this passage teach us about God, his character, and his plan?
- What do we learn about ourselves, our nature, our struggle, and the purpose of our lives?
- What does this passage teach us about right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false?
- What instruction does it offer about relationships, love, authority, etc.?
- What does this passage teach us about life's meaning and purpose?
- What does this passage teach us about the inner man, the heart and how it functions?
- What have we learned from this passage that would guide the way we live and make decisions?
- How does this passage help us understand and critique our culture?

7. After studying Romans 1:18-32, answer the following questions:

- What does this passage teach us about God, his character, and his plan?
- What do we learn about ourselves, our nature, our struggle, and the purpose of our lives?

## Age of Opportunity

- What does this passage teach us about right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false?
- What instruction does it offer about relationships, love, authority, etc.?
- What does this passage teach us about life's meaning and purpose?
- What does this passage teach us about the inner man, the heart, and how it functions?
- What have we learned from this passage that would guide the way we live and make decisions?
- How does this passage help us understand and critique our culture?

8. Watch the evening news on TV. Choose three news stories and critique them biblically as follows: What view of life is expressed? What is right and wrong with this view? What is the common ground with which we can identify?

## **Chapter 10**

### **A Heart for God**

#### **Core Principle**

It is no exaggeration to say that this is the ultimate goal of parenting. It is the fundamental motivation for doing everything else we do. It is the reason for all the talking, praying, instructing, correcting, saying “no” and “yes.” We do all of these things with the hope that God would use us to produce teenagers who love and serve God above all else. Our prayer is that there would be a vertical (Godward) focus to everything the teenager says and does. This is the thing that must rule the teenager’s heart if she is ever going to live a godly life in this fallen world. We must hold onto this goal. We cannot settle for anything less.

A heart for God must be distinguished from a Pharisaical performance of external Christian duty. This is more about the praise of people and temporal benefits than it is about pleasing God. No, a heart for God is a deep, sincere, and abiding hunger to know, love, and honor God even at the expense of other desirable things in life. We must not give in to the cynicism that would make us think it is ridiculous to expect this quality to grow in the heart of a teenager.

#### **Chapter Goals**

The first goal of this chapter is to help parents consider whether this goal is the fundamental motivator in their relationship with their teenagers. Is this goal more important than other, culturally dictated goals? Have they tended to see this goal as unrealistic? The Bible reminds us that a person who only lives for the physical things of this world is a fool. The second goal is to give parents a functional understanding of what a heart for God looks like. The final goal is to teach parents what they can do to encourage a personal pursuit of God in their children.

#### **Study Questions**

1. What should we most want for our children?

*That they would have a heart for God (p.170).*

2. What is one reason this goal may seem unrealistically high for our children?

*Perhaps because we have not had the goal for ourselves (p.170).*

## Age of Opportunity

3. Why is it so common that, although children do not consciously deny God, other things replace his functional rule over their lives?
  - *Familiarity. Taking for granted the things that have been a regular part of our lives (p.171).*
  - *Lifestyle. Families spend much less time together. This affects our ability to communicate redemptive awe to our children.*
  - *Hypocrisy. Parents may verbalize a strong commitment but not live it (p.175).*
  
4. What might parents have to do to create opportunities to communicate redemptive awe to their children?
  - *Turn off the television.*
  - *Share more of our personal lives and hearts with our children.*
  - *Simplify our lifestyles.*
  - *Make a greater effort to talk daily with each child, showing interest in his life, and sharing ours.*
  - *Limit travel and one's focus on career development.*
  - *Confess our own selfishness for having lived closed and isolated lives and justifying it with the convenient excuse of a busy schedule.*
  - *Ask whether we have passed down to our teens a love for God and a commitment to live to his glory (p.174).*
  
5. What is the central characteristic of a heart for God?

*A deep, sincere hunger to know and honor him (p.177).*
  
6. What signs might a parent expect to see in a teen with a heart for God?
  - *An independent life of personal worship and devotion (p.180).*
  - *A desire for corporate worship and instruction (p.181).*
  - *A pursuit of fellowship with the body of Christ (p.182).*
  - *An openness to discuss spiritual things (p.183).*
  - *An approach to decision-making from a biblical perspective (p.184).*
  
7. What practical things can encourage a heart for God in our teens?
  - *Make family worship a priority and make it engaging (p.185).*
  - *Seek opportunities to point your teen to God (p.186).*
  - *Use Scripture in a positive and Christ-centered way (p.187).*
  - *Be an example of the forgiving, enabling, and delivering grace of Christ (p.188).*
  - *Be willing to ask for forgiveness, accountability, and prayer (p.188).*
  - *Model prayer without ceasing (p.189).*

## Age of Opportunity

- *Demonstrate a hunger for God (p.189).*

## Chapter 10 Application Questions

1. What changes do you need to make in your lifestyle to become a better shepherd and discipler of your children?

2. To what extent do you think you have taken Christ and your relationship with him for granted?

3. When you look at yourself and at your children, do you see signs of a pursuit of God? Use the following scale for evaluation.

- 1 - Rarely
- 2 - Occasionally
- 3 - Regularly/habitually

I spend time reading the Bible.	1 2 3
I spend time praying.	1 2 3
I look forward to attending church.	1 2 3
I seek out instruction.	1 2 3
I choose friends who are known to be wise men and women.	1 2 3
I have cultivated friendships with people who are willing to confront me.	1 2 3
I am open and willing to listen to God's Word.	1 2 3
I introduce spiritual things into my conversations with others.	1 2 3
I seek biblical direction for my decisions.	1 2 3
I resist making impulsive, emotional decisions.	1 2 3
I ask myself what would please God in the daily situations I face.	1 2 3

4. What practical things do you do to develop a heart for God in your children?

5. Do you have family worship? What do you do to make it engaging?

6. List three ways in which you pointed your teen to God during the last week.

## Age of Opportunity

7. Ask your spouse and each of your children to recall the last time you sought forgiveness. Would they say you regularly seek forgiveness when you fail?
  
8. Do you invite your family members to hold you accountable for change? For what things are they currently holding you accountable?
  
9. How would you rate the importance of prayer in your family life? Base your rating on what you actually do, not on what you think would be good to do.
  
10. Do you hunger after God and does your family see it?

## **Chapter 11**

### **Leaving Home**

#### **Core Principle**

It has often been said that the goal of parenting is to work yourself out of a job. Although that moment of emancipation is painful for parents and often filled with “Not yet’s” and “I regrets,” it is the goal we have been working toward since the child’s birth. It is also true that one of the great problems of all cultures is that we are sending generations of children out into the world who are essentially unprepared. Our goal is to reach that point of emancipation with children who are mature, and therefore prepared to face life on their own. This means they will be able to deal wisely with the catalog of circumstances, problems, relationships, concerns and temptations that they will encounter in the world. Our definition of maturity must take progressive sanctification as its model. Our teenagers will not leave our homes as finished products. Our hope is that we will see seeds of maturity that can then continue to grow after the teen has left our home.

#### **Chapter Goal**

Four primary goals need to be our focus here:

- To help our teenagers develop a biblical definition of maturity that would become a useful tool of self-evaluation.
- To teach our teenagers how to recognize the fruit of maturity in their lives.
- To be used of God to help them grow in areas where growth is necessary.
- To participate with them in an honest evaluation of their readiness to be emancipated from the home.

#### **Study Questions**

1. According to the author, few teens who want to leave home desire to do so because of the rules. Why do they want to leave?

*The relationship with their parents has gotten so bad that they want to get out as soon as possible (p.194).*

2. What four verbs can set the agenda for parents who want to model Christ with their teens? Explain.

## Age of Opportunity

- *Accept.* Acceptance that holds God's standard high in the context of the hope found in the cross of Christ (p.195).
- *Incaruate.* Reveal Christ (pp.195-196).
- *Identify.* We have the same struggles as our teens. We share a fallen nature and we share progressive growth (p.196).
- *Enter.* Enter the world of the teen. Spend as much time asking good questions and listening as you do speaking (pp.196-197).

3. What six characteristics does the author include in his definition of maturity?

- *Sensitivity to God's revealed will.*
- *Functional godliness.*
- *Progressive spiritual growth.*
- *Perseverance.*
- *An appreciation of God's grace.*
- *Kingdom awareness (pp.199-201).*

4. What does functional godliness mean?

*A desire to please God in everything we do (p.199).*

5. Describe the practical fruit of biblical maturity.

- *Acceptance of personal responsibility (p.202).*
- *Applied biblical convictions (p.204).*
- *An approachable, teachable, seeking spirit (p.205).*
- *Accurate self-assessment (p.205).*
- *Proper perspective on things (p.206).*

## Chapter 11 Application Questions

1. How effectively are you modeling Christ? Use the following scale.

- 1 - Rarely
- 2 - Occasionally
- 3 - Regularly/habitually

- I greet the sin of others with the accepting grace of Christ. 1 2 3  
I hold God's standard high without compromising it. 1 2 3  
I refrain from condemning, rejecting, and being judgmental. 1 2 3  
I reveal Christ's love to others. 1 2 3  
I reveal Christ's patience to others. 1 2 3  
I reveal Christ's gentleness to others. 1 2 3  
I reveal Christ's kindness to others. 1 2 3  
I reveal Christ's forgiveness to others. 1 2 3  
I identify with those facing harsh realities. 1 2 3  
I identify with those facing temptations. 1 2 3  
I recognize my vulnerability to the struggles others might have. 1 2 3  
I spend as much time asking good questions and listening as I do speaking. 1 2 3  
I know what situations my family members face every day. 1 2 3  
I know the pressures my family members are facing. 1 2 3

2. Evaluate the maturity of your family members using the following scale.

- 1 - Rarely
- 2 - Occasionally
- 3 - Regularly/habitually

- My family member has a knowledge of God's will in the varied situations of life. 1 2 3  
My family member knows how the principles of Scripture apply to everyday life. 1 2 3  
My family member desires to please the Lord in everything he or she does. 1 2 3  
My family member is teachable. 1 2 3  
I see growth in the life of my family member. 1 2 3  
My family member refrains from giving up, running away, or quitting in the face of trouble. 1 2 3  
My family member endures. 1 2 3  
My family member appreciates the great privilege of being born into the family of faith. 1 2 3  
My family member does not take our spiritual heritage for granted. 1 2 3  
My family member prizes being an heir of God's grace. 1 2 3  
My family member pursues God's desires rather than his or her own. 1 2 3

## Age of Opportunity

3. Rate your family members on the fruit of maturity you observe in their lives. Use the following continuum.

My family member accepts and finds satisfaction in his or her responsibilities.	1 2 3 4	My family member acts as if life is supposed to be fun and enjoyable all the time.
My family member has a reputation for being trustworthy.	1 2 3 4	My family member frequently excuses irresponsibility with statements such as, "Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot," "I didn't know I was supposed to..." or "I guess I misunderstood what you said."
My family member acts responsibly even when no one is watching.	1 2 3 4	My family member must be coerced into doing what he or she is supposed to do.
My family member pursues Bible teaching, personal worship, and ministry on his or her own.	1 2 3 4	My family member's communion with the Lord occurs only when it is initiated or controlled by others.
My family member maintains healthy, productive, God-glorifying relationships with others.	1 2 3 4	My family member requires constant intervention from others to maintain relationships.
My family member knows how to solve problems with others.	1 2 3 4	My family member doesn't understand how he or she creates problems with others.
My family member finds joy and meaning in work.	1 2 3 4	My family member considers work a necessary evil and avoids it whenever possible.
Employers and others indicate my family member is a willing worker.	1 2 3 4	My family member grumbles and complains about work.
My family member erects moral boundaries.	1 2 3 4	My family member likes to see how close he or she can come to the edge of the moral cliff.
My family member can be trusted to make good choices even when others aren't watching.	1 2 3 4	My family member is not responsible or trustworthy even for very small things.
My family member is open and transparent.	1 2 3 4	My family member is intolerant of conversations about what he or she is doing.
My family member seeks out good advice.	1 2 3 4	My family member gets defensive when his or her choices are questioned.
My family member is approachable.	1 2 3 4	I feel like I am walking on eggshells with my family member.

## Age of Opportunity

I can lovingly challenge my family member's thinking, choices, and actions.	1 2 3 4	My family member turns even friendly discussions into unfriendly debates.
My family member has a sense of his or her strengths and weaknesses.	1 2 3 4	My family member responds with a "What are you talking about, I never do that!" attitude when I point out weaknesses.
My family member is thankful for what he or she has.	1 2 3 4	My family member is rarely content and constantly wants something new.
My family member reaches out to those who don't have much.	1 2 3 4	My family member judges people by their looks and clothing.
My family member uses money to serve others and the Lord.	1 2 3 4	My family member uses money to buy more stuff.
My family member's goals for life are to please God and serve him.	1 2 3 4	My family member's life goals center around materialistic achievements.

4. We cannot give our teens what we do not have ourselves. How would you rate yourself in the following areas? Use the following scale.

- 1 - Rarely
- 2 - Occasionally
- 3 - Regularly/habitually

- I meet the standard of biblical maturity. 1 2 3
- I model a winsome, mature godliness before my family. 1 2 3
- I live a responsible life. 1 2 3
- I am approachable and teachable. 1 2 3
- I live with moral boundaries that shape my decisions and actions. 1 2 3
- I have an accurate sense of where I am weak and where I am strong. 1 2 3
- I am open to help from others. 1 2 3
- I hold physical things in proper balance. 1 2 3

## **Chapter 12**

### **Three Strategies for Parenting Teens**

#### **Core Principle**

God's redemptive work in us is strategic. He knows exactly what he is trying to produce (conformity to Christ) and exactly how he is going to accomplish it (the means of grace). As parents of teenagers, we are called to mirror the work of our Heavenly Father. We do not want our parenting to be aimless, ineffective, and unproductive. We not only want to parent with a sense of direction, we also want to know practically how to get to the destination. This chapter presents three strategies to get us where we want to go in the hearts and lives of our teenagers.

**Project parenting.** Here we learn to regularly evaluate our teenagers to gain an accurate, current sense of where they are struggling, experiencing temptation, or need to grow. We do this so we can take advantage of the daily opportunities God will give us to go after what is "hot."

**Constant conversation.** Here we recognize that like other sinners, our teenagers need daily exhortation, encouragement, and intervention. We also recognize that they probably will not pursue us, so we commit ourselves to seek them out daily, engaging them in conversation, expressing our love, and looking for opportunities to encourage a Godward heart.

**Leading your teenager to repentance.** We do not want to simply constrain behavior. If that is all we have done, there will be nothing within the teenager to keep him moving towards God when he has left home. It is only when the heart turns that the life will turn. We need to regularly call our teenagers to confession and repentance. Our goal is to tell them over and over again that there is nothing in life more important than turning their hearts toward God.

#### **Chapter Goals**

The goal of focusing on these three strategies is twofold. First, we need to remind ourselves that God always gives his people a means of accomplishing what he has called them to do. He hasn't called us to an unrealistic, undoable life. In his grace he is not only the God of ends, but of means as well. Second, the goal is that in focusing on these strategies, we can function with prepared spontaneity. Although I do not know what a particular day will bring, I am prepared for it and able to spontaneously respond because I have committed myself to concrete goals and to practical strategies for reaching them. So I will regularly be surprised but not caught unprepared.

## Study Questions

1. What does the term "project parenting" imply?

*Being focused, purposeful, and goal-oriented in our daily encounters with our teens (p.215).*

2. What two deficiencies in the heart of the wicked are described in Psalm 36?

- *There is no fear of God. He lacks an awareness of the existence and glory of God.*
- *The wicked flatters himself too much (p.217).*

3. How might these deficiencies show up in teens?

- *A tendency to be dominated by things they are convinced they need, or by fear of man issues, or by identity issues (appearance, etc.).*
- *A tendency to think they know more than they actually do. A tendency to think they are more mature than they actually are (pp.217-218).*

4. Besides clear goals, what else do parents need to accomplish "project parenting"?

- *A sense of the teen's situation and context.*
- *Biblical personal insight (p.219).*

5. What two components of personal insight does the author point out?

- *Individuals must detect their own sin.*
- *Individuals must come to hate sin (p. 220).*

6. Why do our teens need constant (daily) conversation?

- *To keep from turning away from God (p.223).*
- *Because of sin's deceitfulness (p.224).*

7. What four steps are involved in turning away from God?

- *A sinful heart that no longer desires to please the Lord or submit to Scripture.*
- *An unbelieving heart: a loss of faith, confidence, appreciation for and trust in God and his Word.*
- *Falling away: personally forsaking communion and fellowship with God.*
- *A hardened heart: the searing of the conscience (p.224).*

## Age of Opportunity

8. What four steps does the author suggest to lead teens to repentance and reconciliation?

*Consideration (getting teens to see sin), confession, commitment (teens promise to respond in a new way), change (pp.228-230).*



## **Chapter 13**

### **Small Steps to Big Change**

#### **Core Principle**

God's goals are high. What he wants for us is much grander than anything we would ever want for ourselves. What he calls us to do is higher, better, and more important than what we would have decided to do if left to ourselves. This is true of parenting as well. It would be very easy to get to the end of a book like this and be overwhelmed as you look at the huge mountain of parental responsibility placed before you. But we must remember that our God is a God of little steps. The radical work of change that God works in and through you is rarely accomplished through a single event. It is a process. He calls us to climb mountains with small steps. These steps, although small, are not unimportant. Each little step is significant because it gets us closer to the God-assigned goal.

This chapter is about recognizing the small things that must be done regularly to function as God's instrument of change in the life of your teenager.

#### **Chapter Goals**

The first goal of this chapter is to see that God's work in our teenagers' lives is incremental. We do not have to feel pressured to accomplish something in a single encounter when it actually takes years. The second goal is to learn the little things that contribute to big change in a teenager's life. This chapter offers a list of constructive small steps. The third goal is to determine which of those steps would be particularly helpful for your teenager.

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### **Study Questions**

1. List the twenty steps the author suggests to bring about change.
  - *Never give in to thinking it is too late. God knows when it is the right moment to teach us. He is never too early and never too late.*
  - *Stay calm. There is a God. He is in control.*

## Age of Opportunity

- *Keep the conversation open. Get in the habit of doing regular checkups after an issue, problem, temptation, fear, struggle or failure has been disclosed.*
- *Demonstrate how the Bible interprets, explains and organizes life.*
- *Be willing to bare your own struggles. Many parents make the error of presenting a “just do it” view of life to their teen. They minimize the reality and intensity of the struggle.*
- *Keep Christ and his work central.*
- *You’re a sinner. Don’t act surprised at your teen’s struggle with sin.*
- *Identify the “voices” in your teen’s life. Who does your teen listen to and respect? When you challenge the influential voices in your teen’s life, be sure you know what you are talking about. When you haven’t done your homework, you will resort to stereotypes, generalizations, rumors and straw man characterizations. The teen will walk away thinking that you simply do not know what you are talking about.*
- *Plan for temptation. Teach them to look ahead and identify traps.*
- *Make accountability your teen’s responsibility.*
- *Be a good listener and observer.*
- *Don’t give in to “problem allergy.” Many parents try to avoid problems and when they come, parents respond in a “swollen” and inflamed way.*
- *Always keep the heart in focus.*
- *Do your biblical homework first.*
- *Always talk to your teen lovingly and constructively. We tend to get into trouble when we try to squeeze significant conversations into brief moments.*
- *Be willing to overlook minor offenses.*
- *Deal honestly with your own attitudes.*
- *Expect, welcome and respect differences.*
- *Look for opportunities to put your teen in the decision-making role.*
- *Humbly admit your limits.*

**Chapter 13**  
**Application Questions**

Summarize the things that have been helpful to you from this book.