

The Exchange Zone



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“The Top Twenty List, Part Five”

One of the books I read this past year that had a powerful impact was the little biography about his father by one of the most celebrated evangelical scholars of our time, D. A. Carson. Carson, who grew up in French Canada where his dad pastored, gave the following picture of his typical evening family life in Memoirs of An Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections Of Tom Carson (p. 70):

Meals were for conversation as well as for food, and while topics were suitably diverse, they often became theological. Dad liked to explain things. Usually family devotions took place after the evening meal. Everyone had to have a Bible because each person read a verse...invariably starting with Mum, until the chapter or other unit was finished. Older friends remember little Jimmy, still in a high chair, holding his Bible, required to 'read' his verse when his turn came around by repeating the words, phrase by phrase, as another member of the family read them out to him. This part of the exercise was inviolable, regardless of visitors, including friends from school, all of whom had to be given a Bible and participate by reading his or her verse as it came up. Most often Dad led in prayer; sometimes it was Mum; rarely it was everyone in the family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Joyfully passing on the baton with you,

Tom Barnes