

PARENTING by Randy Alcorn

What is a Parent to do?

If we don't think strategically about parenting, then we've made a statement: our children aren't important, or parenting comes so naturally that it happens without our attention. My advice is to get more involved in your teenagers' lives, and be more alert to youth culture. Understanding that culture allows you to recognize the temptations, challenges, and opportunities they face.

Too often youth pastors get the blame for students whose parents expect the church to "fix" their kids. Unfortunately, speaking as both a parent and a former youth pastor, it isn't that easy. The church can and should be a source of guidance and support for parents. But no youth group is a substitute for attentive, hands-on parenting. (Not to mention on-your knees parenting.)

The choices your children make when it comes to friends are critically important. As I look back on our daughters' teenage years, their solid friendships with committed Christians most of them in our church youth group - were absolutely crucial. As parents we took primary responsibility for input to their lives. Still, there is no way to overestimate the importance of their peer influences.

Parents also need to understand the balance of truth and grace. Regarding truth, if we parents don't teach our kids to discern between good and evil, who will? The church needs to be there not only to train and guide children, but to equip parents. But no parents should wait for the church to teach their children. As Deuteronomy 6 makes clear, a child's primary education is inside their home.

Regarding grace, if parents aren't loving and forgiving, then our children won't see Jesus in us. And our well-intentioned rules will drive them away from God, not toward him.

Our kids need us to not only raise the bar high for them - and make no mistake, they do need that-but to believe the best of them, being quick to affirm and offer grace when they stumble. This will help them not to give up because they think they can't please us, and therefore can't please God. May your children see in you the Jesus who came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14)

Parents, if I could give you one piece of advice, it would be this: When it comes to your children's lives, no one can take your place. So, don't wait for someone else to talk to your kids about Jesus. Do it yourself. Read Scripture-with them. Memorize it together. Pray with them. Go help the needy together. Give together and serve together.

Show them what it means to be a disciple. Leave your children a lasting spiritual legacy. It only takes money to leave an inheritance. It takes character and spiritual vitality, "along obedience in the same direction," to leave a true heritage.

What will your kids remember? Dad was too busy to help me, too busy to talk with Mom, too busy to volunteer for even the most basic ministry at church, so busy reading the newspaper that there was no time for the Bible, so busy buying new cars there was no money to give to missions? If that's true, my friend, no amount of money you leave can cover up the fact that you have left your family nothing of eternal value.

My mother left me no money, but she left me a heritage that I thank God for every day. She didn't even come to Christ until after I did. In everything of value I do, in everything of value my daughters do, the quality of my mother's life is and will always be present. That is heritage.

"We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done" (Psalm 78:4)