

“The Top Twenty List”

One of the most important services which I undertake as pastor is that of equipping Christians for Bible-based, God-honoring, fruitful parenting. That is why in my next few blogs I would like to share the top twenty principles for parenting teens. I hope in these blogs we can take some of the anxiety out of this privilege God has given to moms and dads. These blogs will come to you bathed in prayer that the Spirit of God will use them to encourage and equip you for strong parenting throughout this season of life.

Here are the first four.

**1. Your home should be a place where the Bible is taught formally (family devotionals) and informally (by example and in discussions).**

Dads, you should take the lead in this. Deut. 6:6-9 sets the foundation when it reads: “And these words that I command you...shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and...talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes...shall write them on the doorposts of your house...” (See also Proverbs 22:6; Eph. 6:4)

God saves us (Rom. 1:16; James 1:18) and grows us through His word (John 17:17), as well as equipping us for life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). What is more, this is how our children keep from conforming to the world and are transformed by the renewing of their mind (Rom. 12:1-2). All of this cries out for us to make sure that the truth of God’s Word is taught to sons and daughters through family devotions, as well as through mom and dad’s life, decisions, and in those times when teachable moments emerge.

Not only the scriptures, but also experience has convinced me that this is the most important component for raising children of all ages. I have often told dads that you don’t have to turn cartwheels or do hand stands with family devotions. Just make sure you are doing something. If you don’t know what to do or where to start, look on our church web site ([mindenefc.org](http://mindenefc.org)) Resource page at the book *The Parents’ Game Plan*. Chapter five will give you practical tips on how to do devotions and when. The bibliography at the end of the book will give devotional resources to use that are geared for jr. and sr.highers (as well as those who are younger).

Additionally, when it comes to family devotions, you must fight through the feeling that something so simple is not enough and we need an action point more complex. Understand that the example you will set for your children regarding the importance of the Bible, as well as what they learn, will make a life time and an eternity of difference.

Finally, here is a word of encouragement to single moms or those moms where a husband is not taking the lead in this matter. It appears that Timothy was spiritually impacted by his mom and grandmother in a home where, at the very least, the father was not spiritually engaged (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5). So, understand that God can work mightily through you in this area as well.

## **2. Pray for your children.**

Pray regularly for them on your own and with your spouse. Pray for their walk with Christ, their future spouse, and their future children, especially. Also, pray for your fruitfulness in parenting and that they would have a heart for God.

Paul tells us that the natural man will never see the need for or importance of God's Word (1 Cor. 2:14) and that left to themselves, no one ever seeks after God (Rom. 3:10f.). If people are to be changed, it must be God's Spirit working in them through His word in response to prayer (cf. Eph. 6:18-20). The same is true of our children. As parents we can do nothing of eternal significance apart from Christ (John 15:5) and the primary way we appropriate His power by faith is through prayer (John 14:12-14). So, a close second place behind teaching the scriptures is bathing our children in prayer and bathing ourselves as we parent.

## **3. You must first look at your own lives and hearts.**

Your parenting must be shaped by your walk with Christ and your knowledge of God. Parenting is not just about learning parenting techniques. It is first and foremost about who you are.

Before God through Moses tells Israel to teach their children, He first tells them "And these words that I command you...shall be on your heart." (Deut. 6:6) We must first take in, believe, and live out the Word before teaching our children. This is not only true because it is imperative for us to set an example for them. It is also crucial because whether or not we parent in faith, love, and wisdom, or in fear, frustration, and foolishness will be largely determined by our knowledge of and walk with Christ. That is why, as we seek to give you guidance for parenting teens, we cannot simply give you parenting techniques. We must also encourage you to grow your walk with Christ and your passion for Him. Without this, all the techniques in the world will do no good. So, pursue hard after God!

## **4. You retain responsibility to disciple your teens.**

What this looks like is that the older they become, the more you should move in the direction of being a coach. As a coach you remain intentional in guiding them toward Christ-like adulthood. Your intentional discipling of children through the teen years must include a gradual launching of them and a gradual letting go. That means that to exercise the same passion and intentionality with your seventeen year old that you did with your seven year old will require a different approach and a new hat to wear for you.

Joyfully passing on the Baton with you,

Tom

## **“The Top Twenty List, Part Two”**

In our last blog we began a five part series sharing my top twenty principles for parenting teens. Our first four included: (1) Provide strong biblical training. (2) Bathe your teens in prayer. (3) Look at your own lives and hearts and shape your parenting by your walk with Christ. (4) Though you retain responsibility to disciple your teens, your role becomes more of a coach as they get older.

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

### **5. Acknowledge your youth are growing and changing.**

The older they become the more important it is that you trust them as much as you can. If we parent our teens out of the fear that we know bad things are happening to youth in our world today and we merely assume they are “blowing it like other teens,” we run the risk of becoming guilty of what Paul warns us against in Col. 3:21, namely discouraging our sons and daughters through aggravating them. Related to this, the older they become the more important it becomes that we keep God’s chief end for parenting our chief end for parenting, namely that they live for His glory by following Christ as strong disciples.

This will give us the freedom to let them appropriately test their wings, take more and more responsibility, and to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. If we are not willing to parent in this direction, we will go against the grain not only of how God made our children, but will short-change their spiritual formation.

### **6. See the teen years as an age of wonderful opportunity.**

The sixth principle is one of the most revolutionary of the twenty. See the teen years as an age of wonderful opportunity, not as a time to be dreaded. Stop and think about the resources we have: The very God who created the universe, who knows all things, and can do all He desires lives in and empowers us. He has given us His Spirit and Word by which He transforms hearts. And, what is more, in eternity past He determined to give to you the children you have. Evidently, He believes you are the right match for each other.

Finally, He has created teens to change drastically in these formative years (that is an understatement). They are trying to figure out life, how to become an adult, and what view of the world they will take. All this change often makes for some mess and chaos. But think about the wonderful opportunity we have to be used by God to shape their hearts and build a strong worldview and foundation! Please do not see these years as drudgery or wish them away. Instead, understand the open door you possess to shape eternity for these young men and women!

### **7. Teach them their need for grace.**

The seventh teen parenting principle is a simple one to state. Yet, it is often hard to accomplish. Our children need to learn that without Christ they can do nothing of eternal significance (cf. John 15:5). Yet, in Christ they can do all things God calls them to (Phil. 4:13). They must learn that the secret to following Christ is not simply gritting our teeth,

trying harder, and being good people (that is a Pharisee). It is the reality that we have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer we alone who live, but Christ who lives in us and the life we now live we live by faith in the Son of God who loves us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20). They must learn from mom and dad that living a fruitful life is not about being perfect or strong, but about faith in Christ. They need to see our struggles and our faith in Christ so that as an adult they are more apt to say, “I saw mom and dad walk with Christ by faith and I know with Him I can do this,” rather than, “I could never walk with Christ because I am not like mom and dad.”

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

### **8. Parent the child God gave you.**

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

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

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

Joyfully passing on the baton with you,

Tom

## **“The Top Twenty List, Part Three”**

Here is our third installment in our discussion of the top twenty list for raising teens. If you are a current or future parent of a teen I encourage you to give attention to these principles.

### **9. The standard for parenting is God’s Word.**

In her November 2, 2007 *Jewish World Review* article, “It’s O.k. To Have An Average Child,” syndicated columnist Betsy Hart said the following about her purpose in parenting: “When it comes to my children, my ultimate goal for them is heaven, not Harvard. If they go to the latter on their way to heaven, that’s great. But if I reverse that equation, I’ve failed them. For this parent, that’s the ultimate motivation.” (emphasis added)

What I find refreshing in this Christian author’s perspective is her nuanced approach to raising children. I know from reading Hart off and on for fifteen years she believes a good education and a stout use of our minds is a calling for all us and no less our children. Like me she gets excited about students who work hard, do well, and use their academic gifts for the glory of God. Yet, she also realizes that if we make a good education the only goal, make it more important than Christ, or divorce it from our children’s calling to Christ, then we have ceased to have a truly biblical view of parenting.

This is just one example of how the Bible must direct all we do with our sons and daughters and it becomes a wonderful introduction to the ninth of our top twenty principles for parenting: We must avoid the temptation of rejecting wholesale how we were raised or buying into it completely. The standard for parenting must not be the newest breaking-with-the-older-generation-fad (even if it is a product of well-meaning Christian parents), nor must it be, “Well, if it was good enough for my mom and dad, it’s good enough for me.” Both miss God’s mark. God instructed His people through Moses in Deut. 6:6-7: “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” When Moses instructs us, in essence, to fill our entire lives with the scriptures and to make them part of all our decisions and direction, part of the implication is that we must allow the Bible to critique and to redirect our approach. This means that as you watch videos, as you listen to teaching, as you read parenting books, as you ingest newsletter articles, and as you develop your parenting style, you must always run ideas through one litmus test: Is this biblical? Then, be willing to change as you see the need.

### **10. Keep a strong unified marriage and parenting approach**

The midway point in our principles, number ten, leaves us with a powerful reminder. When we fail to be unified as parents, when we argue in front of our children about how to discipline them or whether or not to allow them to do something they have asked to do, it sends a mixed message that can often be confusing. They can walk away unclear on what is important. Additionally, without knowing it, such disagreement can exacerbate

teen's natural tendency to seek to pit one parent against the other so they can get their way. If you have a disagreement, work through it apart from their presence. Remember, too, if you have a hard time determining what direction to go in the matter, spend time in the scriptures and in prayer as you discuss it.

### **11. Pursue Your Youth**

The eleventh principle is one of the most important for dealing with our teens: Continually pursue your youth, even if they don't communicate as much as when they were younger. Paul teaches us in 1 Cor. 13:7 (NLT): "Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance." Because of physical changes, new challenges, and sometimes the fears which can come to our teens, they can shut themselves up in their own little world. It is very easy for parents to allow them to do this because it can be difficult to engage them. We can also fear somehow being perceived as trying to invade their space too much and pushing them away. Be assured, though, that most of the time their bark is worse than their bite and they truly need us to keep lines of communication open.

They need for us to allow them to grow up, to gain more and more responsibility, and to trust them as much as we can. However, this does not mean disengaging from or simply letting them go their own way. As they make their way through this age of opportunity from age 13 through 18, they very much need our love, our prayer support, our coaching, and age-appropriate correction.

### **12. Make sure your house is open**

Number twelve, moms and dads, is this: Make sure that your house is open for them and their friends to get together. That social interaction is an important part of their maturation, as well as our discipling of them. Give them opportunities to be with friends while in your home. This can be one of the strongest ways you can communicate your love, acceptance, and respect to teen sons and daughters. What is more, it can also keep you up-to-speed on how healthy or unhealthy their friendships are.

Joyfully Passing On The Baton With You,

Tom

## **“The Top Twenty List, Part Four”**

Remember that our first 12 principles are covered in the last three blogs. Here are the next four...

### **13. Acknowledge that teens need others beside parents to influence them**

Much of the focus of our principles so far has emerged out of the conviction that we are to be the chief disciplers of our sons and daughters. Though this is true, it does not follow that we are to be the only influence upon them. Our thirteenth parenting point is to acknowledge that teens also need others besides parents to influence them. They need to learn to love other believers (Jn. 13:34), to live in harmony with other believers (Rom. 12:16), be kind to and forgive other believers (Eph. 4:32), to spur on to love and good works other believers (Heb. 10:24), bear the burdens of other believers (Gal. 6:1ff.), and pray for another (James 5:16). Additionally, they must learn how to benefit from persons who have diverse gifts within the body of Christ and to benefit others (1 Cor. 12). The rest of their lives they will be part of the Church, serving alongside other believers. Part of our intentional discipling of them must be to help them learn how to do life with other Christians. What is more, God has made us to develop in such a way that as we get into the teen years we begin desiring to have more influence on others and vice-versa. Certainly, this desired new freedom must be given in a context of mom and dad continuing to stay connected, but not to give it at all is to shortchange our youth's discipleship. So encourage and pray them into good solid mentoring and peer relationships!

### **14. Keep in touch with what your teen is doing**

Number fourteen is pray and work hard at keeping in touch with what your teen is doing. Though you shouldn't jump to conclusions or nag them if you sense something that needs attention, nevertheless, make it your goal to share your heart and passion with them and also to know what is going on in their world.

### **15. Love and respect your youth**

Another principle we must remember is to love and respect our youth (1 Cor. 13; 1 John 4:8). We should not seek to be their buddy, nor should we be afraid of their disapproval. However, we should make sure that they know we love them and respect them. This can be hard, especially if they have some history of getting in trouble or have made some mistakes. Yet, think about how important it has always been to you that people the closest to you respect and love you! Then realize that it is the same with your own children. If all they see from you is the disciplinarian, they most likely will “become discouraged” (Col. 3:21).

### **16. Choose your battles wisely**

Number sixteen out of our top twenty parenting list is simply to choose your battles wisely. We all have bad days, will word things in such a way as to be misunderstood, or legitimately forget to do something. In those times we want people to treat us well, not jump to conclusions, and not make more out of the situation than is warranted. If that is how we want to be treated, then we should treat our teens in the same manner (Mt. 7:12).

It can be so easy, out of fear for what might happen to them, to interpret certain things our teens do or don't do as intentional disobedience and rebellion, or to conclude that a decision they have made is worse than it really is. Sometimes it is good to take a step back, pray, wait, and find out more before we "go charging in!"

None of these principles is "rocket science," nor are they things that are necessarily new to you. However, they are of such a nature that we must regularly be reminded of them. If God has convicted you that one or more of these principles is absent from your parenting, take the time right now to pause and ask God to help you improve in that particular area.

Passing On The Baton With You,

Tom Barnes



## **“The Top Twenty List, Part Five”**

The following is our last installment in our top Twenty list of principles for parenting teens.

### **17. Maintain a high bar**

One of the books I read not long that had a powerful impact was the little biography about his father by one of the most celebrated evangelical scholars of our time, D. A. Carson. Carson, who grew up in French Canada where his dad pastored, gave the following picture of his typical evening family life in *Memoirs of An Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections Of Tom Carson* (p. 70): “Meals were for conversation as well as for food, and while topics were suitably diverse, they often became theological. Dad liked to explain things. Usually family devotions took place after the evening meal. Everyone had to have a Bible because each person read a verse...invariably starting with Mum, until the chapter or other unit was finished. Older friends remember little Jimmy, still in a high chair, holding his Bible, required to ‘read’ his verse when his turn came around by repeating the words, phrase by phrase, as another member of the family read them out to him. This part of the exercise was inviolable, regardless of visitors, including friends from school, all of whom had to be given a Bible and participate by reading his or her verse as it came up. Most often Dad led in prayer; sometimes it was Mum; rarely it was everyone in the family.”

In my mind this is one of the most beautiful pictures of life in a Christian family that we can have—a family reading, studying, growing from, and practicing God’s Word together. This picture represents the kind of experience to which we have been calling each other as teen family parents over the past several weeks in our sharing of the top twenty teen parenting principles. It also introduces principle seventeen, which is simply this: maintain a high bar for your children.

Recently Alex and Brett Harris (sons of homeschool pioneers Gregg and Sono Harris and the younger brother of pastor and author Joshua Harris) have founded the teen family conference and movement known simply as the “Rebelution.” This is “a teenage rebellion against low expectations.” In other words, it is a call to keep the bar high for youth, rather than concluding, “Well, they are teens, of course they will rebel; of course they will be rude, lazy, and disinterested spiritually.” Though we must be gracious toward sons and daughter, the Harris brothers are correct that the Bible’s picture of parenting youth is one of expecting much from them. For example, youth must be taught and expected to respect parents, teachers, leaders, and other elders (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3, 32; Is. 3:5; Mal. 4:6; Luke 1:17; Heb. 13:17). What is more, God used young people in very fruitful and powerful ways. Think about the following kings who all came to places of leadership as youth: David, Joash, Azariah, and Josiah. By God’s grace working through Spirit-filled, intentional, loving, discipling parents, our teens can and will also be used of the Lord mightily.

### **18. Teach life skills**

Our eighteenth principle we must keep in mind is the need to teach life skills. If our sons and daughters will be doers of the Word and not hearers only as adults (James 1:22) and thus will provide for their families, be involved in supporting their church, and serve on the front-lines of ministry, they must learn things such as: Cooking, cleaning, budgeting finances, making repairs around the home, time management, and so many other life skills. These skills may not sound very “spiritual,” yet, they are part of living a holistic Christian life that glorifies God in their bodies and all they do (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31).

### **19. Serve Christ together**

The next-to-last principle is a call to serve Christ together. It was the Apostle Paul who affirmed his young protégé, Timothy, with these words (2 Tim. 3:10): “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness” (see also 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7 where he calls believers to imitate him). One of the best ways that our sons and daughters will learn how to follow Christ, encourage other believers, and make disciples, is by watching you do it. This will not only offer wonderful times of fellowship, but also will help them catch what it means to “work heartily as for the Lord” (Col. 3:23).

### **20. Don’t go it alone**

Last and certainly not least, we need to be reminded not to go it alone in raising our teens. This twentieth principle reminds us that though this is a wonderful age of opportunity, nevertheless, it is not easy. There is much to be gained by encouraging and stirring up one another to the love and good work of solid parenting (Heb. 10:24-25); praying for one another (James 5:16); and helping each other bear burdens (Gal. 6:2). Be open as well to learning from those who share the same parenting core values, but approach it in slightly different ways.

I hope these top twenty teen parenting principles have at least motivated you to think more carefully about parenting your youth. I also hope they have at least planted some seeds of thought which will bear much fruit that lasts. This is a wonderful blessing and privilege that God has given to us. Though none of us will do it perfectly, may God find us faithful!

Joyfully passing on the baton with you,  
Tom Barnes