



Seasons of Parenting



BIBLE STUDY

Mentoring Future Teens

Laying tracks to avoid the runaway train of adolescence.



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Maybe it's your daughter's loose tooth, your son's ankles poking out from under the pair of jeans that you just bought, or recent photos taken at a family reunion. Those big-picture moments can produce a mix of heart as you ask: *Am I equipping my children for sadness, pride, and fear in their next stage of life? How on earth am I going to deal with a teenager in my house?*

Dr. Ronald T. Habermas, in "Parenting Your Future Teen," writes, "Successful parenting of teens requires successful parenting of young children." It's encouraging to know that adolescence doesn't have to be a runaway train but a discipleship adventure for which you can now lay tracks. This study will explore biblical principles for mentoring young children towards a well-rounded adolescence and, more importantly, a deep discipleship.

Scripture:

Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Philippians 2:1-11; 2 Timothy 3:10-15

Based on:

"Parenting Your Future Teen," by Ronald T. Habermas,
CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY, July/August 1998



LEADER'S GUIDE

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note: Prior to the class, provide for each person a copy of the article "Parenting Your Future Teen" from CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY magazine (included at the end of this study).

Often moms and dads take a hands-off approach when children are young, then clamp down when the kids reach the teen years. However, Dr. Ronald T. Habermas, in the CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY article "Parenting Your Future Teen," writes, "Good habits in children come not from force or manipulation but from fair and responsible expectations—within strong relationships of unconditional love, open communication, and parental modeling."

Habermas encourages parents of younger children to prepare now for adolescence instead of simply fretting over the future and bracing themselves for a fight. His biblical prescription is essentially one of intentional discipleship; it is faith lived out before young observers. His three key concepts include "honor thy kid," "invite youngsters into your world," and "instruct children in a relevant faith." This intentional mentoring lays the tracks for a healthier, Christ-centered adolescence.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What makes you nervous about your child's impending adolescence? What are you looking forward to during that time?
- [Q] What is your vision for your child when he or she gets to the other side of adolescence? What kind of person do you hope he or she will be at that point?
- [Q] How did your parents steer you toward adolescence?
- [Q] What was adolescence like for you? What did you enjoy during that time? What do you wish had been different?
- [Q] What are you doing now to prepare your child(ren) for adolescence?



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Christian parents should respect their children.

A children-should-be-seen-and-not-heard philosophy still exists in some families, schools, and churches today, relaying the message that children are bothersome or inconsequential. Jesus did not do that. He said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). In this statement, Jesus showed the value he placed on these little ones. Christian parents must take time to show the same kind of respect that Jesus demonstrated.

Read Philippians 2:1–11.

- [Q] In what ways does this passage relate to your relationship with your adolescent children?
- [Q] How have you seen selfishness affect your family and children? How have you seen humility affect your family and children?
- [Q] What personal interests tend to crowd out your concern for the interests of your children (verse 4)?
- [Q] What is the motivation in this passage for considering others as better than ourselves? How difficult is it to have this attitude with your teenage children? Why do you think this attitude is so highly valued by God?

Note: *Christ's example is our motivation (v. 5–11). We cannot work up this attitude on our own, but we need Christ to work in us to change our attitude. God values this because it is for our good and his glory.*

- [Q] In what specific ways could the attitude of Christ manifest itself more deeply in your life?
- [Q] How are your children affected when they witness the sacrificial servant attitude of Jesus in you?

Habermas says honoring our kids means paying attention to them, showing them respect, and building their self-esteem. "Honoring kids means seeing the world the way they see it, then acting accordingly," he says.

- [Q] What are some ways that you show respect for your kids and build their self esteem? Do your children perceive respect in different ways? How do you meet those different needs?



Teaching point two: Christian parents invite children into their world.

When Jesus' first disciples approached him, he invited them to spend the day with him where he was staying (John 1:35–39). The apostle Paul wrote, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Today's view of education, in which the teacher pours information into the student, is very different than the ancient idea of inviting the student to actually live with and walk alongside the teacher. It's the "Sage on the Stage" versus the "Guide from the Side" approach. Christian parents will realize more life change in their kids as they invite them deeper into their lives.

Read 2 Timothy 3:10–15.

- [Q]** Who was the best teacher you've ever had? What qualities and actions made that teacher special?
- [Q]** The apostle Paul's training of Timothy was a first-hand experience. What things did Timothy know about his mentor Paul (verses 10 and 11)? Make a list.
- [Q]** How do you think Timothy's first-hand knowledge of Paul's life affected his faith? How does viewing Paul's life affect your faith even now?
- [Q]** What convinced Timothy that what he learned was true (verse 14)? Who has convinced you of the truth of the gospel by his or her life?
- [Q]** How have your kids witnessed your conduct in the areas you noted in the list above?

Leader's Note: *These areas include teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, persecutions, and sufferings.*

Habermas writes, "Play back encounters you've had with your son or daughter in the past few days. Based on those encounters, what values do you believe your child would identify as yours? Are you satisfied with what you discovered? If not, what other activities or talks would better convey your intended values?"

- [Q]** How would you respond to these questions?

Optional activity: *Take a few moments for the members of your group to briefly: 1. Share the story of how they came to faith in Christ. Who was a key influence in that? What changed in them? OR, 2. Share a story of how you've recently seen God at work in your life. These testimonies of God's movement and power are always encouraging to other believers. Now assign group members the task of finding a time to share these stories with their children and to hear the children's stories of God's work. Often, we only convey these stories to adults.*



Teaching point three: Christian parents need to walk and talk their faith.

“Parents of younger children tend to err on the side of explicit teaching. We almost indoctrinate our young ones. Caregivers of older children tend to overrate only living for Jesus, to the point of not verbalizing faith to them. Certainly we must model our faith, but we must also talk the walk,” Habermas writes in his article. Christian parents should communicate their faith to their children through word and deed.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9.

- [Q] Do you err on the side of overemphasizing talking or walking when it comes to conveying faith to your children?
- [Q] What does this short passage tell you about God?
- [Q] What are the results of obedience to these commands of God (verses 2, 3)?
- [Q] Why do you think Moses stressed the idea of teaching these commands to children?
- [Q] The command here is to submit to the one-and-only God with a singular, loving devotion. What would be the best way to teach this truth to your children?
- [Q] What are the different ways we are to love God (verse 5)? How does this look in your everyday life?
- [Q] What are the different ways these commands are to be communicated (verses 6–9)? How would they look in your everyday life with your children?
- [Q] What activities and resources within the church community would help your kids regularly experience the reality of God’s kingdom?
- [Q] The command in verse 5 and the various ways God’s commands are to be taught involve one’s whole life. In what areas of your life should you more visibly demonstrate your love for God? In what areas should you more clearly verbally communicate your love for God?
- [Q] How do you envision the impact your obedience to God will have upon your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren? What do you hope will be your legacy?



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Habermas concludes his article by saying, “Successful parenting means consistent parenting. Serve kids well now, and you can approach their coming adolescence with confidence and thanksgiving.” As parents look ahead with their younger children, they don’t have to view adolescence as a time of fear and trembling. It can be an exciting opportunity for continued discipleship. But you must start that training *now* by intentionally coming alongside a child with loving respect, close interaction, and God-saturated walking and talking.

- [Q] What kind of date could you plan with each of your children in the next month that would communicate love and respect to each unique personality?

Note: Perhaps you could have an outing at a shopping center, fishing pond, or a soccer field. Wherever it is, be ready for some great conversation to follow.

- [Q] This month, how can you include your children in activities that are less spectator events (TV, movies, video games) and more interactive (board games, walks, volunteering) ?

- [Q] What opportunities do you take to convey God’s Word to your children? Sunday school? Family devotions? Catechism at bedtime? Christian music? Ask other families in your church community how they share God’s Word with their children.

- [Q] In what areas of your life might you exercise greater discipline to more fully model faith for your children?

- [Q] What legacy do you hope to leave to your children, grandchildren, and others? Communicate this vision at a family devotional or meeting so your children can grasp the big picture. Communicate how others have left a legacy for you.

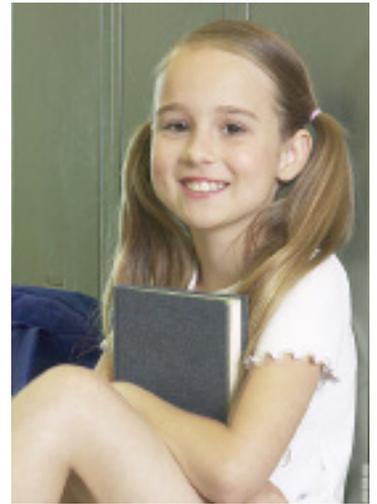
—Study prepared by Kyle L. White, a former youth pastor and current director of Neighbors’ House, a ministry to at-risk students.



Additional Resources

- 📖 *Different Children, Different Needs: Understanding the Unique Personality of Your Child*, Charles F. Boyd, Robert A. Rohm (Multnomah, 2004)
- 📖 *Growing Compassionate Kids: Helping Kids See Beyond Their Backyard*, Jan Johnson (Upper Room Books, 2001)
- 📖 *Parenting Today's Adolescent: Helping Your Child Avoid the Traps of the Preteen and Teen Years*, Dennis Rainey, Barbara Rainey, Bruce Nygren (Nelson Books, 2002)
- 📖 *Raising Teens While They're Still in Preschool: What Experts Advise for Successful Parenting*, Ronald T. Habermas (College Press, 1998)
- 📖 *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tedd Tripp (Shepherd Press, 1995)
- 📖 *Things We Wish We Had Said: Reflections of a Father and Son*, Tony Campolo, Bart Campolo (W Publishing Group, 1989)
- 🔗 ChristianBibleStudies.com
 - Model Self-Confidence for Your Kids
 - Raising Counter-Cultural Teenagers
 - Parenting Together
 - Who's Teaching the Children?
 - You and Your Prodigal Child
 - Loving Discipline
 - Christian Parenting Today six-study course





Parenting Your Future Teen

What to do now to shape a healthier adolescent.

by Ronald T. Habermas

Parents whose kids are older than yours often play the Just Wait game. When you show these folks your darling infant, they reply, “Just wait for those terrible twos.” When your darling reaches three, it’s “Just wait till they go to school.” And when it’s full speed into pre-adolescence, they play the ultimate trump card: “Just wait till they become teens.”

It’s assumed you’re incapable of preparing for that next stage of parenting. But we can train and strengthen ourselves for whatever adventures lie ahead. As a parent of three daughters—ages twenty, sixteen, and twelve—I know this firsthand. Now, based on research I completed last year, I have twenty-three experts to back me up. Key church and parachurch leaders provided practical insights on how to parent teens. Their comments were diverse, but they agreed on this single, significant truth: successful parenting of teens requires successful parenting of young children. And very young children, at that.

Several practical suggestions embracing three key concepts emerged from our talks.

Key Concept 1: Honor Thy Kid

Repeatedly, leaders I spoke with focused on the Fifth Commandment: “Honor thy father and mother.” But they also declared, “Honor thy child.” So how do we honor our children?

We honor our kids by taking them seriously. Wayne Rice, president of Understanding Your Teenager, recalls, “One of my favorite memories of my dad is that he always laughed at my jokes. They were probably terrible. But he honored me by laughing at them.”

Honoring our kids, then, means paying attention to them, showing them respect, and building their self-esteem. Honoring kids means seeing the world the way they see it, then acting accordingly.



To take kids seriously we must avoid treating them like miniature adults, expecting too much too soon. On the other hand, we must show them the dignity we extend to our closest adult peers. We differentiate between the child's performance and his or her person. Put another way, we distinguish what children are able to accomplish from who they are; their doing from their being.

We honor our kids by encouraging tough questions. "A kid should always have permission to ask why," counsels Roger Cross, president of Youth for Christ, USA. "One great revelation in my walk with Christ was that if I couldn't ask questions, then God isn't who he says he is. We don't have to be afraid of any questions."

Ask yourself: "If a hidden video was produced of our family discussions, would the tape indicate that topics like finances, sex—even tough issues of faith—are avoided?"

To help children prepare for adolescence, begin now by making family communication open. (This does not rule out the need for prudence and discretion.) As the saying goes: "Either Jesus is Lord of all or he's not Lord at all."

We honor our kids by creating an inviting home. Dave Rahn, associate dean of graduate studies and co-director of the Link Institute at Huntington College (Ind.), suggests that preparing to parent teens effectively means having a home that welcomes family members and visitors alike. "I want my home to always be comfortable to my kids and their friends. In fact, that's how I measure success: whether or not my kids bring their friends home."

How can houses be turned into homes for our youngsters and their pals? Create settings that shout out loud: "Come in and take your shoes off for a while." An adjustable basketball net at our house has transformed many afternoons and evenings into neighborhood gatherings for our daughters and their friends.

Key Concept 2: Invite Youngsters into Your World

Perhaps the simplest, yet most provocative, recommendation of these experts was that we parents must consistently bring our children into our lives. Why is this strategy so important?

Because many of life's faith convictions are caught as well as taught. And healthy connections with kids early on can bring rewards when the teen years begin.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 expresses the balance between caught and taught better than any passage in the Bible. Here, Moses directs us to "talk about [the commandments of God]"—that's the taught part—"when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up"—the caught part.

Here's how to let kids catch your faith.

Let children enter your schedule. Ginny Olson serves as director of the Youth



Ministry Department at North Park University as well as director of young adult ministries for the Evangelical Covenant Church. She admits that inviting children into our schedules is far from easy, especially when both parents work. But Ginny recalls one parent who “permitted a rocking chair to be moved into the kitchen, so when she was cooking dinner, there was a place where the child could come in, sit, and chat. That parent was symbolically saying, ‘I am here and ready to listen, even though I’m busy.’”

Why not turn routine errands in the family car into a family talk time? Or send a “thinking about you” card to your child’s school? My wife, Mary, and I have created a day (Thank Goodness It’s [your] Special Day) for our kids. On that day, we serve their favorite meal, watch their most-liked video, or play their preferred table game.

Mary and I also take regular walks around the neighborhood with our three kids and “update our files” on them. What are they involved in this week? What are their needs? How are they feeling? What do we need to pray about?

Let young ones eavesdrop on your priorities. Thom Schultz, president of Group Publishing, places significant attention on what he calls “the power of eavesdropping.” “Kids pick up a lot more by eavesdropping on their parents than from what their parents may be deliberately teaching,” he says. “The respect and love I have for the Bible today is based on the many times I came home and caught my dad sitting in his chair with his Bible. Typically he never told me what he was reading. He just allowed me to eavesdrop on how important God was in his life.”

(Confession time: I used to believe my young children were best helped when I exhibited only a moderate display of emotions, never letting them see me upset, angry, or even thrilled or full of joy. I don’t know if it had to do with the call for moderation in all things, but I now know I was dead wrong. By not exhibiting a full range of appropriate emotions, I was not showing my kids how to live their faith through varied circumstances.)

Play back encounters you’ve had with your son or daughter in the past few days. Based on those encounters, what implied values do you believe your child would identify as yours? Are you satisfied with what you discovered? If not, what other activities or talks would convey your intended values even better?

Key Concept 3: Instruct Children in a Relevant Faith

Probably the greatest snare I’ve seen parents fall into is to overemphasize the strategy of caught over taught, or vice versa.

Parents of younger children tend to err on the side of explicit teaching. We almost exclusively indoctrinate our young ones, whereas caregivers of older children tend to overrate living for Jesus to the point of not verbalizing faith to them. Certainly we must model our faith, but we must also talk the walk.



Two key strategies will help you share your faith with your future teen:

Customize the truth according to children's lives. Mark 4:33 states: "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand." Jesus was customizing (not compromising) God's truth in each disciple's life, according to who they were.

Our family was recently planning what we could do on our spring break. One idea included a combination service project and ski trip in Colorado. As the five of us discussed details, my wife and I remembered what specifically motivated each of our three children. Our youngest, Susie, is a very active sixth grader, so we emphasized what we would be doing on the trip. Our middle daughter, Melissa, is a contemplative sophomore, so our talks with her featured why we would do this. With Elizabeth, an exceptionally relational child, we discussed who also would be doing what we planned to do.

Emulating the Master Teacher caused Mary and me to explicitly instruct our three daughters according to who they are as unique individuals.

Own your faith, and help your children own theirs. Teaching at a Christian liberal arts university has its ups and downs. Ups include the awesome privilege of participating in a young person's most formative years of faith and life. Downs include witnessing how life's roadblocks can drastically inhibit a student's growth. Often, parents of struggling students failed to own or personalize their faith.

Consider two significant scriptures.

When Moses was explaining how the Jews were to remember Passover, he told parents not only what they should teach their children but also how they should teach them. Moses commanded parents to explain God's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians whenever their young ones asked, "What does this ceremony mean to you?" (Exodus 12:26). The last three words are critical for parents.

Jesus once quizzed the disciples, asking, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13b), then immediately followed up with, "But ... who do you say I am?" (v. 15b). The Master Teacher shifts from a general poll to a personal inquiry. Parents who promote this kind of ownership of faith will fare far better in passing on a genuine and vibrant faith.

I recommend both public and private instruction. Public instruction includes the ways a child is taught outside the home. Television, phone conversations, the Internet, music, and so forth—though technically in the home—would be public, since each one complements or competes with the education I provide my children. When our children were young, we attempted to establish healthy habits for watching TV, for choosing friends, and for attending church.



My friend, Wayne Rice, tells this story: “I have a friend who, like me, likes to fish. He goes fishing on Sunday mornings, and I tell him, ‘You’re a fool.’ (He’s a good friend of mine, so I can say that to him.) He’s got two kids watching him, and what he’s teaching them is this: ‘You don’t need to go to church to grow in your relationship with God.’ But, one non-negotiable in our family is that we’re in church on Sundays. Unless we’re all on our deathbed, we’re there. ... This is how you grow in your relationship with God. It’s not something you mail in. It takes effort. It takes work.”

I can’t overemphasize this: good habits in children come not from force or manipulation but from fair and responsible expectations within strong relationships of unconditional love, open communication, and parental modeling.

Private instruction focuses on the individual child. Last week, my daughter Elizabeth initiated a provocative discussion on human suffering. “Why does this happen?” and “Where is God in it all?” she wanted to know. (Of course, I did, too.) That talk provided an exceptional chance for us to study the Bible together and to grow.

My daughter Melissa and I prefer to take walks through our neighborhood, which is a conscious habit we started seven or eight years ago. Her reflective skills lend themselves to conversing about her devotional life. I might ask, “What are you studying now? What are you learning? What can I pray about for you?”

Mary and I try to instruct Susan, our event-focused youngest, while keeping tabs on her activities such as band, roller-rink escapades, and church. Recently we talked about her need to befriend a new girl at school. It isn’t too difficult to incorporate spiritual instruction into that activity.

How do we prepare for the teen years? Must we be scared of them? Not at all, for successful parenting means consistent parenting. Serve kids well now, and you can approach their coming adolescence with confidence and thanksgiving.

—*Dr. Ronald T. Habermas is McGee Professor of Biblical Studies at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, and author of Raising Teens While They’re Still in Preschool (College Press, 1998). This article first appeared in CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY, July/August 1998*

