

The Exchange Zone



February 2008

“The Top Twenty List, Part Three”

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

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

This is just one example of how the Bible must direct all we do with our sons and daughters and it becomes a wonderful introduction to the ninth of our top twenty principles for parenting: We must avoid the temptation of rejecting wholesale how we were raised or buying into it completely. The standard for parenting must not be the newest breaking-with-the-older-generation-fad (even if it is a product of well-meaning Christian parents), nor must it be, “Well, if it was good enough for my mom and dad, it’s good enough for me.” Both miss God’s mark. God instructed His people through Moses in Deut. 6:6-7:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

When Moses instructs us, in essence, to fill our entire lives with the scriptures and to make them part of all our decisions and direction, part of the implication is that we must allow the Bible to critique and to redirect our approach. This means that as you watch videos, as you listen to teaching, as you read parenting books, as you ingest newsletter articles, and as you develop your parenting style, you must always run ideas through one litmus test: Is this biblical? Then, be willing to change as you see the need.

The midway point in our principles, number ten, leaves us with this powerful reminder: Keep a strong unified marriage and approach to parenting. When we fail to do this, when we argue in front of our children about how to discipline them or whether or not to allow them to do something they have asked to do, it sends a mixed message that can often be confusing. They can walk away unclear on what is important. Additionally, without knowing it, such disagreement can exacerbate teen’s natural tendency to seek to pit one parent against the other so they can get their way. If you have a disagreement, work

through it apart from their presence. Remember, too, if you have a hard time determining what direction to go in the matter, spend time in the scriptures and in prayer as you discuss it.

The eleventh principle is one of the most important for dealing with our teens: Continually pursue your youth, even if they don't communicate as much as when they were younger. Paul teaches us in 1 Cor. 13:7 (NLT): "Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance." Because of physical changes, new challenges, and sometimes the fears which can come to our teens, they can shut themselves up in their own little world. It is very easy for parents to allow them to do this because it can be difficult to engage them. We can also fear somehow being perceived as trying to invade their space too much and pushing them away. Be assured, though, that most of the time their bark is worse than their bite and they truly need us to keep lines of communication open. They need for us to allow them to grow up, to gain more and more responsibility, and to trust them as much as we can. However, this does not mean disengaging from or simply letting them go their own way. As they make their way through this age of opportunity from age 13 through 18, they very much need our love, our prayer support, our coaching, and age-appropriate correction.

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