

CHRIST- CENTERED PARENTING

**GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS
ON COMPLEX CULTURAL ISSUES**

**RUSSELL MOORE &
PHILLIP BETHANCOURT**

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Jen Wilkin is a wife, mom to four, and an advocate for Christians to love God with their minds through the faithful study of His Word. She is an author and Bible teacher, and currently serves on staff with The Village Church Institute.

INTRODUCTION

PARENTS,

Each day, as you do the very ordinary work of being moms and dads, you are teaching your kids how to live. The work of parenting has always been challenging, but today we face the added pressure of raising our children in a world that barely resembles the one we grew up in. If you are like us, you are well aware of just how ill-equipped you are for the task.

There is some good news. Our most basic problems are the same ones we have always faced. We are sinful beings in a fallen world. The good news is that through the gospel, Jesus has redeemed us from sin and is making all things new.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

GALATIANS 3:13

Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new.” He also said, “Write, because these words are faithful and true.”

REVELATION 21:5

You will find that this entire study is based on a simple idea. When Christ is the foundation for your parenting, it enables you to equip your children to navigate even the most complex issues in the culture today.

We know the world is changing at breakneck speed. We know you cannot possibly keep up with it. But what you can do is be there for your kids. You can follow the Bible’s admonition to instruct them in the fear and knowledge of the Lord as you walk alongside them each day.

Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. LORD the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

This study is intended to equip you to face the challenges presented by the culture. As the world around us continues to shift and become more secular, this curriculum will help prepare you and your children to meet these moral and ethical challenges. At times, we will encourage you to talk together about difficult and sensitive issues. Don't be afraid. Your child will be better equipped to face these things if you are there to shape and guide their thinking.

Picking up this study is a step in that direction. It is our prayer that God will use it to assist you as you continue doing one of the most important tasks of your entire life. Children are a stewardship and a precious heritage from the Lord.

Sons are indeed a heritage from the LORD,
offspring, a reward.

PSALM 127:3

They need you more than you know. May God bless you as you seek to honor Him in your parenting.

FOR THE KINGDOM,

Handwritten signatures of Russell Moore and Phillip Bethancourt. The signature on the left is 'Russell Moore' and the signature on the right is 'PR BXT'.

Russell Moore and Phillip Bethancourt

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *Christ-Centered Parenting*. This six-session study will help equip parents of children, youth, and young adults to navigate difficult and complex cultural issues that face our families today.

This study is designed to be used in a weekly small-group setting of parents. However, it can also be used with larger groups, as an individual study, as well as a resource for those who work with children, youth, young adults, and their parents.

The study consists of the following components:

1. VIDEO

Each video session is approximately 30 minutes and features a panel discussion on how to parent in the midst of a specific complex cultural issue. Each panel is hosted by a member of the ERLC staff and includes Russell Moore with other knowledgeable guests. The panelists come from different walks of life and ministry, but have this in common—they are all parents.

There is a Viewer Guide page provided for you to take notes on the video content.

2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Following the video, several questions are provided on the Group Guide pages to help your group discuss the session issue. Also, there is a Takeaways section at the end of the Group Guide for you to jot down notes to remember or list what you've learned from the video and group discussion.

3. ARTICLES

Each session contains three articles that deal with one facet of the larger issue discussed on the video and in your small group. These articles are to be read between sessions. There are reflection questions at the end of each article to help you process and apply the information. Also, you can use these questions to discuss the article with your spouse or other parents.

4. AGE-GRADED INFORMATION SHEETS

Following the articles are information sheets for six age-graded categories: preschoolers, younger elementary kids, pre-teens, middle schoolers, high schoolers, and young adults. The sheets will give you a brief overview of where most children are concerning that session's specific issue. Understand that this is general information and will not apply to

every specific situation you face with your child. We encourage you to go to the age range your child or student is in to see what is generally recommended for most kids his or her age. Check the age group before and after to see what is most suitable for your child according to his or her level of growth, development, and Bible knowledge. Learning style and pace will differ from child to child. Precise ages are not given because God designed each child to develop differently. Your child will progress through Bible concepts and life application unique to how God created your child and his or her knowledge of and interaction with the Bible.

Here are the elements found on each age-graded page:



KEY SCRIPTURES

This is not an exhaustive list of Scripture that applies to each issue, but a starting point for you to reference. You can use these Scripture passages in your personal study or family devotions as you talk about these issues.



KEY QUESTIONS

We have provided a short list of questions your child might ask concerning the issues at hand.



AT THIS AGE ...

These are some things most children are dealing with, thinking about, or experiencing at each specific age.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

This list could include emotional, social, physical, or spiritual milestones they will have attained by or will attain during this age.



COACHING TIPS

These are brief parenting tips to encourage, challenge, and equip you to be a better parent during this age.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

We have provided a list of simple questions to help prompt conversations between you and your child.



SAY OR PRAY

This is a list of encouraging words or prayer prompts specific to the session issue.

SESSION 1

GOSPEL

FRAMEWORK

ALLOWING THE GOSPEL TO
SHAPE YOUR PARENTING



GROUP GUIDE

Use the following questions and prompts to continue the conversation about the issues discussed by the video panel.

How do you define “gospel”?

How does the gospel influence the decision making in your home?

*What are the effects of performance-based love on our children?
How can we stop this and move toward unconditional love?*

What can we learn from the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) about gospel-based parenting?

How do you incorporate law and grace in your home?

Why does your home need to be a safe place to fail? Is that how you would describe your home currently? Explain.

Are you vulnerable with your children? Are you honest about your failures? Do they see repentance in you? Why is this so important?



Would you say the boundaries for your children are too stiff? Too lax? Just right? Explain.

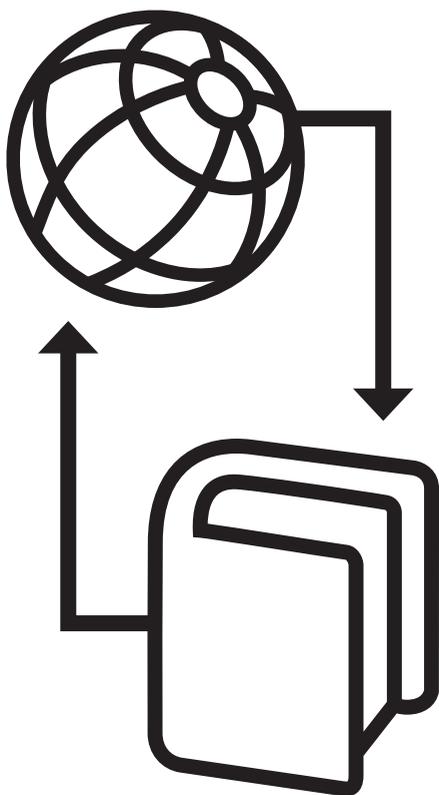
Would you call yourself a distracted parent? Why or why not? What's the worst distraction for you?

Name some of the broken families in the Bible. What issues did they deal with? Why is it important to remember that we are all broken?

What are the repercussions of continually comparing your family to the ideal?

How are you maintaining a culture of communication and conversation in your home?

TAKEAWAYS:



THE CONTEXT

The State of Things

Every generation has faced challenges in parenting. As the culture shifts, long-standing beliefs are put to the test, and Christians are often left wondering how they are to remain faithful in the new normal.

At the same time, there is no denying that Christian parents today face unique challenges in the midst of a culture that continues to put a wedge between itself and the teachings of the Bible.

The Christian church in the West now faces a set of challenges that exceeds anything it has experienced in the past. [This] is a revolution more subtle and more dangerous than revolutions faced in previous generations. This is a revolution of ideas—one that is transforming the entire moral structure of meaning and life that human beings have recognized for millennia.¹

DR. ALBERT MOHLER

Consider the issue of human sexuality. Americans' beliefs about same-sex marriage have undergone seismic shifts in a matter of decades. What was almost completely taboo thirty years ago is now not only culturally acceptable but legally protected and celebrated. The Internet makes pornography easily accessible for even the youngest of children. Some public schools have become ground zero for introducing progressive sexual ethics. And the list goes on. How can Christian parents meet the challenges of this cultural moment? Perhaps your kids have already decided where they stand on the big issues. Or perhaps there is a war raging in their heads as they listen to all the different voices telling them what to believe. Either way, parents cannot afford to be silent.

TWO SIDES OF THE ROAD

As we navigate this narrow road of Christ-centered parenting, we are in danger of falling to extremes. On one side is the temptation to bow to the culture and conform. Unfortunately, far too many well-intentioned Christian parents have unwittingly found themselves in this very ditch (or at least they would, if they took the time to notice),

and this is easy to understand. Parents face near-constant pressure to adopt the habits and beliefs of the prevailing culture when it comes to raising children. While this pressure is often subtle—it just seems easier not to go against the grain—it is always insidious. We must not be fooled. The truth of Scripture does not change. As Paul urged in Romans 12,

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

ROMANS 12:2

The only conforming we are to do as Christ-followers is that of our minds to His perfect will.

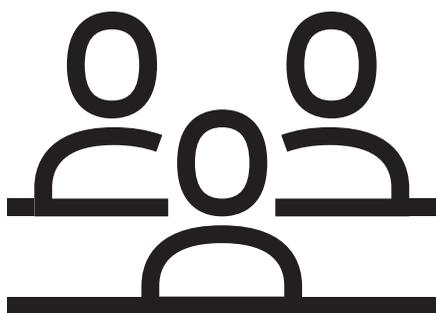
On the other side of the road is legalism. This is nothing new. Even some who saw Jesus in the flesh were guilty of falling into this ditch. The Pharisees, in their relentless effort to keep every part of God's law down to the letter, added additional expectations to every God-given rule. If the law commanded to do no work on the Sabbath, they extended this to mean you could not lift a finger to help a friend in need. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees in Matthew 23 saying that while they kept the law externally, their hearts were far from God.

A Pharisaical approach to parenting means we build up walls of protection around our kids. It is a system built on rules rather than relationship and on fear rather than faith. While that may keep our children safe in the short-term, it does not equip them with a long-term battle plan on how to engage a culture that will continue to change throughout their lifetime.

The struggle to navigate the road between these two ditches is one of the true challenges of Christ-centered parenting. On the one hand, we always want to raise our children with the right values and to be the right kind of people. While on the other hand, we desperately want to teach our children to love people and make a difference in the world. Because of our humanness and limitations, we are regularly tempted to steer too strongly in one direction or the other. Most conservative evangelicals are readily aware of the danger of too much immersion in the culture. It can easily influence our kids away from God. So we go to great lengths to avoid this danger in our homes and in our churches. Surely it is good to recognize that parents function as the curators of what influences the young minds God has entrusted to us. But even so, it is the other, more subtle danger that should cause us the greatest concern. If we aren't careful and vigilant, we may be guilty of raising up little Pharisees who so imbibe the values we teach that they begin to use them as a weapon with which to judge others.

THE FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP UNIT

As we confront the complexities of our culture in the midst of raising our children, we can't fall to one side or the other, and we can't shut down. Shutting down says to our kids that we are afraid of these issues. It says these are the things we don't want to talk about. If we as Christian parents think we will be able to escape or wait out these drastic culture changes, hoping the pendulum will eventually swing back, we are mistaken. Cultural progressivism does not have a fixed



destination.² This trajectory will continue, and silence is not an option—we must engage.

Unless we are actively discipling our kids, the world will disciple them for us. We cannot let the responsibility of parenting fall to the culture or to the schools. We cannot even let it fall primarily to the church, although the church should be our closest partner. If we are merely sending our kids down the church hall twice a week for Sunday School and youth group meetings, while failing to teach them the truths of Scripture in our own home, then we are guilty of forsaking our God-given role as parents. Hoping they hear it from someone else isn't good enough.

God's design has always been for faith instruction to take place primarily within the family. See Moses' instruction to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6:

Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead.

Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.

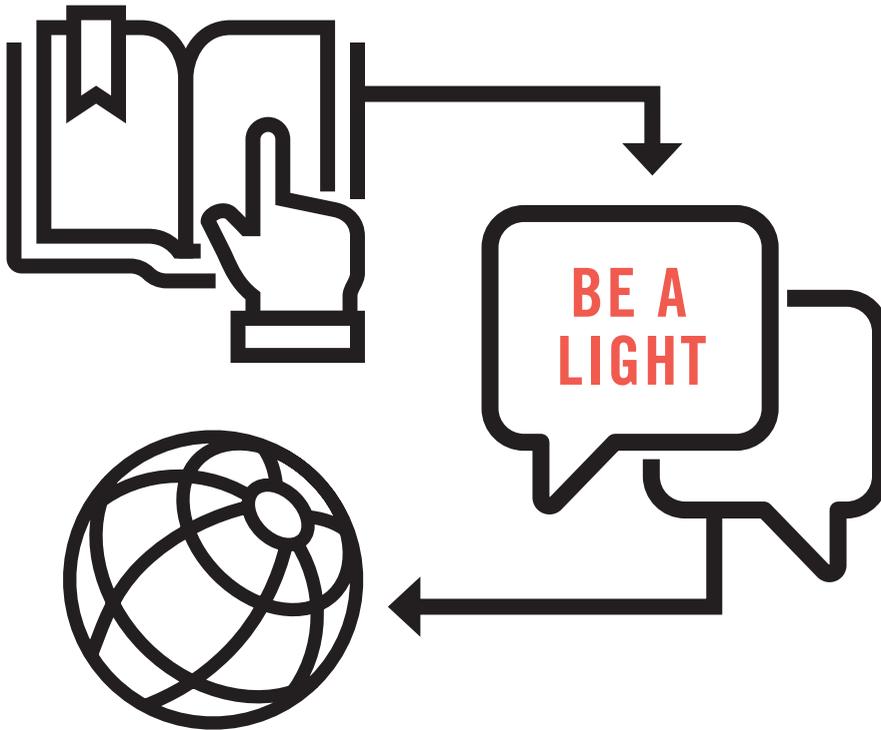
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

God's Word is our best weapon in this battle. His Word is our anchor in the confusing culture of tolerance and relativism. But we can't teach to our children what we don't live and know. We must spend time in God's Word. The Scriptures instruct us to pass the faith along to our kids by intentionally and regularly repeating God's words to them. We must look for ways in the everyday moments of life to speak of the gospel and point our kids to Jesus. We must seek out opportunities to speak God's Word to them.

What better discipleship unit than the family? What better model, teacher, and shepherd over a little one than a parent? God's desire for your family is to be a Trinity-displaying, God-glorifying, disciple-making unit. God gives us little children so that we can influence them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who love Him and love others. It is messy and inefficient, rewarding and frustrating, and ultimately, profoundly glorious work.³

CHAP BETTIS

The good news is we're not alone in these muddy waters. The responsibility of Christ-centered parenting falls on each of us, but thankfully it doesn't depend solely on us. We have a heavenly Father who gave the gift of the Holy Spirit who is with us forever and will teach us all things (John 14:16,26). We have the truth of Scripture to guide and sharpen us (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We have each other, the church of Jesus Christ.



The worst thing we could do is follow that familiar advice to “pray as if it all depended on God, and work as if it all depended on you.” Rather, we need to become people who work as if it all depends on God—because it does, and because that is the best possible news. We work for, indeed work in the life and power of, a gracious and infinitely resourceful Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. And we need to know ourselves well enough that the thought that it might in fact all depend on us would drive us straight to fasting and trembling prayer.⁴

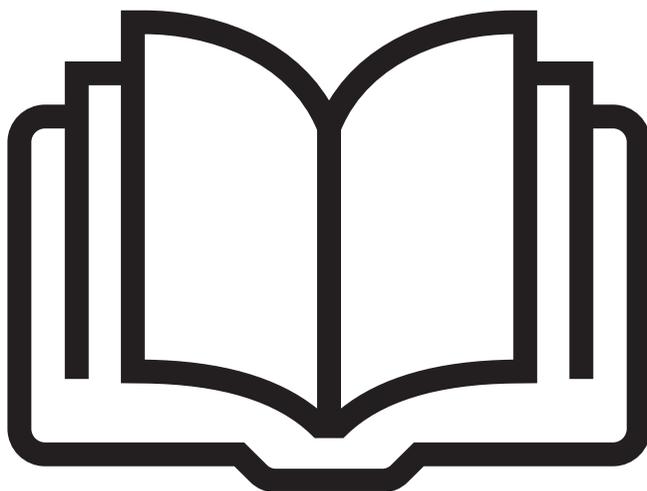
ANDY CROUCH

On your knees is not a bad place to begin this journey. Pray for our fallen world that those who are far from Christ would be reconciled to Him. Pray for your kids as they venture every day into a culture that

opposes the message of the cross. Pray for strength from the Lord to fulfill your role in training your children in the way of truth.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does our changing culture most challenge you as a parent?
2. Would you say you lean more toward conforming or legalism?
3. In what ways are you actively discipling your child?
4. What one thing stood out to you from this article?



THE GOSPEL STORY

The gospel is not only a message of salvation for those apart from Christ. It is the foundation and hope of our parenting. And we know this is true because the gospel itself is the story of our heavenly Father reconciling His children to Himself through the work of His Son.

Allowing the gospel to shape and inform our approach to parenting will cause us to think differently. Consider this example: In our practice of parenting, we often act as though our child's relationship with God is completely up to us. This can result in our sincere attempts to lead our children to faith to become awkward or overbearing.

So why do Christian parents feel so much pressure to produce Christian offspring?

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
PROVERBS 22:6, ESV

At first glance, Proverbs seems to offer us an ironclad promise: Raise your children “the right way,” and they will automatically “turn out right.” Perhaps you’ve heard sermons or Bible study lessons insist that this is the message of Proverbs 22:6. But telling parents that the solution to having Christian kids solely depends on their ability to train them up is not only unfair to parents, it is unfair to the Scriptures.

Proverbs 22:6 was never written to serve as a stand-alone foundation for the biblical model of parenting. Yes, parents have a God-ordained responsibility to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. But

this verse from Proverbs (as well as the entire book) presents us with wisdom, not a formula.

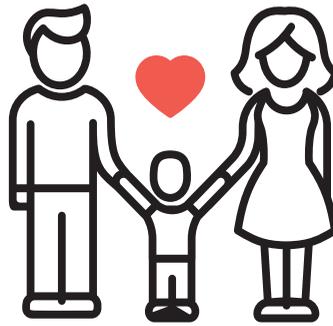
Sadly, misreading and misapplying this verse has led many Christian mothers and fathers to embrace a humanistic, results-oriented approach to parenting. Instead, when we see Proverbs 22:6 embedded within the gospel story, it enables us to depend on Jesus rather than ourselves in our parenting.

Putting all the pressure on parents to execute and then blaming only them for failure is both unbiblical and impossible—unbiblical because it removes the work of God and brings glory to man; impossible because human parents cannot manufacture what only the Holy Spirit can produce.

We also forget that every child is an individual human soul, created with their own accountability before God. Worse, we ignore the work of the Holy Spirit in the shaping of a child's soul.

So what is the job of a Christian parent? Faithfulness. Parents are given the task of creating a culture of faith that intentionally uses all of life to point their children toward a lifelong relationship with God. We're to equip them for life.

Yet the job of salvation and spiritual growth can only be done by God through the work of the Holy Spirit. Only God can shape the human heart. Only God can call us out of sin and give us life. Too many Christian parenting models operate under the subtle assumption that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is incidental to parenting. But gospel parenting is about much more than raising moral children. It is about constantly pointing our children to Jesus with our words and with our lives. Even so, the



Parents are given the task of creating a culture of faith that intentionally uses all of life to point their children toward a lifelong relationship with God.

beauty of gospel parenting is that it frees us from taking the place of God.

In a gospel paradigm, parents are both evangelists and disciple-makers, continually retelling the story of creation, man's sin, Jesus' offer of redemption, and the promise of the Holy Spirit in guiding their children toward their God-given purpose. We earnestly pray with fervent trust, knowing that it is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who will do the work of creating faith in our children and making them more like Jesus.

Children are a divine stewardship. They are not for us to own but for us to love, carefully guide, and then release to God's providential care. We cannot pressure, bully, or force them into faith. We parent, not with anticipation of some promised outcome, but out of faithfulness to Jesus, leaving the outcome to Him.

THE CULTURE

Gospel parenting puts God at the center of our parenting—not our own efforts and not our children. This approach reframes the predominant message of the culture that elevates the experience of the individual, turning our energy and attention inward—on self. The prevailing culture presents a paradigm of moral relativism where each person is free, even encouraged to define for themselves what is right and wrong. The world proclaims, “Be true to yourself. Follow your heart and your desires. What’s right for you is right for you.”

A short walk through Scripture reveals the fallacy in this mind-set.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

JEREMIAH 17:9, ESV

All a person’s ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs hearts.

PROVERBS 21:2

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him.

JUDGES 21:25

This verse in Judges follows a lengthy description of the tribe of Benjamin’s departure from following the law and their refusal to recognize the Lord as their King. They traded the one true God, who called them and set them apart, for fleeting earthly desires and self-reliance. Just as Paul says of the ungodly, the cultural paradigm of *self first* exchanges “the truth of God for a lie” (Rom. 1:25). It trades the authority of God for sin and perceived autonomy.

This exchange started in the garden when God’s first man and woman, created in His image, chose what they felt was best for them over God’s plan. But the gospel is a call to repentance, turning from sin and turning to Christ. Our old self is crucified with Him and we are raised up to walk in a new way of life, free from the enslavement of sin (Rom. 6:4-7). Paul says,

I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

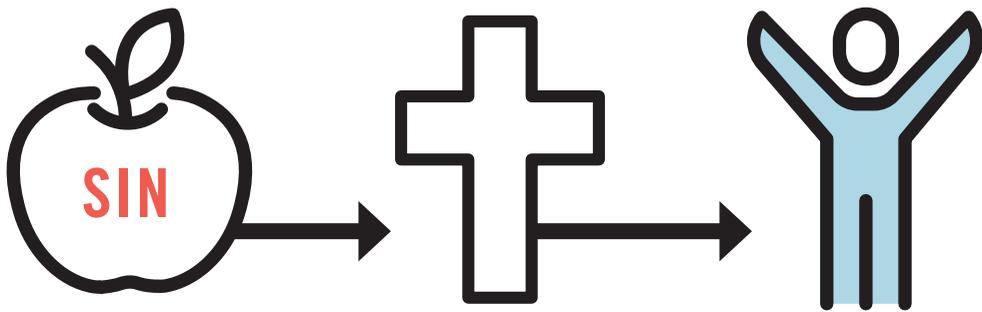
GALATIANS 2:20

WHERE TO BEGIN

So our lives are not our own, just as our children’s lives are not their own. We are created in “the image of God” (Gen. 1:27) and now as Christians our lives are “hidden with Christ” (Col. 3:3). So now our ambition is not to elevate our own desires but to follow after the heart of God. As parents, our aim with our kids is not simply to build up their self-esteem but to help them see their utter dependence on God. The biggest challenge every parent faces is not their kids’ behavior but their sin. A Christ-centered approach to parenting recognizes we are sinners raising sinners.

Coming to Jesus means we stop using our hearts as the beginning point for determining what is right and wrong, submitting instead to His Word.⁵

J.D. GREEAR



Our starting point for gospel conversations with our kids is the message of the gospel woven through Scripture. We address complex cultural issues with the authority of God's Word, rather than the instability of our own thoughts and feelings. The Bible is our guide for godly living.

Taking the Bible as our starting point is a demonstration of humility. It means we stop relying on our own wisdom and lean fully into the grace and mercy of Jesus. We confess our own dependence upon our heavenly Father, and we cease to parent out of fear or insecurity. In our weak and sinful state, God sent His Son to die for us (Rom. 5:6-8). As parents, we must always be mindful of our weakness and insufficiency. We must rely on God and point our children back to Him.

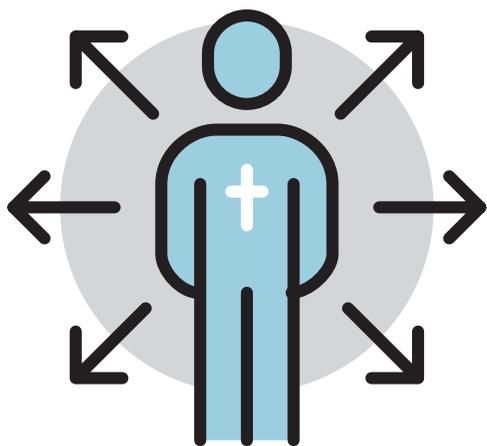
The story of our sin and the redemption found only in Christ transforms every aspect of our lives. As we parent with the gospel in focus, we will let go of earthly desires, prioritizing instead the things of Christ and His kingdom. We will understand how to love, how to parent, and how to live when we shine the light of the gospel into every corner of our lives. The love of

our heavenly Father gives us a model for loving the children He has entrusted to us. God's Word gives us a standard by which to discern truth versus falsehood.

Being rooted in the gospel equips us to navigate the complex challenges of culture, challenges we are otherwise unprepared to meet. By immersing ourselves in the gospel, we will parent differently.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you ever feel the pressure to produce Christian offspring? Explain.
2. How does knowing that the salvation and spiritual growth of your children are God's work through His Holy Spirit bring a sense of freedom and peace? How do you see God at work in your children to bring this about?
3. What is your responsibility in Christ-centered parenting? How are you fulfilling that responsibility?
4. What one thing stood out to you from this article?



THE MISSION

INTO THE WORLD

As Christianity grows more estranged from the mainstream of American culture, we will be forced to relearn the distinction between the church and the world. We are “strangers and exiles” in this world, urged “to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11), but we should not assume that means isolation or disengagement from the culture. Jesus made this clear to His disciples in John 17. He prayed for them, acknowledging that the world would hate them because they were not “of the world” (v. 14). But Jesus did not want them to be taken out of the world. Instead, He prayed for them to be sent into the world, just as He was sent (v. 18). Rather than disassociating themselves from the world, the disciples were sent into the world with a mission. This distinction

is crucial for parents. We can neither embrace a culture that is in opposition to the teachings of Jesus, nor hide away from a world that Christ came to redeem.

This can present a real challenge for parents as we teach our kids about culture. Here are two common mistakes we should avoid:

1) WE OVEREXPOSE OUR KIDS TO THE CULTURE. The Bible doesn’t use the term, “culture,” but it does use a very similar word, “world.” This is a loose definition of the prevailing thinking in a given society. Typically the values of the culture run counter to the way of Christ, but not always. Sometimes a culture is shaped by Christian influence. Parents should be cautious in what we allow our kids to embrace. We cannot afford to be passive, allowing them to form ungodly convictions based on what everyone else is thinking and saying. Media and relationships are forms of culture that pose particular challenges for parents. We must be wise in monitoring the media our children consume, how much time they spend online, and the amount of time they spend with friends (not to mention who their friends are).

2) WE UNDEREXPOSE OUR KIDS TO THE CULTURE. This is the opposite danger to overexposure. It is easy to adopt a fortress mentality as parents, sheltering our kids so much from the world that they have no ability to discern truth from error or ugliness from beauty. There is a tendency to overprotect our kids so much that we fail to prepare them for their mission in this world. Our kids will one day live as adults and will require the necessary skills, both spiritual and social, to make wise choices. If our only parenting

mode is protection, we fail to teach them how to apply the Scriptures to the reality of life in a sinful world. We cannot do all of their thinking for them. We must give them space to fail and learn and figure out what they did wrong. In the back of our minds we have to remember that we're not simply training our children to be good or protecting them from evil; we're equipping them for God's unique mission in their generation.⁶

These two ideas—protecting and equipping—always exist in tension with each other. As those who are in the world but not of the world, we are right to protect and set proper boundaries. God's Word instructs us:

Renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and ... live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

TITUS 2:12, ESV

But because we are also sent into the world, we must equip our kids to be on mission for the gospel.

SAFETY IS A MYTH

We live in a world of immense human conflict—war, terrorism, school shootings. The world is unpredictable, and the idea that we could protect our kids from every evil thing is a placid myth at best and a destructive lie at worst. If we are truly basing our approach to parenting on the gospel, then we should raise the banner of the Great Commission as our parenting mantra. Think about this for a moment. What if in a world of warring nations, economic challenges, and many faiths, we equipped our kids to follow the Great Commission:



Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.

MATTHEW 28:19-20

What if we did this, knowing they won't always be safe, but trusting that Jesus is always with them just as He promised?

David Prince, a professor and pastor, writes,

If the gospel is true, a safety-first, safety-centric worldview is a lie. A world where nothing is worth suffering and dying for is a world in which it is difficult to discern what is worth living for. Teach your children that love itself is an aggressive act that is often costly and demands courage. Defending the defenseless, speaking truth in love, and helping those in need, will often put them in harm's way.⁷

Living faithfully in a diverse society means holding fast to the truth of Scripture that Jesus Christ is the only hope for this world, while at the same time loving your neighbor as yourself.

Paul assured his spiritual son Timothy,

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 TIMOTHY 3:12, ESV

If we are truly gospel people, we will be motivated to move beyond our safety and comfort to address the issues of our day. Of course we will teach our children about culture from the safety of our homes and churches, but it doesn't stop there. When we shift our efforts from protecting to equipping, our kids will begin to see the world they are called to love through the lens of the gospel. They will see those who are different as neighbors rather than enemies. And they will no longer view the culture as entirely evil, but as a medium through which God's kingdom can advance.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

Living faithfully in a diverse society means holding fast to the truth of Scripture that Jesus Christ is the only hope for this world, while at the same time loving your neighbor as yourself. If we truly live with the gospel as our lens, we will not view the culture as something to be tolerated or despised. We will see a world of people in need of redemption. We will not shy away from difficult conversations, because we will see people at the heart of these conversations,

people made in the image of God who are in need of a Savior. Imagine our children caring for victims of human trafficking, speaking up for the unborn, and defending biblical marriage. Imagine them loving “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40)—those in prison, those displaced by the injustices of war, and those friends who are ready to give up on life because they have no hope.

One of the most difficult tensions is raising our children to love sinners on the one hand and yet live their lives in Spirit-directed holiness on the other hand. This is a delicate balance. The best way forward is for us as parents to think about the culture we create in our homes and churches. If your child is trying to determine how to truly love sinners and walk in holiness, he or she will likely begin by looking at you. Our lives should always point our children toward Jesus, His kingdom, and the mission He has given us.

How do we do this? One answer is to constantly have these conversations in our homes. Ask your kids, *What is our mission on this earth? Why are we here? Is our goal to look good or to love others into the kingdom?* Our children are just like us. They need to be reminded of their own desperate need for the gospel all the time; they need to be reminded that the world needs the gospel too, all the time.

Jesus loved sinners. He ate with them, spent time with them, and engaged in long



conversations with them. Jesus courageously opposed sin, but His heart was always brimming with love for the world. If we want our children to love like Jesus, we have to love like this too.

We can learn to love others in this way because at the root of our differences, we all have something in common.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

ROMANS 3:23

The root of conflict in our world is not our ethnic differences, religious differences, or even our cultural differences. The root of the problem of human conflict is sin. The gospel is an invitation to be reconciled. As those who have been reconciled to Christ and have peace with God, we now are tasked with “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). Mission is a matter of reconciliation, the reconciliation of humanity to God and of humanity with one another.

We are talking about the kingdom of God. We teach our children to participate in the mission of reconciliation because there are millions who do not yet know Jesus as Lord. There will come a day when “every knee will bow ... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11) whether

they made that confession in this life or not. All will stand before the judgment seat of God to “give an account” (Rom. 14:10-12) and will either spend eternity in communion with Christ or eternity apart from Him. All things will be made known. All differences will be set aside. All wrongs will be made right. May God help us.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When it comes to exposing your kids to culture, have you tended to overexpose or underexpose? Why?
2. Why is it so important for you to embrace the task of equipping your kids for God’s mission? How are you currently doing that?
3. What are the consequences of a “safety-first, safety-centric” worldview when it comes to raising your kids? How can you break out of that view?
4. Is your heart broken for those who don’t know Christ? How can you cultivate a love for the lost in your own heart and in the heart of your children?
5. What one thing stood out to you from this article?

BIG IDEA

Raise your child with a biblical framework in a confusing culture that attempts to undermine the gospel.



KEY SCRIPTURES

- *We should obey God because we love Him (John 14:15).*
- *We should train children in the right way (Prov. 22:6).*
- *We should study the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15).*
- *We should tell the world why we love God (1 Pet. 3:15).*
- *We should set an example for the world (Titus 2:7-8).*



KEY QUESTIONS YOUR PRESCHOOLER IS ASKING

- Are Bible stories real or pretend?
- Why can't I see God?
- What does God want me to learn?



AT THIS AGE MOST PRESCHOOLERS WILL ...

- Ask countless questions about the world around them.
- Have a limited attention span.
- Think in only literal terms and ideas.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- Preschoolers are ready to learn when their basic physical and emotional needs are met. Some of these needs include love, trust, acceptance, and security. Providing for these essential needs will make children more receptive to the lessons and truths you teach them.
- Because children are literal thinkers and learn through their senses, involving them in hands-on activities can help children remember what they learn, as well as learn how to apply these truths in their lives (with coaching, of course).
- Preschoolers learn largely through relationships and imitation. Their principal source of biblical understanding comes from their parents or teachers. Through your teaching and behavior, you essentially represent God and His Word to your preschooler.



COACHING TIPS

- Repetition is key in shaping a child's mind and teaching him important concepts. He will be a better learner and become more confident about the Bible and its foundational truths. Different approaches to teaching the same concept will also help etch the truth in his heart.
- Building a firm foundation of acceptance and trust will make your preschooler more receptive and keep an open channel of communication between you and your child as she grows. If she trusts you, then she will accept what you teach her as truth despite what she may learn from culture, friends, or media.
- Remember to root every important truth and concept in Scripture. Explain often that God's truth is the only truth, and that it never changes. Talking about these truths often will help kids shape a gospel-centric worldview.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- **DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN ... ?** During casual conversations, reference foundational Bible stories he knows and create a connection between real life and Bible application. For example, if your child mentions that a classmate fell on the playground, discuss the story of the good Samaritan. Ask him how he could act like the good Samaritan at school. Emphasize that we should always show God's love to others.
- **WHO DO YOU KNOW?** When the name of someone you know comes up in conversation, use this as an opportunity to illustrate God's love for people. You can discuss why God loves this person, and bring up ways you can show love to her. Teach your child to see everyone as God sees them.
- **WHY DID I DO THAT?** When you ask your child to do something, such as a chore, ask her why she thinks you wanted her to do it. Discuss why it was important for her to obey, and emphasize the connection between love and obedience. Mention that, in the same way, we obey God's Word because we love Him.



SAY OR PRAY

- God loves us.
- God wants us to obey Him.
- The Bible is true.

BIG IDEA

Raise your child with a biblical framework in a confusing culture that attempts to undermine the gospel.



KEY SCRIPTURES

- *We should obey God because we love Him (John 14:15).*
- *We should train children in the right way (Prov. 22:6).*
- *We should do our best for God (1 Cor. 10:31).*
- *We should tell the world why we love God (1 Pet. 3:15).*
- *We should set an example for the world (Titus 2:7-8).*



KEY QUESTIONS YOUR ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILD IS ASKING

- How can learning what the Bible says help me live?
- Why should I choose to obey God?
- How can I tell other people about God?



AT THIS AGE MOST ELEMENTARY CHILDREN WILL ...

- Be eager to learn how they fit into the world.
- Start taking on responsibilities and facing challenges.
- Begin to think abstractly.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- Children at this age learn best through discovery. Activities involving such things as solving puzzles, taking things apart, and discovering how things are made will help your child engage in and understand the concepts you teach.
- Younger elementary age kids are learning to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Leading your child to understand that God's Word is true and that it never changes is foundational to her spiritual growth.
- Although relationships with peers are becoming more important at this age, parents remain the most important influence in a child's life. Because children are very observant, the example you set will have a great impact on your child. Your child will be watching as you live out what you teach him about God and His truths.



COACHING TIPS

- Because children learn in a variety of ways (visual, reflective, musical, etc.), consider how your child learns best and use those approaches as you teach and reinforce biblical concepts.
- Your child may ask a lot of questions. Instead of always giving an answer, encourage your child to discover the answer by providing him with age-appropriate resources or thought-provoking statements or questions. Work together to discover the biblical truth.
- Every important truth and concept should be grounded in Scripture. Lead your child to understand that what God thinks about something (as stated in the Bible) is always the truth and will never change. Teach (and model) that we are to live our lives based on God's truth, not on what the world around us says or does.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- **WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED IF ...** After your child obeys a request you make, evaluate the situation with her. For example, if she goes to bed on time the night before a test instead of staying up late, discuss what might have happened if she hadn't gotten enough sleep. Explain that you set rules because you love her and want the best for her. God does the same for us. Rules and boundaries aren't to punish us but to keep us from making harmful choices. Point out that we should obey God out of our love for Him, just as your child should obey you out of love.
- **I'VE BEEN THINKING ...** As you and your child run errands, discuss ways to tell people about God. Talk about God's love for all people in your community and how you would like your family to find ways to show God's love to them. Encourage suggestions from your child and make plans to follow through with an idea.
- **TELL ME ABOUT ...** Encourage your child to tell you about a project, paper, extracurricular activity, or chore that she has been working on. Ask her about the time spent on it, how much she enjoyed the activity, how she feels the project turned out, and so forth. Remind her that we should always do our best for God, no matter what we are doing.



SAY OR PRAY

- We obey God because we love Him.
- God's truth is the only truth, and it never changes.
- We should find ways to tell other people about God.

BIG IDEA

Raise your preteen with a biblical framework in a confusing culture that attempts to undermine the gospel.



KEY SCRIPTURES

- *We should obey God because we love Him (John 14:15).*
- *We should recognize that God's Word is perfect (Ps. 18:30; Prov. 30:5-6).*
- *We should follow God's will, not that of culture (Rom. 12:2).*
- *We should tell the world why we love and follow Christ (1 Pet. 3:15).*
- *We should not be ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16).*
- *We should set an example for the world (Titus 2:7-8).*



KEY QUESTIONS YOUR PRETEEN MAY ASK

- Are there any mistakes in the Bible? Is it all true?
- How should I talk with my friends about the gospel?
- Why doesn't everyone believe in Jesus?



AT THIS AGE MOST PRETEENS WILL ...

- Begin to adopt a religious belief system of their own.
- Be able to concentrate on things they are interested in.
- Think deeply, quickly, and concretely.
- Memorize information with greater ease.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- Even though preteen boys and girls will feel more independent as they approach puberty, they still have basic physical and emotional needs. These needs include love, trust, acceptance, and security. Meeting these essential needs will make him more receptive to the truths you teach.
- Preteens are generally capable of grasping abstract concepts. They can engage both in literal and figurative thinking. Intentional conversations will become indispensable to reinforce experiences and activities and to direct your preteen toward a more complete gospel framework.
- At the same time your preteen grows out of earlier, imitative phases and exhibits more autonomous behavior, he will still seek approval of peers. Lead by example and talk to your preteen about his stage of growth. Discuss the importance of

friendships but emphasize also the dangers of approval. Be gentle, empathetic, and honest, using your explanations of this milestone to underline the importance of living according to Christ's gospel.



COACHING TIPS

- Explain how you learned about sin and were called to repent and trust in Christ's perfect sacrifice.
- Emphasize that you were saved by grace and not by works. Be ready to share the difference between obedience because of your faith in and love for God as opposed to obeying as a means to earn God's favor.
- Help equip your preteen to live a life modeled on the gospel by highlighting the significance of personal testimony. Speak with your preteen about your own journey as a believer.
- Build and maintain a firm foundation of acceptance and trust to make your preteen more receptive and to keep an open channel of communication. If your preteen trusts you, then he will more readily accept what you say and will feel more comfortable talking to you about difficult topics as he grows.
- Remember to ground every important truth and concept in Scripture. Explain that God's truth is the only truth, and that it will never change. Talking about these truths will help your child shape a gospel-centric worldview in the midst of a relativist culture that glorifies adaptability and alteration.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- **HOW COULD YOU HAVE DONE THAT DIFFERENTLY?** We all wish for do-overs to fix mistakes, to approach problems differently, or to say something left unspoken. Indeed, we often fail to achieve the standards of a truly gospel-oriented life. This question could help spark new ways for your preteen to reflect on things done or left undone. Be candid and, when appropriate, answer this question yourself.
- **WHO COULD YOU SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH?** Review the importance of love in a gospel-centric life—loving God, loving the church, and loving the unreached. Talk about the need to see people as God sees them and to demonstrate His love to people specifically. Pray for those with whom you need to share the gospel. This will be a powerful example to your child.



SAY OR PRAY

- We obey God because we love Him.
- God's Word is inerrant. It is perfect.
- The gospel truth never changes.
- We love God because He loves us.

BIG IDEA

The gospel should shape the way you parent your middle schooler and should affect every area of your middle schooler's life.



KEY SCRIPTURES

- *Jesus is the only way to salvation (John 14:6).*
- *The Scripture equips us to live for God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).*
- *It is important to be involved with the local church (Heb. 10:24-25).*
- *We should be transformed by God, not conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1-2).*



KEY QUESTIONS YOUR MIDDLE SCHOOLER IS ASKING

- Is Christianity really true? How can I know?
- What does it mean to be a Christian?
- Why does it matter what I believe?



AT THIS AGE MOST MIDDLE SCHOOLERS WILL ...

- Have more exposure to other religious beliefs and worldviews.
- Begin to see a connection between one's thinking and one's behavior.
- Begin to connect faith to real life.
- Be excited to be part of the youth ministry.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- Many of the attitudes, beliefs, and values that middle schoolers develop during these years remain with them for life. They move from blindly accepting the convictions of significant adults to developing their own personal values. However, they usually embrace the values of parents or key adults.
- Middle schoolers are usually able to think through ideological topics, argue a position, and challenge adults' thinking and perceptions. Older middle schoolers are able to go deeper than you would expect in a theological discussion about Scripture and the gospel.
- Middle schoolers are eager to learn about topics they find interesting and useful, especially ones that are personally relevant. They like active learning experiences, visual illustrations, and prefer interactions with peers during educational activities. This should shape the way we teach them the Bible.



COACHING TIPS

- Through observation and conversation, assess your middle schooler's relationship with Christ. If she had a salvation experience as a child, watch for fruit of that decision and be prepared to discuss what it really means to follow Jesus. If she's still yet to receive Christ, pray for the Holy Spirit to make her need evident as you clearly present the gospel. Don't pressure her to make this decision, but at the same time, don't procrastinate sharing the gospel.
- Intentionally make connections between biblical truth and everyday life experiences. Help your middle schooler to see his own feelings, words, and actions in light of Scripture.
- Point out the benefits of walking in God's truth: protection from harmful and hurtful consequences of sin, a clean conscience, a good witness to others, and so forth. Remind middle schoolers that God's truth will triumph over false philosophies, ideas, arguments, and religions.
- Guide your middle schooler to understand that she will face opposition as a Christian and to be prepared to stand firm. Pray with your middle schooler about how she can stand firm on the truth of the gospel.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN?** This will help you gauge where your middle schooler is in his relationship with Jesus. Be an active listener and give him plenty of time to share his thoughts before you begin to share yours.
- **DO YOU HAVE ANY FRIENDS WHO BELIEVE DIFFERENTLY THAN YOU?** This question will help you know the other religious beliefs and worldviews your middle schooler is being exposed to. While you want to make sure your middle schooler knows the truth, be careful not to seem harsh or condemning of his friends.
- **WHAT STORY IN THE BIBLE IS YOUR FAVORITE?** Guide this conversation to talk about the importance of Bible study and growing as a Christian.



SAY OR PRAY

- Pray that your middle schooler will embrace the truth of the gospel. Pray that her life will reflect words, actions, and attitudes that demonstrate Christ.
- Pray with your middle schooler daily about friends and family members who need to know the truth of the gospel. Ask God to provide opportunities for you to share truth with them.
- Encourage your middle schooler to talk about the ways God is working in his life each week.

BIG IDEA

The gospel should shape the way you parent your high schooler and should affect every area of your high schooler's life.



KEY SCRIPTURES

- *Jesus is the only way to salvation (John 14:6).*
- *The Scripture equips us to live for God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).*
- *It is important to be involved with the local church (Heb. 10:24-25).*
- *We should be transformed by God, not conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1-2).*



KEY QUESTIONS YOUR HIGH SCHOOLER IS ASKING

- How do I know Christianity is real?
- Why do I have to go to church?
- Is Jesus really the only way to salvation and heaven?
- Am I truly saved?



AT THIS AGE MOST HIGH SCHOOLERS WILL ...

- Have some knowledge of other faiths and religious beliefs and may personally encounter these in friendships and acquaintances.
- Be involved with a number of activities that affects their church attendance.
- Continue to be concerned about being alienated and fitting in.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- Youth at this age will be abstract thinkers, enabling them to wrestle with the doctrines of the faith.
- The change from concrete to abstract thinking may also cause high school students to doubt their personal faith. They may wonder if their childhood decision to follow Christ was authentic.
- At some point during these high school years, most students will obtain their driving licenses. This gives them more freedom to pursue jobs, hobbies, and relationships.
- Some high schoolers are now given the opportunity to choose their level of participation in a local church. Their parents have moved from insisting they go to encouraging their involvement.



COACHING TIPS

- While the student minister and the ministry he or she leads in your church is important to your high schooler's faith development, you are still the primary spiritual developer of your teenager. Continue to have spiritual conversations that challenge your high schooler and hold him accountable.
- If your high schooler was saved at a young age, it's a good possibility she will have doubts about her salvation. Listen closely to what she's saying and evaluate the spiritual fruit of her life. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern the truth. Make sure her salvation is based on repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ.
- Don't be hypocritical. Don't let your spiritual instruction be, "Do as I say, not as I do." You are setting the example of what it means to walk with Christ. You don't have to be perfect, but you should be authentic. Keep in mind that rarely will a student rise above the spiritual level of his or her parents.
- These are the last few years to spiritually prepare your child to move out into the world. Make a list of what you want them to know before they leave your home; then be intentional about completing the list.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- **WHAT DO YOUR FRIENDS THINK ABOUT JESUS?** This will help you assess the spiritual atmosphere in which your high schooler is operating. Also, this question could lead to a conversation about the need for Christians to share our faith with others.
- **IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT OUR CHURCH, WHAT WOULD IT BE?** Find out how your high schooler feels about church. Be a good listener. Don't condemn their feelings, and don't jump to defend the church too quickly.
- **WHO IS THE BEST CHRISTIAN YOU KNOW? WHY DID YOU CHOOSE HIM OR HER?** Find out what your student values when it comes to a life of faith.



SAY OR PRAY

- Pray for your high schooler to have a true evaluation of his spiritual condition.
- Pray that your high schooler will be teachable and desire to grow in Christ.
- Encourage your high schooler to share her faith with those who don't know Christ.
- Pray that you would model an authentic Spirit-filled walk with Christ.

BIG IDEA

The gospel should shape the way you parent your young adult and should affect every area of your young adult's life.



KEY SCRIPTURES

- *Jesus is the only way to salvation (John 14:6).*
- *The Scripture equips us to live for God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).*
- *It is important to be involved with the local church (Heb. 10:24-25).*
- *We should be transformed by God, not conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1-2).*



KEY QUESTIONS YOUR YOUNG ADULT IS ASKING

- Is Christianity really true? How can I know?
- Do all religions lead to God?
- Why are my religious beliefs that important?



AT THIS AGE MOST YOUNG ADULTS WILL ...

- Encounter other religious beliefs and worldviews through personal relationships and social media.
- Examine and perhaps question the validity of their personal faith.
- Be solidifying their spiritual framework, whether Christian or otherwise.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- Young adults begin to enjoy the freedom they have longed for. Their desire to live independently of their parents is welcomed, but usually without much thought to the responsibilities that accompany that independence.
- Statistics tell us that during this time of life, many young adults will leave the church. Even though they may not totally abandon their faith, they stop attending a local church for various reasons.
- Young adults may go through a crisis of belief as they realize their faith is tied closely to their parents' faith. While this may result in a time of questions and doubts, many young adults emerge from this crisis with a strong personal faith that is their own.
- Relationships with parents and other significant adults remain vitally important to the spiritual well-being of young adults. In fact, they may now have a more open ear to the wisdom of parents than they did in earlier teen years.



COACHING TIPS

- It is important to remember the changing dynamics in your relationship with your young adult. For eighteen-plus years you have parented, for the most part, by insisting. Now, you're suggesting. You're moving from the role of commander to coach.
- Though your role as a parent is changing, you are still in a position to hold your young adult spiritually accountable. Continue to inquire about the state of his walk with the Lord, his involvement in the local church, and the spiritual condition of the people with whom he surrounds himself.
- Don't panic if your young adult goes through a time of questioning her faith. Listen intently and attentively to her struggle. Be patient with her and answer her questions honestly and biblically.
- Perhaps the best spiritual thing you can do for your young adult is intercede for him. He is going to be challenged like never before in all areas of life. Pray continually and specifically for him. Frequently ask him how you can be praying for him and follow through.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- **WHAT IS THE SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE ON YOUR CAMPUS OR AT YOUR WORKPLACE?** After you ask the question, don't be shocked by the answer. This will help you know how to pray for your young adult and the people surrounding her.
- **WHAT OTHER RELIGIONS AND WORLDVIEWS ARE YOU ENCOUNTERING?** This question may assist you in helping your young adult navigate the pluralistic world he is facing.
- **WHO ARE YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS, AND WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?** Listen with interest, not judgment. Listen in order to pray more specifically. Listen to know who the influencers are in your young adult's life.



SAY OR PRAY

- Pray that your young adult would not conform to this world, but would "be transformed by the renewing of [his] mind" (Rom. 12:2) through the Word of God.
- Pray that your young adult is surrounded by godly people who are speaking truth into her life.
- Pray that the voice of the Holy Spirit is the loudest voice among many in your young adult's life.