



## “PARENTING TEENS”

Workshop at Key Man’s Invitational

February 20, 2010

Steve Burner

- I. Current challenges of adolescents and families
  - A. Technology
  - B. Morality - the most important changes are not technological, they are moral. (Joe White)
  - C. These are extreme days. (John Davis)
  
- II. Scriptural guidelines
  - A. Specific: Prov. 13:24; Prov. 22:6; Prov. 23:13, 14; Eph. 6:4
  - B. General: There is much guidance in Scripture involving wisdom in human relationships.
  - C. Scriptural wisdom and guidance is universal, timely, and sufficient. II Peter 1:3
  - D. Adolescence is both...
    1. A description of a place in the life span.
    2. A social invention.
  - E. Discipleship principles apply. II Tim. 2:2
  
- III. Logs and Specks
  - A. Parenting formulas in Scripture
  - B. God’s focus regarding parenting issues is the parent. Mt. 7:3
  - C. Models of Parenting (Kevin Huggins)
    1. Consumer model. Gal. 5:13, 15
      - a. Misplaced dependency. Gal. 5:16
      - b. Fleshly desires. Gal. 5:17
    2. Ministry model. Gal. 5:13-14
      - a. Co. 1:28-29 – labor
      - b. Luke 9:23-24

Like most aspects of the Christian life, success in parenting involves self-denial and self-sacrifice.
  
- IV. Communication skills, especially with teens
  - A. Active listening (Joe White)

If you want to know why your teen acts the way he does, ask him!

    1. Would you like to talk about it now?
    2. What’s wrong?
    3. How do you feel?
    4. What are you doing about it?
    5. What do you need to do?

- B. Access the built-in parenting manual. (Gary Smalley)
  - 1. General questions
  - 2. Specific questions
    - a. What kind of relationship do we both want (1-10, with 10 being the “best” relationship)
    - b. Where are we today? (same scale)
    - c. What are some specific things we can do to move closer to our ideal?
- C. Teen Repellant: Six Toxic Approaches (John Davis)
  - 1. Reacting - causes teen to shut down or get out
  - 2. Micromanaging - causes teen to disconnect
  - 3. Lecturing - causes teen to want time out
  - 4. Moralizing - causes teen to be driven or despairing
  - 5. Reiterating - causes teen to tune out
  - 6. Threatening - causes teen to become enraged
- D. The 90-Second Window (John Davis)
  - 1. Think ahead.
  - 2. Be brief.
  - 3. Express concern about one thing.
  - 4. Plant a seed: I believe you can do this!
- E. Shoulder to Shoulder Communication (John Davis)
  - 1. Let the conversation unfold rather than steer it.
  - 2. Kids need parents who are present - physically and emotionally.
- F. The Damaging Fear Dance (Gary Smalley)
  - 1. What pushes your “buttons”? Fear of failure? Fear of not being loved? Fear of being ignored or disrespected?
  - 2. How do you react when your buttons are pushed?
  - 3. How does this affect your teen? Which of their buttons get pushed? (causing a vicious cycle)
  - 4. A diagnostic tool is available (in book).
- G. How to argue with your teen and come out closer friends (Gary Smalley)
  - 1. True communication usually does not occur until each partner understands the feelings that underlie the spoken words.
  - 2. How not to argue
    - a. Withdrawing
    - b. Hurtful name-calling
    - c. Belittling or invalidating
    - d. False beliefs
  - 3. “Drive-thru Talking”
    - a. Fast-Food Employee (listener)
      - (1) This person’s job is to listen.
      - (2) When receiving an order, you can only repeat back what you’ve heard. No editing, evaluating, or defending yourself. You can ask to have the order repeated if you did not understand something. However, this is only for clarity – you don’t have to agree.
      - (3) Listen for their heart – their feelings, fears, and emotions.

- b. Customer (speaker)
  - (1) This person's job is to express needs or feelings using "I" statements. No bringing up past issues, starting a new argument, or making blaming "You" statements (e.g., "You always ...")
  - (2) Offer "bite-sized" thoughts or information so the other person can remember in order to repeat it back correctly and understand your feelings.
  - (3) Share your heart – your feelings, fears, and emotions.
- c. General Rules
  - (1) Repeating statements in the employee role does not mean you agree with what's being said. Instead, the goal is to listen and validate the other person's feelings and individuality.
  - (2) When the customer feels heard and validated, you switch roles.
  - (3) You are not looking for solutions at this time. Solutions can be sought after each person feels heard and validated.
  - (4) Agree to take a time-out if withdrawal, escalation, invalidation, or negative beliefs creep into the conversation.
  - (5) Above all else, strive to honor one another in all that is said and repeated!

#### V. Choices (Foster Cline and Jim Fay)

- A. Premise: "The happiest teens are those who operate under real-world rules that inspire self-control rather than under parental rules and control that may encourage rebellion."
- B. Parenting Styles
  - 1. Helicopter parents
  - 2. Jet-powered attack helicopter parents
  - 3. Drill sergeant parents
  - 4. Laissez-faire parents
  - 5. Consultant parents
    - a. Ask questions
    - b. Offer choices
    - c. Put the burden of decision-making on the kid's shoulders
    - d. Establish options within safe limits
- C. Tips on offering choices
  - 1. Select only choices you like or at least can live with (negotiate!).
  - 2. Be willing to allow consequences.
  - 3. Avoid dangerous choices.
  - 4. Be willing to choose if the teen doesn't.
  - 5. Be sincere (watch your delivery).
- D. Phrases for arguing or "push back"
  - 1. If other choices are interjected - "What were the choices?" or "What did I say?"
  - 2. Predictions of "doom" - "No problem" or "Probably so"
- E. In responding to teens, try very carefully to speak in terms of what you are going to do, not what the teen will do.

VI. Our “Panel of Graduates from the School of Parenting Teens”

- A. *Regarding parenting teenagers, what is one thing that you wish you had done differently, or understood earlier?*
- B. *What is one thing that you are glad you did?*
- C. See final four pages of handout for their responses.

Concluding verses: I Cor. 14:1 (LB) – “Let love be your greatest aim.”  
I Cor. 13:1 (NIV) – “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels,  
but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging  
cymbal.”  
I Peter 4:8 (NIV) – “Above all, love each other deeply, because love  
covers over a multitude of sins.”

### Bibliography

- Parenting Teens with Love and Logic, by Foster Cline, M.D., and Jim Fay (1992, 2006,  
Pinon Press)  
Extreme Pursuit, by John E. Davis, M.A. (2007, NavPress)  
Parenting Adolescents, by Kevin Huggins (1989, NavPress)  
The DNA of Parent-Teen Relationships, by Gary Smalley and Greg Smalley, Psy.D. (1998,  
2005, Tyndale House)  
How to Keep Your Kids on Your Team, by Charles Stanley (1986, Thomas Nelson)  
Sticking with your Teen, by Joe White with Lissa Halls Johnson (2006, Tyndale House)

## Responses from our “Panel of Graduates from the School of Parenting Teenagers”

(These came from Steve and Peggy Burner’s current Sunday School class,  
as well as from longtime school, church, and Bible study friends.)

First question:

***“Regarding parenting teenagers, what is one thing that you wish  
you had done differently, or understood earlier?”***

(Gender or spouse pronouns may have been changed for anonymity.)

### **Communication:**

The one thing I would do differently is spend more time listening to my children and let them know I care what they have to say. I know now it is possible for two people to see the exact same thing and view it completely differently.

Spend more time one on one – eat out, weekend trip alone, talk and walk, get to really know them and what concerns they had.

I wish that I had spent more one-on-one time with the kids during the time when I was soooooo busy building a career.

Engage your children. Don’t assume they will come to you or bring you a topic or concern.

When I brought home a B on my report card, my parents said, “We don’t allow B’s.” That communicated that my best was not good enough. I had worked hard in that class.

It’s so important to keep the communication lines open. If I were given another chance to mother my girls through their teen years, I would spend more time one on one with them....eating out, perhaps taking them on a weekend trip alone...just to have time to talk and walk without the daily interferences. I would get to really know them and what concerns they had.

When you are in a confrontation with your teenager, try to two-step out of the circle - to see it from another perspective. Sometimes as parents we want to stay in the circle and attack with words and warnings. But we need to step back and reassess.

I should have been more confrontational when necessary.

The biggest regret for me as a parent is that I should have listened more to my teens without offering advice so quickly. Often just their “talking it through” helped them come to their own wise conclusions. It would have given them confidence that they could reason and pray to a proper decision. If we saw them heading in the wrong direction, we could have spoken up then. I wanted so desperately to “do it right” as a parent that I didn’t respect them as young adults able to make their own choices. My spouse was a much better listener than I was.

### **Trust:**

There were times when I wish I hadn’t trusted our teens so much. I think parents always need to be ‘spying’ - it’s called surveillance. We need to make the calls and check things out before saying yes to our teens.

Been more tolerant and understood the pressures teens experience.

If parents communicate that their kids are untrustworthy, then they might think, “Well, since I have that reputation, I might as well live up to it.” It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### **Friends, activities:**

To have their friends over more.

If I were doing it differently, I would have done more homework, and had a friend stay overnight at our home first to get to know him/her. And I definitely would have talked to the friend’s mother.

I wish I had involved a child in some kind of sport.

**Discipline:**

Teens know how to flip that 'switch' that will immediately 'fire up' their parents in an argument. It then is easy to let the discussion devolve to their level. Consequently discipline, by me, was done many times out of anger. Letting a teen bring you to their level is the one thing I would seek to avoid, and would guard against disciplining while angry.

Be more consistent.

Don't disagree with your spouse in front of the kids on punishment or whether they can do something.

I would help minimize their sense of entitlement that they possess. Made them work around the house more.

Both of us said we absolutely should have required more in general of the kids. More responsibilities, chores, etc. It is amazingly easy to let things slide "just this once" for whatever reason, and the next thing you know, your children are grown up.

Would have forbidden some things, rather than mostly do nothing because we were not in agreement over how best to handle a situation, and just hoped they would outgrow it.

I think we both decided we were probably too strict and invasive with our firstborn during that child's early teen years.

I wish I had understood earlier that I should make [our oldest] take more responsibility for his/her schoolwork (in other words, not so much help, drilling for tests, suggestions... from me [the mom]) when he/she was about 11-13, so that he/she could have had some inconsequential failures before the grades were so important related to college entrance. I had learned that before the others hit that age.

**Family relationships:**

One of the things we wish we had done differently was to emphasize building their relationships between them.

Wished we had spent more time with them. In retrospect, I think that is the one thing that our children crave the most.

The family being like a mobile - everything swings around harmoniously when everybody is happy in the family. But when one member is not functioning, the mobile doesn't either - it becomes lopsided.

**All of the above:**

We wish we'd been exposed to *Growing Teens God's Way* sooner. We found it so full of good principles and practical insights on having the kids/teens' hearts. Our kids were teenagers when we did the Bible study.

To ask God to give me His perspective on the matter at hand or the particular circumstance based on Col 1:9 in the Phillips. This would have helped me NOT to handle the problem or conflict emotionally. Praying and asking God for His perspective takes me out of the equation and allows me a Divine perspective giving me new thoughts or new reasonings or new motives. I have found this incredibly helpful and profound. God is always right!

Second question:

***“What is one thing that you are glad you did?”***

(Gender or spouse pronouns may have been changed for anonymity.)

**Communication:**

We were glad that we built a relationship with our children before and during their teenage years. That laid the foundation for communication.

I am glad I always let them know they could talk to me about anything, setting aside time to listen whenever they wanted to talk, asking questions, and responding enthusiastically, without saying "I'm busy" even if I was.

Never left without telling them I loved them.

Talking.

The priority was maintaining the relationship, and I felt like we did that.

One thing a father would do again would be to take the daughter to breakfast every Sat. morning, just the two of them, during her teen years. More stuff came up for discussion with her Daddy over eggs and bacon! During some time when the daughter and mother had some strained communication, the father and daughter never missed their weekly date. Once when the daughter was home visiting at about age 25, she asked, "Aren't we going to breakfast in the morning, Dad?" When she was going through a tough relationship termination, the father sent her a card every single Monday. Some were silly, some were serious, but each had a little hand-written note of love and affirmation on it.

I think going into the kids' rooms at night, even when they were big ol' boys, to hug them and tell them good-night was the right thing to do. Often the "casual bomb" (as we liked to call the important stuff that reared its head at bedtime and kept us up while they went on to sleep peacefully!) came up when the lights were out and they were comfortable talking. It also gave me time to affirm them and point out things they were doing right.

It seems our kids identified with their same sex parent but shared more easily with their opposite sex parent. Whatever works, right?

Keep building the communication bridge in whatever form that particular teen can cross it. Keep them communicating and don't take yourself too seriously. If you are looking for feel-good affirmations to come from your teens, you will be sadly disappointed most of the time.

**Trust:**

I told my child, "I'll trust you unless you give me a reason not to." I started with the positive, and the child lived up to it.

Being nosy and checking out their rooms.

We chose to believe our children when they told us something even though they might be lying. After we got the facts and asked them if they were telling the truth, we then chose to believe them. The reasoning was that they could count on us to stand by them in difficulty or uncertainties. It also laid the responsibility of "truth" on them. This has proved to be a tremendous relationship builder.

**Train to think:**

Helping them evaluate whether or not this event or whatever was best for them.

Taught them to respect all people despite race, \$, lifestyle.

Taught daughters to be strong women.

**Discipline:**

Practice the art of reflection in discipline situations. Taking the time to absorb all of the facts and then make a fair and balanced "change of direction" for them.



**Friends, activities:**

Keep in touch with what they are involved in and meeting all their friends. Opening the house so they can have a place to come.

It's important to always welcome your kids' friends at your home - even if the boys have earrings or nose hoops.

Requiring accountability for where they were going, who they would be with, what time they would be back, etc.

Being a part of all their activities.

Having friends over to our house so we could watch what was going on.

I am glad that we included their friends in so many of our activities. They enriched all of our lives.

Exposing them to others who read the Bible and prayed; having them use the Word and prayer to share Christ with others.

**Family relationships:**

That we made eating the dinner meal together a high priority. There was much relational sharing and closeness that developed.

I am glad we almost always had dinner together, and not with the TV on in the background.

Providing a home environment where we as parents tried to be careful about living out the beliefs and standards that we professed, and giving them the security of letting them know they are loved.

We're glad for anything we were able to do to get the Word of God and prayer into our kids lives - before and while they were teenagers. Things like reading the Bible together, helping them study and memorize scripture, praying with and for them. We thank God for these things.

I am grateful someone caused us to realize early that you don't raise them alike. Each teen has his/her own strengths and weaknesses. Each one tests and delights you differently. Each one has his/her "individual bent," as Proverbs says. Finding that is one of the hardest and most wonderful aspects of parenting.

**Schooling:**

Putting them in Christian Schools.

I wouldn't trade the Christian school experience with our kids. Home and church teaching and values were reinforced by the school instead of being torn down.

Having them in a Christian school.

**Practical:**

Things parents should be sure to teach their children before they leave home to be on their own (some, but not all of which we did), like:

- |                                  |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Change a tire                    | Build things from scratch            |
| Simple sewing (buttons, mending) | Iron a shirt                         |
| Simple plumbing and wiring       | Properly set a table                 |
| Tie a man's tie                  | Scrutinize a contract before signing |
| Follow a recipe                  | Fill out income tax forms            |
| Laundry                          | Etc.                                 |

**All of the above:**

Determine what few things are really important, and focus on those. Don't focus on the small stuff. Choice - it's about choice. Teach your children the consequences of choice from an early age.

And one comment that speaks for all:

**"Parenting is Hard Work!"**