

Shepherding Through the Teenage Years

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Topics

- Lead your teen toward wisdom, identity, and ownership of their faith
- Turn everyday moments into meaningful conversations
- Navigate resistance, tension, and pushback without losing relationship
- Address heart motivations without constant correction
- Stay connected to your teen as independence grows



**Our ultimate mission is to intentionally guide
our teenagers to anchor their identity in
Christ, take ownership of their faith, and
become lifelong disciples of Jesus**



Studies show that between **65% and 70%** of young adults who were regular churchgoers as teenagers drop out of church for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22. (Lifeway Research)

The decline accelerates sharply right after high school. While roughly 70% of these young adults attend church at age 17, that number dips to 58% at age 18, and plunges to **40% by age 19**. (Lifeway Research)

The primary reason representing almost half of those leaving Christianity identified that they “stopped believing”.

The next two largest reasons were “It wasn’t important in my life” and “I just gradually drifted away”.



1 Thess 1:5 - For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.

1 Cor 2:4,5 - My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

We need to lead our kids to know the truth of God's word and the reliability of scripture. We also need to guide them into the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Both knowing about God (truth) and knowing God (spirit) are critical in forming our children to be passionate disciples of Jesus.



Truth Pursuits

Church involvement

Family conversations

Youth group

Book study*/Apologetics course

Devotions - Bible, prayer, meditation

Spirit Pursuits

Church camp

Worship nights

Short-term missions

Pray the details

*Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis
A Case for Christ by Lee Strobel
Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus by Nabeel Quresh
A Visual Guide to Biblical Apologetics by Joseph Holden



Identity

- Primary identity is a child of God (sonship concept)
- Encouragement should be weighted towards status in God's kingdom
- Temporary vs eternal

2 Cor 4:16-18 - So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For these light, momentary afflictions are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal



Praying for your teens

- Prayers guided by scripture
- Power in agreement
- Perseverance in prayer

Colossians 1:9-11

Ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy

Ephesians 1:16-19

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

Phil 1:9-11, Rom 15:13, Heb 13:20-21, Psa 19:13, Psa 51:12, Psa 139:23-24, Psa 25:4-5, Psa 119:17-18, Psa 143:8&10, Eph 3:16-19, Col 4:12, 1 Thes 3:11-13, 2 Thes 2:16-17, 2 Thes 3:5, 2 Thes 1:11,12, Psa 119:36-27



Discussion Questions

1. What other pursuits or activities have you been involved with that led to growing in spirit and/or truth?
2. What is an activity that you will start or do more with?



Children and teens are becoming more attached to their peers than to their parents. This shift has significant consequences for development and connection.

- Peers lack the maturity and stability to provide consistent guidance.
- Too much peer influence can lead to conformity, anxiety, fear of rejection, and emotional immaturity.
- Secure attachment to a parent gives children safety, belonging, confidence, and stability.
- Children and teens are more likely to trust and follow parents when they feel loved and connected.



The shift from **parent attachment to peer attachment** is largely a result of social and cultural changes rather than something inherent to children.

- **Schooling outside the home**
- **Less time with parents**
- **Decline of extended family and community**
- **Cultural emphasis on independence**
- **Parents inadvertently facilitating peer orientation**



Parents are uniquely equipped to guide and influence their children because they know, love, and understand them deeply, and Proverbs encourages children to embrace their parents' wisdom rather than dismiss it as irrelevant.

Proverbs 1:8–9

- ⁸ Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching,
⁹ for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.



Become a Trusted Source of Counsel

- Share your faith journey and experiences with God
- Be transparent about your sin struggles; confess areas you feel are age appropriate
- Humbly seek forgiveness when you are wrong
- Be your child's "home base"

Talking points with your teen:

- How has confessing your sin freed you and what fruit have you seen from it?
- Share times that you have experienced the power of Christ
- What are you learning in your quiet time?



Trade Control for Influence; and Transition from Manager to Consultant

As teens grow, direct authority naturally becomes less effective. Instead of trying to control every decision, focus on maintaining enough trust and credibility that your guidance still matters.

- Listen more than you fix: teens often want understanding before solutions.
- Offer advice without always insisting it be followed.
- Explain your reasoning instead of relying solely on rules.
- Pick the issues that truly matter.

Teens are often more receptive when they feel respected rather than managed.



Discussion Questions

1. Have you seen your teen trade parental influence for peer influence?
2. What are ways that you stay connected to your teen?



Reframe and understand the resistance - It's transition, not necessarily rebellion

- Pushing back helps adolescents break away from dependence
- It allows them to practice the critical thinking and boundary-setting they will need in adulthood.
- Compliance is not conversion. A teenager who never pushes back may develop into a people-pleaser.
- The teenage brain is undergoing a massive development process. Their pushback isn't always calculated defiance; often, it's a biological inability to articulate their growing need for autonomy.



Be cognizant of how we respond

- We don't want to parent out of exasperation or frustration (Ephesians 6:4).
- When parents double down on raw control during a teenager's resistance, it triggers a "fight or flight" response. The teenager either becomes a **rebel** (fighting the control) or an **escape artist** (lying, hiding their true self to maintain peace while doing what they want in secret).
- God does not shepherd His children through heavy-handed coercion. He leads with a perfect blend of grace and truth, drawing us by our hearts rather than just dominating our behavior. When a parent demands blind obedience through anger, manipulation, or emotional withdrawal, they are making an idol out of control. Heavy control might win the outward argument, but it almost always loses the inward relationship.
- As parents we should evaluate *why* we are angry during a conflict. Is it because the teen sinned against God, or because the teen inconvenienced us or wounded our pride?



Moving from Lecture to Dialogue, Correction to Conversation

When a teenager feels criticized or lectured, their brain goes into defense mode and they completely tune out. When you ask a question, you force their brain to switch from defensive posturing to internal reflection.

- James 1:19 (*"Quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry"*). True shepherding requires understanding the sheep. If you are always talking, you aren't learning anything about what your teenager is actually processing. Asking thoughtful, non-threatening questions forces the teen to think critically and reveals the underlying beliefs driving their pushback.
- Move from making **defensive statements** to asking **discovery questions**.
- Consider having one parent confront your teen to avoid the feeling of being "ganged up" on
- Sometimes it can be beneficial to table a conversation
- *The power of validation*. Validating an emotion is not the same as validating a behavior or changing your boundary.
- Practical conversational framework to use when tension flares. Instead of saying, *"You are being incredibly disrespectful!"* use de-escalating questions:
 - *"You seem really frustrated with this rule. Help me understand what feels unfair about it."*
 - *"What do you think a fair boundary would look like in this situation?"*



Moving from policing behavior to addressing the heart

- Correction alone may modify behavior temporarily, but transformation happens when we help teens understand what is happening inside them spiritually and at the center of their heart.
- Rely on the Holy Spirit to help you discern
- Create an environment of openness, we cannot just engage when something is wrong. Correction works best when trust already exists.
- Ask questions and separate the heart from the behavior
- Spend time with no agenda
 - Take family vacations
 - Be available when they are available
 - Know how your teen ticks



Keeping the relationship safe and home as a place of refuge

The golden rule of shepherding through tension is making sure **the relationship survives the disagreement**. If a teen feels that a mistake or an opinion will cost them their parent's love, they will stop sharing their lives.

- A Christian home must be a safe harbor where a teenager can disagree, struggle with doubt, or even fail miserably without fearing emotional abandonment or a loss of affection. Discipline and boundaries must still exist, but they must be delivered in a way that communicates security.
- The parent must always be the one to bridge the gap and initiate reconciliation
- "Keep the Door Open" strategy



Discussion Questions

1. What is one area where I've been overly focused on behavior instead of the heart?
2. How can I increase conversation and decrease constant correction this week?



1. **Don't shield your children - teach them to overcome**
2. **Talk to them head-on**
3. **Explain why we believe what we believe**
4. **Use conversations to connect to and lean on Jesus**



Make Connection a Habit

- Drive together without distractions.
- Eat meals together when possible.
- Take walks, exercise, or run errands together.
- Maintain simple traditions, even small ones.

Proverbs 20:5

The purpose of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.



2 Timothy 1:7 AMP

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity or cowardice or fear, but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of sound judgment and personal discipline [abilities that result in a calm, well-balanced mind and self-control]."

Power: "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, *that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Love: If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love [for others growing out of God's love for me], then I have become only a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal [just an annoying distraction]. (1 Corinthians 13:1)

Sound Mind: But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)



Discussion Questions

1. When was there a time you turned an everyday moment into a meaningful conversation?
2. What routines do you have that help you connect with your teen?



Entrust your teens to God (1 Pet 4:19)

- Give yourself grace
- We will make mistakes, He doesn't make mistakes
- We are inconsistent, He is consistent
- It's never too late to start



What are two adjustments you will make in how you shepherd your teenagers?

1.

2.

