

Course Outline

Adult Bible Institute
A Biblical Guide To Parenting Teens

Is it possible to parent a teen? What are biblical principles that will see you through these sometime stressful years? What about parenting styles? In this first part of a two part series we will discuss the goals of parenting, styles of parenting and the things that hinder our effectiveness as parents of teens. Part II will follow with discussion of issues: communication, dating, handling rebellion, music, purity and guiding your teen to a faith that lasts.

Of course, twelve weeks cannot do this topic justice. Therefore, we strongly recommend some collateral reading for each of the two sections. These selections are suggested because they are significant contributions to the discussion of rising teens. They can be purchased at your local bookstore.

A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens (Part I)

Recommended Reading: Age of Opportunity, Paul Tripp, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1997

- Session #1 - Confusing the issues in parenting (idolatry)
- Session #2 - Developing a definition of “family”
- Session #3 - Spiritual mentoring (goals, glory and grace)
- Session #4 - Parenting styles/teenage behavioral patterns (part a)
- Session #5 - Parenting styles/teenage behavioral patterns (part b)
- Session #6 - Three strategies for parenting teens

A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens (Part II)

Recommended Reading: Guiding Your Teen to a Faith That Lasts, Kevin Huggins and Phil Landrum, Discovery House Publishers

- Session #1 - Communication (how to and keeping the lines open)
- Session #2 - Dating, Courtship to Marriage (relationships)
- Session #3 - Handling Rebellion (what is it you’re disciplining)
- Session #4 - Music (styles, content, stewardship of time)
- Session #5 - Purity (how to promote wholesome living)
- Session #6 - Guiding your teen to a faith that lasts (discipleship)

Confusing the issues in parenting

Issues of idolatry

INTRODUCTION

Various Excerpts from Age of Opportunity, Paul Tripp

It is everywhere around us—on the television sitcom, in the magazine on the supermarket rack, on the shelves of the local bookstore, on television and radio talk shows, and yes, even in a number of Christian books on the family. Parents are afraid of their teenagers. Even as they are enjoying the early years of a child's life, they are looking over their shoulders with dread, expecting the worst, knowing that in a few short years this precious little one will turn into a monster overnight. They've heard enough stories from parents who have gone through the dark valley of the teen years to know the dangers that lie ahead. They are told to expect the worst and to be thankful if they come out of the valley sane, with their teenager alive and their family intact.

A Biological View of Teens

We often talk about our teenagers as if they were nothing more than collections of raging, rebel hormones encased in developing skin. We see our goal as somehow holding these hormones back so that we can survive until the teen has reached twenty. A parent recently rejoiced to me that her son had turned twenty, as if he had passed through some magic portal from danger into safety. "We made it!" she said. This survival mentality exposes the poverty of this view of teenagers.

Particular Sacrifice and Suffering?

In 2 Timothy 2:22, Paul exhorts Timothy to "flee the evil desires of youth." This interesting little phrase calls us to be balanced in the way we think about teenagers and the way we define this time of life. On the one hand, the Bible challenges us not to be naive about this period of life. There are lusts that uniquely plague young people, temptations that are particularly powerful. These must be faced. Scripture enjoins us to be strategic, to ask the question, "What are the evil desires that grip a person during this phase of life?"

At the same time Paul uses the qualifier, "youthful," because each phase of life has its own set of temptations. The temptations of the little boy, the young man, and the old man are not identical. The temptations of the teenager are not particularly savage and severe. Each person at each time in his life, if he seeks to please the Lord, must watch, pray, stand fast, and fight lest he fall into temptation. The teenager is called to guard against the temptations that are unique to youth, while the older person is called to guard against the temptations unique to that age. Each person, whatever his or her age, must accept each stage of warfare as a Christian living in this fallen world.

Battle of Biology or Battle of the Heart?

The 2 Timothy passage is also helpful in the way it locates and defines the battle of youth. There is a battle raging in the lives of young people, but it is not the battle of

biology. It is an intensely spiritual battle, a battle for the heart. This is exactly what Paul wants us to be aware of as he exhorts Timothy not to let his heart be controlled by evil desires. This battle is not unique to teens. It takes a certain shape during the teen years, but it is the battle of every sinner.

The tendency of every sinner, no matter what his age, is captured well by Paul in Romans 1:25, that is, the tendency to exchange worship and service of the Creator for the worship and service of the created thing. Yes, it's there in the life of the teenager who forsakes his convictions for the approval of his peers, but it is just as powerfully present in the adult who compromises family and spiritual priorities for professional success. **The battle, as Paul understands it, is a heart battle, and it is dramatically important because what controls the heart will direct the life.**

There are significant temptations of the heart that greet teenagers, calling them to believe that they cannot live without some aspect of the creation. These voices call them to believe that identity, meaning, and purpose can be found in the creature rather than the Creator. These are the life-altering conflicts of the teen years. We dare not miss them because of our biologically oriented fears and our survival mentality. We must believe that Jesus came so that each of us would be freed from the desires of our sinful nature so that we may serve him and him alone. This includes our teenagers.

IDOLATRY – Not Just A Teenage Problem

Whose Idols Are in The Way? If we are ever to be effective for Christ in the lives of our teenagers, it is important to be honest about our own idols – the places where *we* have tended to exchange worship and service of the Creator for worship and service of created things. Too often when we seek to understand the struggles of adolescence, we only look at teenagers and their problems. In reality, it is time for us to take a look inside and ask, “What really rules *our* hearts?” Now, surely, every Christian parent would spontaneously give the correct theological answer. We are God's children. He rules our hearts. Or does He? This is not about a theological affirmation, but about our day-to-day worship. At the level where the rubber meets the road – in the bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens, and hallways of life – what really controls our hearts?

Start with Your Heart

It is a waste of time for us as parents to think about strategies for parenting our teens without first examining ourselves. If our hearts are controlled by something other than God, we will not view the golden parenting 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 who is neither adult nor child, but who has the uncanny ability to make even the most unimportant moments of our lives chaotic.* The cynicism of our culture toward teenagers not only reveals something about who teenagers are, but it also reveals what we as parents are serving. Our hearts blind us to the opportunities all around us during the teen years.

There is an important principle here that is taught all through Scripture, but enunciated most clearly in **Ezekiel 14:4: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him in keeping with his great idolatry.”**

Let me put this passage in my own words. The leaders of Israel have come to God to hear His words to them, but as they come, God recognizes that their hearts have been captured by idols. So, God says, “Because there are idols in your hearts, the only thing that I am interested in talking about is your idolatry.” Why? There is a little phrase here that clues us in. God says that when a person sets up an idol in his heart, he also puts “a wicked stumbling block before his face.” *The principle revealed here is the principle of inescapable influence.* What controls my heart will control my life. An idol of the heart will always put a wicked stumbling block before my face.

Imagine that you have placed your hand, with fingers narrowly separated, in front of your face. When you attempt to look through your fingers, your vision is obstructed. As long as your hand is in front of your face, no matter where you turn to look, your vision will be altered by your fingers. So it is with an idol in my heart. It will exercise inescapable influence over my life. Wherever I go, whatever I am doing, the idol will influence what I do and how I do it. This is the reason God says, “It makes no sense for me to talk about anything else, because whatever I say somehow, some way, will be used to serve the idol that rules your heart. Therefore, I want to deal with your idolatry. That is my priority.”

We cannot ignore this central issue. I am deeply persuaded that our idols have caused us to see opportunity as trial and caused us to strike back at our teenagers with bitter words of judgment, accusation, and condemnation, behaving toward them with intolerance and anger. While God is calling us to love, accept, forgive, and serve, we are often barely able to be nice.

TYPICAL PARENTAL IDOLS

The Idol of Comfort

The Idol of Respect

The Idol of Appreciation

The Idol of Success

The Idol of Control

Developing a definition of “family” *A Definition and Job Description*

INTRODUCTION

Various Excerpts from Age of Opportunity, Paul Tripp

THE question “What is a family?” has been debated throughout human history and will be the subject of debate for generations to come. Each generation recognizes the significance of the family and the fact that it has changed from what it was in previous generations. The nature of the family is a raging debate in our culture today under the politically hot title of “family values.”

Our purpose here is not to enter into this cultural debate by trying to give a biblically comprehensive definition to the family. Our goal is to define the family in a very different way, that is, to answer the question “What is a family?” functionally. What we are really asking is, “What did God intend the family to do?” This is important because our functional definition of the family will shape our goals for our children and our actions toward them. The question “What did God intend the family to do?” is the basis for asking, “What does God want us to do with our teenagers?” You will never get a proper biblical sense of your job description as the parent of a teen unless you have first understood your job description as a parent more generally.

I have listened to many of my Christian brothers and sisters tell stories of their vacations and the elaborate plans they made for many months to ensure that their family would have a good time. It hit me one day, as I was listening to yet another account of the well-researched vacation package to Orlando, that many parents are more organized, more intentional, better researched, and more goal-oriented when planning their vacations than they are in raising their children.

Imagine how a vacation would go if I “sort of” understood what a vacation was supposed to be, but I really wasn’t completely sure. Imagine how it would go if I “sort of” knew where I wanted to go with my family on vacation, but I wasn’t really committed to one destination. What if I had a bit of a sense of direction, but had taken no time to really study the maps? What if I knew that vacations tended to be costly, but I hadn’t really prepared financially? What possibility would there be that my family would, in fact, have any vacation, let alone a successful one? So it is with family life. It is vital that we are biblically informed, biblically prepared, and biblically intentional.

The Family: God’s Primary Learning Community

Judges 2:6—15

As Israel was preparing to enter the land of promise, God took time to talk about his purposes for the family. Deuteronomy 6 records God’s plan. God essentially says this: “I have designed the family to be my primary learning community. There is no better context to teach the truths that need to be taught so that my people would live the way they should live.” God says, “You live

with your children. You were there when they are lying down, you are there when they are rising up. You are there during the many days of a child's life. Teach your children; the family is your classroom."

Parents have unique opportunities to instruct their children, opportunities no one else will have, because parents live with them. God commands us to make the most of the opportunities. Capitalize on the searching question that is asked just as you are tucking your child into bed. Make the most of the morning complaint that you feel you won't have time to deal with. Ask your school-age children what their day was like, but do it at the kitchen table over the afternoon snack so that it is a conversation, not just a quick greeting as the child comes through the door. Turn off the car radio and engage your children in conversation. The family is God's primary learning community. Parents have a platform for instruction that no one else has.

Getting to Know the Students

If you are going to function as God's instrument in the life of your teen, you need to know that God intended the family to be his primary learning community, parents to be his primary teachers, and family life to be just the right context for life instruction to take place. Once you understand that you are one of God's teachers, the next question to ask is, "Who are the students?" It is not enough to say that the students are our children. We need to have a biblical description of who those children are. A good teacher not only knows his material well, but he knows his students well too. So it is with parenting. The more accurate our understanding of our children, the more successful we will be at doing what God has called us to do.

There are a host of ways in which the Bible describes our children, but four things the Bible says about them are most essential, Once I understand these as a parent, my teaching task will begin to take shape.

- ❑ Children Are Covenantal Beings
- ❑ Children Are Social Beings
- ❑ Children Are Interpreters
- ❑ Children Behave Out of the Heart

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks." Luke 6:43—45

The Family as a Theological Community

What is theology? It is the study of God, his existence, his nature, and his works. It is God's plan that the family function as a theological community. What this means is that the ultimate fact of family life is the fact that God exists and that we are his creatures. Everything we do, think, and say is attached to that reality. We must never allow ourselves to view life horizontally, that is,

only in terms of earthly relationships and circumstances. We must always ask questions about God, his will, and his work no matter what the subject or situation being discussed.

The goal of all of this is to root our children's identity in the existence and glory of God. We want them to understand that they were made by him, that they belong to him, and that they are called to live for his glory. We are called by God to *do* theology, that is, to live our lives with a moment-by-moment consciousness of God. He is the reality that gives sense and shape to every other fact we discuss and consider

In Deuteronomy 6:20—25, the task of rooting our children's identity in the existence and work of God is placed in an everyday life context.

- ❑ *Every moment is God's moment*
- ❑ *Always a higher agenda*
- ❑ *Trust and Obey*

The Family as a Sociological Community

Just as teenagers need us to root their identity in the character and existence of God, they also need us to root their identity in community. Sinners are rugged individualists. Sinners want to sing with Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way!" They are filled with a sense of self. Their thoughts are dominated by what they need and what they want. Sinners, according to Paul in Ephesians, are people who are led around by the cravings of their sinful nature (Eph. 2:3). Sinners want their will to be done, and they will fight with whoever gets in their way. Consequently, sinners are much better at making war than they are at making peace (see James 4:1—10), much better at hatred than they are at love. They are much better at causing division than they are at creating unity.

The family is called to be the context in which what it means to love your neighbor as yourself is self-consciously taught at every turn.

- ❑ *Proverbs 20:5*
- ❑ *Matthew 7:12*
- ❑ *James 4:1-2*

The Family as a Redemptive Community

Spiritual Mentoring *[goals, glory and grace]*

Introduction

Various Excerpts from Age of Opportunity, Paul Tripp

Before we consider God's goals for us as we parent our teenagers, we need first to reflect on who we are as God's children. It is important that we see that God's glory and grace are far greater than our sin and our struggle with parenting.

I want to show you *three passages* that have been friends to me in moments of discouragement and defeat. God has used these passages to radically alter the way I think about what he has called me to do in my teenagers' lives.

Awesome Power

Few things in life have the twenty-four-hour-a-day demand quality that parenting does. Few things in life have such potential for unexpected difficulty and drama. I have talked with many parents of adolescents who speak of being weary, who feel as if they do not have the strength to do what they have been called to do. It is vital in the face of this that we do not forget the strength that is ours as the children of God.

"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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." Ephesians 3:20

The God who is our Father is a God of awesome power. Through this power he is able to do things that are well beyond anything we could verbalize or grasp with our imaginations. Think of the thing in your life that seems the most impossible to accomplish. God is able to do more! Think of the thing that the Bible would say is most needed in your teenager's life, yet seems unrealistic and out of reach. God is able to do more!

It is important for us to look at our task as parents from the vantage point of the awesome power of God—the power by which he created the world, holds the universe together, raised Christ from the dead, and defeated sin. Our God is a God of glorious power far beyond what our minds can conceive. We cannot look at our parental responsibilities only from the perspective of our own weariness and weakness. We must remember that we are the children of the Almighty. He is Power! He is Strength.

It is in our moments of weakness, when we refuse to give up, that we experience the glorious resources of power that reside within us as children of the Almighty. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. *Often we miss the experience of his power because we tend to quit when we have hit the wall.* It is when we are beyond the resources of our own strength and wisdom that we tend to succumb to the emotions of the moment, saying and doing things we will live to regret. *But because of Christ's work for us, we can do something different; we can parent with courage and hope.* It is important to recognize the strength we have been given as the children of God.

The Gift of Glory

In John 17, Christ is facing the cross, resurrection, and his ascension to heaven. In the final moments before his capture, he goes to his Father in prayer for his disciples and for those who would believe through their ministry. He prays for the relationships his followers will have with one another; that his children will experience the same unity that he has with the Father and the Spirit. Imagine a family where such unity reigned! Picture that kind of relationship with your teenager! Again, it is tempting to look at passages such as this and say, “Come on, get real! You can’t be serious. You don’t really think this is possible, do you?”

Before we cast off this passage as utter idealism, too distant from our experience to be of any practical encouragement or help, we need to pay careful attention to its words:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity....” (John 17:20–23)

In his prayer Christ says that he has done something magnificent for his people. Knowing the brokenness of the world and our sinful hearts, Christ saw that there would be no way that we would ever experience on our own the love and unity that are his plan for us. On earth he had seen the bitterness, anger, jealousy, greed, deceit, and vengeance that sin produces. He knew that he must make ample provision for his people or they would never live in unity and love. Brother would never love sister, husband would never love wife, friend would never love friend, and parent would never love child without his divine intervention. And that is exactly what he provided!

Pay careful attention to the words of verse 22: “*I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.*” Hear what Christ is saying. When Christ came to earth and took on flesh, the glory of almighty God was placed on him so that, through him, the glory of God would be seen by us all. Christ then says that the glory that was placed on him he has placed on his children so that they would be one! We need to embrace this redemptive reality. What was far beyond our grasp has been placed by Christ within our reach. He has placed the glory of almighty God on us for a specific purpose: that our relationships with one another would mirror those of the Trinity. Paul says it this way in Colossians 2:9–10: “*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ.*” . .

Notice further that Christ says, “May they be brought to complete unity.” it is important to see that Christ doesn’t pray, “May they bring themselves to complete unity.” No, Christ is saying, “Father, if your children are ever going to live in unity and love, it is you who must bring them there.” Again, in those moments in the room, it is not just we who are working. God is working to produce what only he can produce. These are his moments of grace, his moments of redemption and change.

There is probably no time in our lives when we are in more need of God’s gift of glory and his moment-by-moment activity than the years when we are parenting our teenagers. *In these years we are faced with our weakness, sin, and inability. It is in these years that the enemy wants to turn us from the high goals to which God has called us to settle instead for human control and situational success.* We need to remember that God’s gift of glory was given to bridge the gap between us and our children so that his love and unity would flourish between us.

Everything We Need

There is no passage that has been more of a comfort to me as a parent than . . .

“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. 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.”

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 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. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.” (2 Peter 1:3–9)

Peter says that there are believers whose lives are ineffective and unproductive. He then explains what causes this. It is because these believers are missing the qualities that make for a productive life. Faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love are the essential qualities of a Christian’s effectiveness. They are also the essential qualities of productive parenting, the qualities we need in those tough moments with our teenagers.

Peter also tells why these essential qualities are missing: because these people are nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. In short, they have forgotten their identity. They have forgotten who they are as the children of God. *Here is Peter’s argument: if you forget who you are as a child of God, you will quit pursuing the qualities that will make your life effective and productive.*

The first few verses of the passage lay out the glories of our identity as God’s children that Peter says we must not forget. He says that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. God has given everything we need, not only for eternal life, but also for the God-honoring life to which we have been called until he returns. Notice the tense of the verb. Peter says God has given us everything we need. It has already happened! This is a fundamental Gospel truth. God will not call us to do anything without providing a way for it to be done. If he calls us to cross the Red Sea, he will enable us to swim, send a boat, build a bridge, or part the waters!

We need to walk into the rooms of our teenagers saying to ourselves, “I have everything I need to do what God has called me to do.” In these moments we can experience a little more of the inheritance of character that Christ has provided us through his death.

Awesome power dwelling within, the gift of glory given so that we can be agents of love and unity, and everything we need to do what God has called us to do—this is the Gospel. This is our identity as the children of God. These are the truths that can lift us out of our weariness and discouragement to parent our teenagers with faith, courage, and hope. They call us to hold onto God’s high goals and to fight the hopelessness that the enemy wants to rule our hearts.

Goal #1 Focusing on the Spiritual Struggle

What Does it look like . . .

1. He will have a heartfelt, internalized fear of God (Proverbs 1:7).
2. He will understand the need for submission to authority.
3. He will understand the need to be separate from the world.
4. He will have the desire to think through his faith and apply it to all situations.
5. He will be growing in a biblical self-awareness.

Goal #2 Deepening a Heart of Conviction and Wisdom

Six Characteristics of Biblical Convictions

1. A biblical conviction is always based on a study of, submission to and application of Scripture.
2. A biblical conviction is predetermined.
3. A biblical conviction will not change with the circumstances.
4. A biblical conviction have a non-negotiable quality to them.
5. True biblical conviction is bold and always lived out.

Principles that lead to a life of wisdom

1. There is the principle of authority.
2. There is the principle of grace.
3. There is the principle of truth.
4. There is the principle of a higher agenda.
5. There is the principle of wise counsel.
6. There is the principle of faithfulness or integrity.
7. There is the principle of the sovereignty of God.
8. There is the principle of values.
9. There is the principle of the heart.
10. There is the principle of God's glory.

Parenting Styles & Teenage Behavioral Patterns

[Part A]

Introduction

Despite how critical styles of parenting are to adolescents' development, most parents are not deliberate about the kind of parent they want to be. *Parents tend to be non-reflective about their parenting styles*; that is, they allow their way of relating to kids to be determined by internal and external forces of which they have little conscious awareness. Consequently, the parents' underlying problems in thinking go unchallenged, and the resulting problems in relating go unchanged.

(Parenting Adolescents, Huggins, p 95).

This practice of operating non-reflectively as parents, with little or no awareness of the motivational forces within, is the single most important obstacle to learning to be effective parents of teenagers.

Causes of Non-reflective Parenting

A parent remains out of touch with what drives him because he dreads facing three painful truths:

- ❑ He is contemptuous
- ❑ He is wounded
- ❑ He is defeated

Example of Non-reflective Parenting

Perhaps the portion of Scripture from which we can glean the richest insights about non-reflective parenting deals with the life of David. King David is asked a very pertinent question concerning his relationship with his son Absalom: Why hasn't he devised a way so that his banished son may not remain estranged from him?

- ❑ II Samuel 13:21
- ❑ II Samuel 13:22, 32, 23-27, 36-39
- ❑ II Samuel 14:1-14, 21, 24
- ❑ II Samuel 16:11-12; 18:33-19:4

"Only by exploring his own purposes through personal reflection can a parent understand why he clings to the style of parenting he does."

Reasoning of Non-reflective Parenting

Too often parents are ruled by no higher goal than that of lessening his own pain. Ironically, parental goals like these only increase a parent's pain in the end (I Samuel 18:33—19:4).

The question remains: Why are so many parents hesitant to do any honest reflection about why they parent the way they do? Parents offer various reasons:

- ❑ Lack of time
- ❑ Lack of aptitude

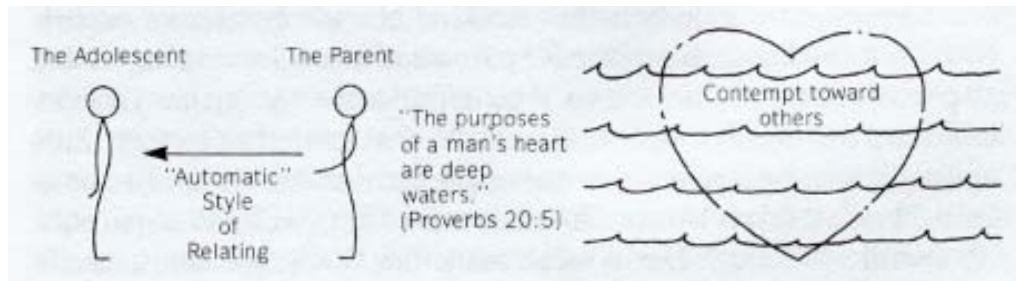
- ❑ Lack of desire

These kinds of excuses fail to expose the real reasons why most parents tend to be non-reflective today. There is probably resistance to a look inside because of fear of the painful truths that must be confronted for the capacity of growth and love to be kept alive in the parent. *The parent-teen relationship is one of God's primary tools for putting an adult in the kind of situation where he can get a penetrating look at the truth about himself.* Take a look with me at the inner realities that can make self-examination so difficult for parents of teens.

A Parent's Contempt

Notice how figure 1 below attempts to pick up on the imagery from Proverbs 20:5 ("The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters"). There are always hidden parts to the human personality that account for the relational style a person chooses to employ, even when it seems automatic or second nature to him. When a parent begins to look into the deep waters of his heart to understand himself, the first truth he often must confront is his feelings of contempt toward those who have disappointed him. This is one of the primary reasons why parents don't like to reflect. *They don't want to acknowledge that in their heart they often feel contempt for others, including their kids.*

FIGURE 1
THE NONREFLECTIVE PARENT

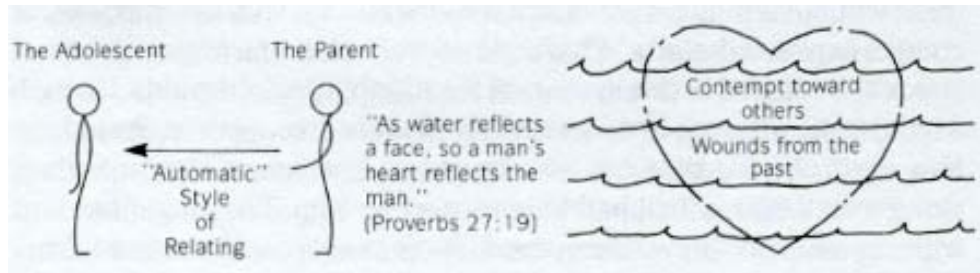


The fact that the contempt lies just beneath the surface means it usually lies just beyond the parents' conscious awareness. Parents can become suddenly aware of it when some event, especially one involving their child, threatens them in some way. However, just as quickly, parents can become unconscious of it again once the event or threat has passed. Very few adults are willing or ready to admit that a lot of anger and contempt lie behind the way they relate to their children. The implications of this are just too painful. *There is something self-protective about the way you parent because there is something damaged about you as a person.* Once acknowledged, the contempt—like a scab that is peeled back—reveals a very tender, wounded part that lies beneath, a part parents find even more painful to probe. This is the second major reason parents are reluctant to do any extensive self-examination.

A Parent's Wounds

Once a parent allows herself to be exposed as a contemptuous parent, she opens the door to being exposed as a wounded parent as well. The fact that a parent almost inevitably bears some deep unhealed wounds is a reality that she communicates to her teen in dozens of subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Often she does this unintentionally because she has little conscious awareness of the wounds she carries from her past.

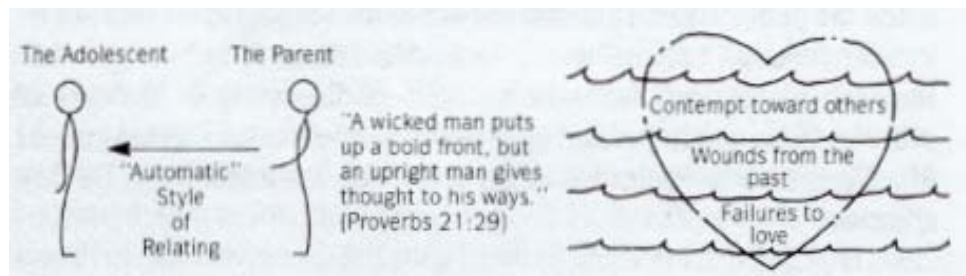
FIGURE 2
THE NONREFLECTIVE PARENT



The more wounded a parent is, the greater the probability that he'll imagine the real sickness in the family to reside in someone else—the spouse or the children. In a parent's mind, wounds from the past reveal an even deeper truth about a person, a truth the parent is terrified others will discover about him. This becomes the third reason why parents avoid personal reflection.

A Parent's Failure

FIGURE 3
THE NONREFLECTIVE PARENT



Both parents and their teens are victims of failed relationships because on some level every person has been failed by his parents—an inevitable consequence of living in a fallen world with fallen parents. The writer of Hebrews draws one important contrast between our heavenly Father and our human parents: “Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness” (12:10). Our heavenly Father has righteous and loving goals in everything He does. Human parents do as they think best. Even at their best, we know parents often think with a misguided focus, with misdirected goals, and with misplaced dependency. The result is that their responses are often unlike God's (e.g., for the child's good, that he may be holy). When a response is guided by any other kind of intention (e.g., for the parents' good, that they may be unhassled), it is a failure of the parents to love.

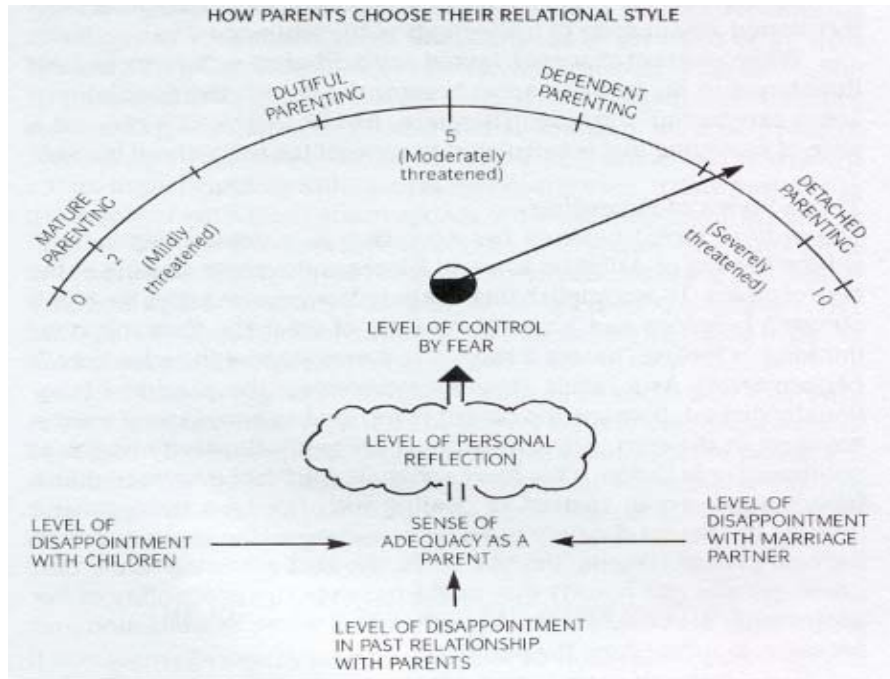
A parent has not genuinely faced the truth that he is a failed parent until he acknowledges it at a core level. Look for three indicators that reveal how deeply you are acknowledging the truth about yourself:

- ❑ *How much responsibility do you accept for the failure?* When a parent gets a glimpse of himself at a core level, he can make no excuses for himself. He cannot blame his insensitivity, preoccupation, or angry outbursts on someone else. He has to acknowledge that he has chosen his way of relating in order to protect himself from more pain.
- ❑ *How aware are you of the impact your failures have on others?* When a parent gets an honest glimpse at what he's been doing as a parent he becomes painfully aware of its destructive impact on his kids. He begins to recognize how his relational style actually reinforces problem ways of thinking and relating in his kids.

- *How much do you express a desire to be a fundamentally different kind of parent?* When a parent gets a glimpse at who he really is in his heart, he longs for a change in himself. However, he knows he is powerless to accomplish this change on his own. At this point a desperate sense of his need for God, on a level he has never experienced before, is born. *This parent recognizes that if he ever hopes to truly love his kids, he is absolutely dependent upon God to change something deep within him that he can't change by himself* This results in some detectable movement in the parent toward deepening his relationship with Christ.

Parents are not responsible for their adolescent's choices, since they really have no way of controlling the decisions their kid makes. *However, parents are responsible for choosing what kind of parents they will be*—how they respond to their adolescent's choices and what their underlying goals are as they respond. God makes this very distinction in His rebuke of Eli, the priest, in I Samuel 3:12-14. Eli was held responsible, not for his sons' contemptible behavior, but for his own failure to respond in ways that would have discouraged their behavior.

A Glimpse of Next Week . . .



Parenting Styles & Teenage Behavioral Patterns [Part B]

There are two different kinds of people in the world: foolish people and wise people.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Matthew 7:24-27

It would be good to list all the differences between these two categories of people.

- ❑ Wise people build their lives on Jesus’ ideas, while foolish people build their lives on their own ideas.
- ❑ Wise people build their lives to withstand storms and trials, while foolish people build their lives on foundations that can give way when troubles come.
- ❑ When living life as a foolish person you’d never know when a wave could come along and tear your whole life apart. Living as a wise person gives you much more confidence; you know that the foundation you’ve built on is secure.

The Two Tasks of Adolescence

[Excerpted in part from Parenting Adolescents, Kevin Huggins, pp. 117-140]

Huggins says, “Adolescents are confronted with the task of answering two crucial questions: ‘What kind of person do I have to be to really be wanted and loved?’ and ‘What kind of person do I have to be to make an impact that lasts?’ Every adolescent has to decide for himself whether he can accomplish these two things better as a wise person or as a fool. His decision will determine the kind of person he becomes.”

Earlier in the Matthew 7 passage, Jesus taught about two kinds of gates: a narrow gate and a wide gate. Matthew records His words as follows:

*“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”
(Matthew 7:13-14)*

Jesus indicates that few people take the narrow gate that leads to life. The majority choose the wide gate that puts them on the road to destruction. In other words, very few choose Christ or His ideas as the foundation on which to build their lives. Most choose the sandy foundation of their own efforts or ideas. The writer of Proverbs actually defines a fool on this basis: “He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe” (Proverbs 28:26).

Every person (including your adolescent son or daughter) has an active disposition to choose to be the kind of person who trusts in his own resources, rather than in Christ's, to make life work. This means that without significant intervention by Christ or someone He uses as one of His representatives, every person will in essence end up building his life on sand or traveling the broad road to destruction. This is why men, women, and children are portrayed by David in the Scriptures as foolish by nature:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Ps 14:1-3)

Kids literally decide what kind of adults they are going to be during adolescence. They are doing this while under the control of a built-in tendency to believe that no God can be counted upon to give them what is vital for their existence. At least no God that can be counted upon to be anything but a hindrance. There is no doubt, then, about what kind of persons adolescents will choose to be if their tendency to factor God out of the picture is left unchallenged. They will choose to be fools. This accounts for the strong calls in Scripture for the kind of parental responses that will drive the foolishness out of a young person's heart. The writer of Proverbs records them as follows:

Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death. (Proverbs 19:18)

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)

The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother. (Proverbs 29:15)

A relationship with parents is one of the primary forces that challenges or reinforces the foolish tendencies of a developing young person, especially in the early stages. The kind of relationships a child experiences with his parents greatly influences which strategies or styles of relating will become his pattern for life. In order for parents to be more active and deliberate in their influence over what kind of person their teen decides to be, they must first understand two things:

- (1) The stages through which a child develops the basic strategies he'll carry through life.
- (2) How his relationship with his parents can influence the type of foolish strategy he ultimately chooses as an adolescent.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENT FOOLISHNESS

Foolishness begins to develop in the human heart from birth. In infancy it is *aroused*. In childhood it is *learned*. In adolescence it is *incensed*. And in adulthood, if it is allowed to continue operating, it will become *rearranged* (*borrowed from Larry Crabb*).

Stage One: Aroused Foolishness

Foolishness is aroused in a child's heart before he is one year old. Even in infancy, foolish tendencies become aroused and ingrained in the fabric of a baby's personality as he interacts with the people in his environment. The best parenting in the world cannot prevent this from happening.

To an infant, every desire seems crucial: the desire to suckle, the desire for a full stomach, the desire to be warm and dry. When these desires are not immediately fulfilled by the infant's primary caretakers, he experiences his first relational disappointment. This disappointment arouses within him a tendency to mistrust the abilities and intentions of his parents to give him what is vital for his existence. Though he doesn't yet have the capacity to understand his own thought processes, he develops his first real problem in thinking: "If I'm going to feel safe and secure I must do something to get my world to respond to me."

Proverbs 13:12 says that "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." Whenever the human heart experiences significant delays in having its longings fulfilled, it has a tendency to grow sick. In this way the disappointed heart of an infant also grows sick. The baby's predisposition toward foolishly trusting in only his own efforts to make life safe and secure is aroused (Proverbs 28:26). The more extensively the infant experiences delays in having his primary needs met, the stronger is his belief—based on his survival instincts—that life depends on trusting in no one's initiatives but his own.

The Apostle Peter admonishes his readers to stop satisfying their own desires by using foolish strategies like malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander and to become like newborn infants (1 Peter 2:1-2). They should place their trust in a source of nourishment that will never disappoint them: "The one who trusts in

Stage Two: Learned Foolishness

From two years to adolescence, a child learns, practices, and becomes somewhat adept at doing what it takes to get the significant people in her world to satisfy her desires. In this stage a child is trained "in the way he should go" (in the sense of Proverbs 22:6) primarily through interaction with her parents. Although Old Testament scholars disagree as to the exact meaning of Proverbs 22:6, one basic principle seems clear: The training a person gets in the formative years of her life has profound impact on the kind of person she later chooses to be.

During the stage of learned foolishness, a child learns the basic foolish strategies she'll carry into her adult life. When a person emerges from infancy into early childhood she begins to learn some very important lessons about life in a fallen world. *She learns that the deepest desires of her heart rarely get fulfilled if she fails to meet the expectations of others.* The fact that, in most cases, she has to do something wrong to get attention leads her to silently ask, "Am I the kind of person who is really wanted and loved?" "Am I the kind of person who can do something others recognize as important?" When she is rewarded with affection or attention for meeting adult expectations, she concludes, "When I do, I am the kind of person who is loved and valued." This creates for her a temporary sense of security and predictability (soon to be undone by adolescence, however) that is rooted in her own abilities to meet the expectations of others.

All of this serves to strengthen the foolishness in her heart. Her problem ways of thinking deepen as her dependence on her own efforts grows more complete. And her problem ways of relating become rigid and compulsive as her relationships become the whole basis upon which she evaluates her worth as a person. Only when she succeeds at earning the approval or attention of others can she consider herself the kind of person who is really wanted or valued. A child at this stage is like the person who has built her house on the sand, but hasn't yet experienced a high tide or a storm. Little does she know that a great crash is awaiting her at stage three.

Stage Three: Incensed Foolishness

This stage begins when a child starts puberty and culminates when he's found a way to resolve the crises puberty triggers. During this stage a child's learned strategies for manipulating relationships meet with frustration and failure. Because of changes in others' expectations of him and changes in his perception of others, childhood strategies become inadequate to provide him with a sense of love and impact. And when what he's been conditioned during his childhood to trust in suddenly proves worthless, he feels betrayed. Betrayed by his world. Betrayed by himself. Even betrayed by God. *He experiences great contempt for all three. He becomes an incensed fool!*

Parents must not think they can prevent their sons or daughters from experiencing this stage. It is an inevitable consequence that confronts everyone who emerges from childhood having learned a way to make life pleasurable apart from entering into a vital relationship with Christ, which can only occur when he's been broken by recognizing the depth of his sin. In this sense, adolescence is a real gift from God. It can prevent the foolishness devised by a child from becoming the philosophy that guides him as an adult. Adolescence is designed by God to literally stop kids in their tracks and make them wrestle with some serious questions before they proceed into adulthood. There is no guarantee, however, that kids will be able to find wise answers to the questions adolescence evokes. The only guarantee is that the responsibilities of living in an adult world will seriously challenge them to question the foolish ideas they learned during childhood.

Proverbs 13:19 sheds light on the developing fool at this stage: "A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but fools detest turning from evil." *Whenever a fool discovers an effective way to fulfill his longings, he detests anyone or anything that tries to make him give it up (even though it is evil!).* During adolescence kids often perceive that the adults in their world are conspiring together (perhaps even with God) to make them give up everything that has proved meaningful or useful in satisfying their longings (e.g., certain activities, certain privileges, certain freedoms, certain ways of treating others, etc.). Therefore, tremendous anger in teens can be generated and unleashed during this stage.

This theme is further amplified by Proverbs 19:3: "A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." An incensed fool looks for someone to blame after his own foolish plans have failed. The adolescent often directs this anger toward God, which can account for some of the lack of interest in spiritual matters and the defection from churches that occur among kids at this stage. They are expressing blame toward God for the circumstances that keep them from finding satisfaction in this world. And on one level God is to blame. In His wisdom and mercy He has created a world in which fallen people have great difficulty finding life and fulfillment apart from Him.

During adolescence the incensed fool experiences increasing problems in his thought processes and relationships. He reaches the conclusion that fulfillment in life depends on him changing the kind of person he is and becoming some other kind of person (e.g., a thin person, an organized person, a funny person, etc.). He must be someone whom others will want, someone who has what it takes to get others to respond.

As the adolescent begins to make this his new goal, relationships can become much more threatening to him. There is the ever-present danger of being found out, or of being discovered for who he really is— something far less than the ideal. Therefore, the adolescent can become quite uncomfortable in close relationships, especially with those who might see through him. He may consider all adults “unsafe” for close relationships for a time. In his style of relating the adolescent may make it a practice to remain aloof and mysterious. Unless helped to see what he’s actually doing, this can remain part of his style of relating for all of his adult life.

The stage of incensed foolishness can conclude very shortly, or it can continue for a very longtime (even into the mid-to-late twenties). It culminates with the occurrence of one of two things: the rearrangement or the repentance of foolish strategies.

An adolescent rearranges his foolishness when he revises or adapts his strategies in a way that makes them start to work for him again. The crises of puberty triggers incense in the teen because he now sees that his strategies to win these things (the threats to the adolescent’s security, sense of impact, and sense of being loved) have proven unsuccessful. If he can figure out a way to adapt his foolish strategies to his new adult environment, he’ll be able to resolve the crises of adolescence through merely rearranging his foolishness. His anger will subside to some degree, and he will appear ready to face life as an adult. However, in his heart he’ll remain independent of Christ, and dependent on himself.

In contrast, an adolescent repents of his foolishness when he makes a deliberate choice to forsake his foolish strategies. This means shifting his dependence to Christ alone and whatever He chooses to provide for his sense of love, impact, and security in his new adult environment. An adolescent stands little chance of choosing the pathway of repentance without someone helping him become aware of the actual consequences of his foolish strategies. While God can intervene directly in human lives, normally He chooses to work through human vessels to make this will known. If an adolescent is not fortunate enough to receive God’s help through others, he will more than likely progress to the fourth stage in his development as a fool.

*Stage Four: **Rearranged Foolishness***

In the fourth stage of foolishness, which begins in early adulthood, a person remains fixed until a major crisis occurs that renders her foolish strategies ineffective once again. At this point she often reverts to another period of “incensed foolishness.” Many adults in their thirties or forties may experience this when their marriages disintegrate or when their teenagers rebel. Others may not experience such a crisis until they experience an “empty nest,” a change of occupation (i.e., retirement), or the death of a spouse.

During stage four young adults remain committed to foolish strategies that in some significant ways resemble the style of relating they learned as children. Thus, the second half of Proverbs 22:6 rings true: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (emphasis mine). The fool remains a fool until he dies or repents. The crises of life are rarely sufficient in and of themselves to drive the foolishness out. Neither is corporal punishment, brute force, or a controlled environment. The writer of Proverbs 2 7:22 makes this very clear: “Though

you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him.” Even though external restraints or force may be adequate to temporarily control a person’s foolish behavior, the foolish belief structure remains intact, “underground” or out of sight, in her heart—not to be expressed outwardly again until the restraints are removed. The writer of Proverbs explains this with a colorful analogy: “As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (Proverbs 26:11). The best remedy for foolishness can be applied only in the context of honest, loving relationships. Rarely will adolescents or adults come to the point of forsaking their foolish strategies without allowing someone with maturity and wisdom to get close enough to show them what they are really doing to themselves and to others through their foolishness (Psalm 55:12-15, 141:5).

THE REMEDY FOR FOOLISHNESS

Solomon described how a remedy for foolishness can be applied when he wrote, “Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being” (Proverbs 20:30). According to Solomon, combatting foolishness requires discipline that is applied by another and targeted at dislodging the foolishness within a person’s heart. He even goes on in a later proverb to describe who can best apply such discipline: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (27:6, RSV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT

I want to urge you as a parent not to leave this discussion of foolishness without first considering the strategies or formulas for living you model around your own teens. The foolishness we observe in our kids’ lives often mirrors the foolishness in our own. It would be futile to attempt to build a relationship with our kids that challenges their foolishness when our own foolishness goes unnoticed and unchallenged.

It is truly possible to offer our teens a relationship that increases, instead of decreases, their chances to become foolish adults. No approach can offer a guarantee of success at parenting. However, a biblical approach can offer the hope that your teen will not build his life on the foolish ideas he has detected in you or invented on his own. The kind of relationship you offer your teen is the single most influential factor in shaping the kind of person he chooses to be.

THE SHAPING OF ADOLESCENT FOOLISHNESS

If a parent cannot prevent foolishness from being aroused in his young child or from it later being incensed when the child becomes an adolescent, what kind of impact can a parent have? A kid’s foolish strategies are most vulnerable to a parent’s influence when they break down and leave the teen in some level of despair. This of course happens most prevalently to kids during adolescence. When a teen becomes frustrated and incensed at her inability to get her desires met on her own, she experiences a lot of despair. Her relationship with her parents at this stage will to a large degree determine how she handles her ineffective ways of thinking and relating as she moves into adulthood.

Parents have only two choices as to how they can impact their child during this stage. They can offer her a relationship that will encourage her to revise and strengthen her foolish ways of

thinking and relating, or they can offer her one that will encourage her to forsake her foolish ways. The Apostle Peter offers a clue as to how parents can accomplish the latter:

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:1-3)

It is an authentic taste of what the Lord is really like that motivates a person to stop manipulating her world to get love and impact on her own terms and depend instead upon the Lord for what will nourish her soul. It should be the goal of parents, then, to offer their teens a genuine taste of God's loving-kindness. Where else can kids get a sample of what God is really like if not in their relationships with those who are supposed to represent His interests and authority in their lives? Jesus urged people to look at their relationships with their earthly dads for a small glimpse of what their heavenly Father is like (Matthew 7:9-11). Parents, of course, are not capable even at their best of offering kids everything their Father in Heaven can. However, they are capable and responsible for offering to their children a small sample of what God wants to provide for them later on a much grander scale.

TWO MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO A TEEN'S REPENTANCE

There are two basic ingredients that a parent must demonstrate in her relationship with her teen to give him an authentic taste of what God is like: unconditional involvement and uncompromising responsiveness.

These are big words that communicate two big concepts to kids about the nature of their heavenly Father. A parent's unconditional involvement gives her kid a taste of *God's grace*. Uncompromising responsiveness gives him a taste of *God's justice* or righteousness. Without seeing the two modeled in the lives of those who teach them, kids can easily get a false idea of what God is like.

When an adolescent asks the question, "What kind of person do I have to be to get someone to want and love me?" unconditional involvement from another teaches him that he doesn't have to be anybody but himself to be loved and wanted. Unconditional involvement makes him aware of the kind of security that is available to him at any moment in a relationship with Christ. As a parent takes whatever initiative is possible to stay relationally near the child during problem times, the child gets a taste of the kind of grace God demonstrates to each one of us (parents and teens alike) in spite of all of our foolishness and sin (Romans 5:8). Even when we act like His enemies, God uses His Son, His Word, and even His people to communicate His desire to remain near (James 4:8). His grace provides everything we need to enter and enjoy relationship with Him at any time (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

When an adolescent asks the question, "What kind of person do I have to be to accomplish something of lasting significance?" uncompromising responsiveness from another teaches him that everything he does has lasting impact because of who he is. Because God has created the person to rule with Him, his every action, word, and thought have great impact on both God and His creation. Uncompromising responsiveness can help him recognize the kind of impact his life and choices have from God's perspective. As a parent takes whatever initiative is necessary to

develop her teen's awareness of the true impact his choices are having on God, others, and himself, the child can begin to understand and appreciate the significance his life really has in God's eyes. Fools have little understanding of their own ways, especially of the impact or consequences that result from them. They often attach too much significance to some actions (academic performance, athletic perfection, social popularity) and too little to others (slander, grumbling, cheating, or lying). And they often fail to attach any significance at all to the things God attaches the greatest significance to—the purposes of their own hearts. Parents have the responsibility to respond to their kids' purposes and actions in a way that encourages kids to attach the same significance and meaning to them that God does.

Two forces move a kid toward God. The kid's disillusionment with his wrong strategies to manipulate his world push him to a place where God's ways can become a desirable option. His parents can then pull him to God by exposing him to God's sufficiency to meet his deepest longings for love and impact. Parents who offer their teen a relationship that gives him a taste of unconditional involvement and uncompromising responsiveness stimulate an appetite in that teen's heart for more. When they direct the teen's attention to the relationship that God offers, they give the adolescent an automatic frame of reference. He has already tasted this kind of relationship and found it something that touched the deepest desires of his heart. When he tests other kinds of relationships and other ways of getting his desires satisfied, he will remember (much as the prodigal son did) the kind of genuine love that is waiting for him with God's Son and God's people. There is a high probability that he will return to that kind of relationship when his foolish strategies fail him. Parents have far less to fear about the kind of person their adolescent chooses to be or the kind of relationships he chooses to pursue when he has had an authentic taste of what God is like. God does very well in taste tests among those kids who have experienced an unconditional and uncompromising kind of love.

THE FOUR STYLES OF PARENTING

The matrix in the figure is formed by two axes. The vertical axis represents the level of responsiveness found in each style, while the horizontal axis represents the level of involvement in each. How parents incorporate or fail to incorporate these two ingredients into their relationship with their teen determines which of the four styles of parenting the teen receives.

