ENCOURAGING PARENTS IN THE BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

OF THEIR TEENAGERS AT FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH,

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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A Project

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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by

Chad Michael Vinson

May 2014

APPROVAL SHEET

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PREFACE

This project would have never been completed without the love, support, and encouragement from many others. First to my family: Laurie, my bride, Solomon in Proverbs writes, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord" (Prov 18:22). You have been a tangible expression of God's goodness to me. During the past several years of completing this program, you have taken care of countless responsibilities as both a wife and mother and have handled each one with a gentle spirit. You have been my sounding board during the good and difficult days. You have exemplified the Father's love to me, and I am grateful for the precious gift you are to me. Our children: Owen, Griffin and Tate, one of the highest honors in my life is the privilege to be your dad. Thank you for understanding when Dad was busy writing for school. I love and am proud of each of you. My late grandmother, Emmie Martin, made it financially possible for this program to be completed. She always believed in me and encouraged me to fulfill my dreams. I am still dreaming, Grandma! I am also thankful for my dad and mom, Mike and Joanne, for showing me by their words and actions God's love for me.

Second, I want to thank the parents of teenagers at Fellowship Bible Church who participated in this project. Thank you for helping shape and sharpen this project. I consider it a joy to walk alongside you and your teenagers.

Third, I would like to thank my faculty advisor, Dr. Stuart Scott. Thank you for opening my eyes and heart to the sufficiency of the Scriptures for all of life. I appreciate your humility and grace with me during this project.

Finally, I am thankful to God. He has been gracious to me by always providing hope in the midst of the daily obstacles: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God not to us" (2 Cor 4:7).

<div align="right">Chad Michael Vinson</div>

Murfreesboro, Tennessee

May 2014

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip and encourage the parents of

teenagers at Fellowship Bible Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in order to increase

their effectiveness in fulfilling the biblical responsibility of discipling their teenagers by

engaging the heart issues of teenagers with the gospel.

Goals

Four goals served to evaluate this project's effectiveness. The first goal was to

provide biblical hope and encouragement to parents of teenagers. The teenage years

consist of challenging times both for the teenager and the parent. A parent can experience

an array of emotions during the teenage years from delight to distress. A majority of

parents experience the teenage years as a time when their teen is making destructive

choices by engaging in foolish pursuits and displaying the wrong priorities (rejects the

gospel, selecting unhealthy friendship, intimacy with the opposite sex, substance abuse,

video gaming, etc.). Therefore, the first goal during the training sessions with the parents

is for them to experience an attitude change from discouragement to encouragement with

their teenager. The parents experienced biblical hope when they recognize the truth that

they are not alone in the parenting journey. Parents began to experience a change in

attitude from discouragement to encouragement. When they trusted in the truth God does

not abandon them and embraced the opportunity to walk alongside of other parents

during this challenging season of life.

The second goal was for parents to understand their God-ordained

responsibility to faithfully love, instruct, and evangelize, and then when they are saved to disciple them. If parents do not understand their God-ordained responsibility, then they will be ill-equipped to fulfill it. The Bible describes parenting as consistently directing a child's attention to the Lord by words and actions. The biblical description of a parent's responsibility is to instruct their children's attention to the Lord when they are lost and once they are saved to disciple them in the faith. Therefore, this project examined the practical implication involved when understand their God-ordained responsibility. The results were parents who understanding their calling faithfully love and instruct their children in the Lord and then once they are saved, discipling them in the faith (for this project specifically, teenagers). The project sessions provided understanding and clarity for parents concerning their responsibility to evangelism when teenagers are lost and discipleship when they are saved.

The third goal was to equip parents with the competency of how to disciple their teenager once he or she is saved by engaging their heart with the gospel. Unfortunately, the natural propensity in parenting is to be more concerned with the external behavior than the internal motives driving that behavior. The danger of focusing on the external behavior is that it produces hypocrisy. Often times a parent will reward acceptable behavior with applause and additional privileges only to be disheartened in the future when they discover the teenager's manipulated motive, which was driving the acceptable behavior. On the other hand, the temptation is to correct unacceptable behavior by exerting power, control, and manipulation. The project provided a biblical paradigm for parents by training on how to disciple their saved teenager by addressing their teenager's heart instead of relying on compliancy with external behavior.

The fourth goal was personal. As a youth pastor, I have become more confident and effective communicator at helping parents fulfill their God-ordained responsibility, which is to instruct their children to the Lord if lost, and to disciple their teenager if he or she is saved. I desired to reciprocate what I am teaching to my children.

I have sat and listened to concern parents share the challenges and heartaches of parenting teenagers. I have felt ill-equipped in the past to help them navigate during these years with a biblical paradigm. My goal was to be able to articulate a biblical discipleship strategy to the parents of teenagers who are saved while encouraging those parents not to lose hope if their teen is lost. Through this project, I have become a better parent in faithfully instructing my children's heart to the Lord while they are lost and discipling my own children's hearts when they are saved in a biblical manner. I pray God would give me the grace each day to parent out of trust versus fear and when I fail to be quick to repent of trusting in myself instead of His character.

Ministry Context

Fellowship Bible Church of Rutherford County (FBC) is located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, the county seat. Murfreesboro is approximately thirty miles south of Nashville, the capital of Tennessee. Murfreesboro has experienced and is projected to continue to experience significant growth. The city as a whole has experienced a 50 percent growth in population since 2000. The population of the city in 2009 was 105,209 and is projected to increase to 110,000 to 120,000 by 2015.[1] A study based on a ten mile radius of the surrounding area around the church shows the following: from 1990 to 2000 the population grew 47.9 percent, from 2000 to 2010 the population grew 39.7 percent and the next five years the population is projected to grow 16.4 percent.[2] The area is experiencing growth over three times faster than the national average.[3] The growth is largely due to the area's close proximity to Nashville, which provides people the flexibility to commute to work and benefit from the affordable cost

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[1]US Census Bureau, "Murfreesboro, Tennessee," http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47/4751560.html (accessed February 21, 2012).

[2]Tag Consulting, "Transforming Church Demographics," prepared January 2010. The church hired a consulting organization to acquire accurate data about the area.

[3]Ibid.

of living in Murfreesboro.

Fellowship Bible Church of Rutherford County is a church plant from Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, Arkansas. The decision was made to plant a new church in Rutherford County, Tennessee in 2000 by the elders at Fellowship Bible Church Little Rock, Arkansas. Previously, in 1997, Fellowship Bible Church of Little Rock began a church plant in Davidson County, which is a neighboring county to Rutherford. The Fellowship Church in Davidson County was experiencing significant growth so the decision was made to plant a Fellowship Bible Church in Rutherford County. Fellowship Bible Church of Little Rock, Arkansas, commissioned Monty Waldron and Cole Hoffman to be the two teaching pastors in the fall of 2000. Waldron and Hoffman did not have a core group of people to help launch the new church plant, so a core team had to be established once they arrived in Murfreesboro. In October 2001, FBC hosted their first church meeting in a children's daycare building. The decision was made from the beginning of the church plant that on Sunday mornings the format would be a worship gathering for adults and a learning center for children, from birth to sixth grade. The church members were challenged and encouraged throughout the week to participate in community groups, which met in various homes in the area, typically on Wednesday nights.

The main obstacles with most church plants are space and funding. FBC is not an exception. Initially the teaching pastors, because of limited funding, had their offices in their homes. The children's daycare building required intensive preparation for the Sunday morning gathering. In 2002, God graciously provided more space for the church, which met a tremendous need. First, the church secured office space on the second floor of a financial advisory building. Second, the morning worship service moved from the children's daycare building to a local middle school cafeteria. By the end of 2002, the church was experiencing steady growth and funding.

In 2003, however, the church had a significant setback when one of the

founding teaching pastors decided church planting was no longer his passion/calling. The church began to experience a gradual decline in both numbers and momentum with his departure. By the beginning of 2004, the church membership had declined to 30 members and the monthly giving was well short of the monthly expenses. God provided in the spring of 2004 when the circumstances looked bleak—an encouragement when another pastor, passionate about church planting, joined the team. The addition of this pastor helped the church begin to heal and stabilize, making it through an uncertain time in its brief history.

I was hired by the church in the fall of 2004 to be the youth pastor with the specific challenge and opportunity to start a youth ministry. The church had begun to attract families with teenagers, and they needed someone to invest time into this specific age group. Therefore, in August of 2004, I moved my family to Murfreesboro, Tennessee to be the youth pastor at FBC. When I arrived, the church had around 50 members and was still meeting in a local middle school cafeteria.

Since 2004, the church has experienced steady and gradual growth. The decision was made in 2007 to move the worship service from the school cafeteria to the 600-seat school auditorium. When the church moved into the auditorium, they experienced steady but not overwhelming growth in attendance. Since the fall of 2004, the church has grown from 50 members to 350 members. The increase in membership has come by four avenues: (1) those who transfer of membership by inactive church members of other churches in the area, (2) those new to the area who seek out a church family, (3) active members of other churches dissatisfied for a variety reasons, (4) the unchurched—either never involved in a local church or having attended any church regularly for quite a while. The impressive aspect of the growth the church has experienced since 2004 is that 85 percent of its members have committed to be in a community group each year. Currently, there are 20 community groups consisting of 297

members. The mantra of living in community has been a consistent plea from the pulpit and the majority of members are embracing this lifestyle.

The church growth has been a direct catalyst for the increased giving, allowing the church to provide more space. The church has been portable since it launched in 2001. The church elder and staff team have been praying for God to provide the church with a permanent location that would be easily accessible to the community. God began to answer that prayer in 2008 when the church purchased a house for office space. The purchase provided much needed space for the growing church staff and gave the church the ability to have a location to host small-scale church events. God continued to answer the prayer for permanent space in 2011. The church has been looking for several years for land on the west side of town in the Blackman community, but every opportunity has been a dead end. The city has been working on lengthening a road called Veterans Parkway, which will circle around the entire city. God showed His good favor to the church when 16 acres of land become available on the west side of the city in the Blackman community. In October 2011, the church was able to obtain 16 acres of land, which will become the future home of FBC.

FBC has the potential of relating well to the Murfreesboro community. The age group breakdown of the congregation resembles the age group of the area. In the ten-mile radius of the church's physical address, the largest age group is 29 to 49, which makes up 32.5 percent of the total population in the area.[4] The age group of 29 to 49 is by far the predominant group at FBC. The median age of the church body is in this age group, which is 34. The second largest population within a ten-mile radius of the church is the age group between 9 to 20, which makes up 29.9 percent of the total population in the area.[5] The majority of the people between 9 to 20 would be classified as teenagers. The

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[4]Tag Consulting, "Transforming Church Demographics."

[5]Ibid.

age group of 9 to 20 is beneficial to recognize because as the church grows numerically it will be composed of more people in this age bracket. The reality of having more people in the 9 to 20 age bracket would mean the church would increase numerically with parents who will have teenagers in their homes.

A significant demographic growth in the area is the age bracket of 8 or less. The change in the 8 or less bracket can be contributed to younger families moving into the Blackman community. Previously the Blackman community was comprised of mostly retired farmers, which explains why the age bracket of 8 or less would be non-existent seven years ago. Currently the age bracket of 8 or less comprises 13.4 percent of the area's current population.[6] FBC is experiencing steady growth in the 8 or less population, which reflects the community. The growth in this age bracket at FBC can be attributed to the increase of women experiencing pregnancy (the majority are first time mothers). The growth in the 8 or less population will continue to incline because of the median age of the church being 34.

The median age of the population in the area is 34.3 and is 78.2 percent white with a household income of 60,239.[7] The demographics of the average age, ethnic make-up, and income correspond to the type of members at FBC. FBC is middle class, has a majority white makeup and is made up of a majority of young families.

When I arrived in August of 2004 to be the youth pastor of FBC, the mission statement of the church was to exalt Jesus Christ as a worshipping community of influence by engaging our world with genuine spiritual life. The practical implication of the church's mission statement for me was to evangelize and disciple teenagers. I immediately began recruiting an adult leadership team that had a passion for teenagers. Once I was successful in recruiting, the next step was to train them for ministry. I spent a

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

significant amount of time providing instruction on how to evangelize and disciple teenagers.

The objective for the youth ministry from the beginning was to be consistent with the structure of the church's adult ministry. Overall the church's adult structure is a large group worship service on Sunday and then throughout the week meeting in homes for small groups. My intentions for the youth group would be to follow that example, striving to cultivate consistency between adults and teens. Therefore, the youth group would meet one night a week, and the opportunity would be given for the students to be involved in a small group based on gender and age. After a couple of years experimenting with different nights for the small group. The decision was made the most convenient time for teens to be in small group would be immediately after the large group meeting on Sunday night. Sunday morning became a time for teenagers to worship with his or her family or he or she had the opportunity to serve every two weeks with the learning center students (birth-sixth grade), which meet in classrooms throughout the school during the worship service. The youth ministry had structure and a mission to fulfill.

The adult leaders and I began the process of engaging in relationships with the handful of teenagers who were present in the worship service. It took time to build trust, but slowly we were noticing two things: the teenagers were bringing their friends to youth group; and the parents of the teenagers at the church were inviting their friends. Gradually, excitement began to build about the youth ministry as the teenagers connected with the adult leaders. We were beginning the journey of the church's mission statement: to exalt Jesus Christ as a worshipping community of influence by engaging our world with genuine spiritual life. Each year, the youth ministry has experienced growth. In 2004, there were 10 teenagers involved in the ministry and at the end of 2011 the youth ministry had grown to 100 teenagers.

Since I arrived in 2004, God has been gracious to the youth ministry, and I have been humbled by His goodness. God has been faithful each year to provide enough

adult leaders to serve as small group facilitators. Each year the number of adult leaders increases because of the amount of growth the ministry has experienced. God has provided sufficient space for the youth ministry to meet on Sunday night. Since the church is portable, meeting in a local middle school auditorium, having a facility for the youth ministry means prayers have been answered. Ministry requires having the financial resources to participate in fulfilling the mission. God has been faithful to provide for the youth ministry. The youth ministry has received generous financial support through the families of the church to provide for yearly camps, mission trips, and events throughout the year.

Rationale

As a youth pastor, I have spent countless hours with teenagers. I have had the pleasure during my tenure as a youth pastor to be involved with teenagers from all types of backgrounds: different income (affluent to low income), different family structure (parents married, blended families to single parent homes) and different spiritual background (believers' such as pastors, deacons, elders, missionaries, laymen and women, and others are unbelievers that rarely attend church). I have initiated thousands of conversations with teenagers about the relationship they have with their parents. In these conversations I discovered one common theme that continued to be communicated, which was they want their parent(s) to spend time with them. When I came to FBC in the fall of 2004, I kept hearing the same feedback from the teenagers in the church. Therefore, I began asking myself, "What key component am I missing in my ministry to help those in my youth group experience biblical change?" I came to the realization that I was neglecting the parents. I began to recognize that as a youth pastor I have limited time with teenagers, but if I focused strategic time each semester on parents, my influence could be multiplied.

My role as the youth pastor of FBC was more comprehensive than to evangelizing and discipling teenagers. I had to consider the entire family to be a more effective youth pastor, which meant partnering with parents. I desired to partner with

parents to provide encouragement, hope, and equipping because the teen years can be full

of challenges. My objective was for parents to embrace Paul Tripp's perspective of the

teen years when he refers to it as the "age of opportunity." Tripp explains what he means

by the phrase "age of opportunity" when he writes,

> These are not years merely to be survived! They are to be approached with a sense of hope and a sense of mission. Almost every day brings a new opportunity to enter the life of your teen with help, hope, and truth. We should not resign ourselves to an increasingly distant relationship. This is the time to connect with our children as never before. These are years of great opportunity.[8]

I came to the conviction that a youth pastor's comprehensive job description involves

assisting the parents during these years of opportunity with the understanding of their

biblical responsibility of discipleship and then to train them with the wisdom of how to

fulfill the responsibility.

My ministry to parents in the past would be considered reactionary as opposed

to proactive. For example, a parent would call me once their son or daughter had been

caught with drugs, sending an inappropriate text message, coming home drunk, lying to

them, pornography, involved in a sexual relationship, cutting, had a huge verbal altercation

with them, etc. The reactionary model was exhausting because I was in a position of

managing crisis after crisis. My goal was to shift the ministry from reactionary to a more

proactive model by equipping and encouraging the parents. When I was with parents

during these crisis times I noticed three common scenarios: (1) they are hopeless that

change can happen with their teenager, (2) they do not understand their biblical

responsibility (instructing their child's heart to the Lord), and (3) they do not know how

to disciple their teenager (how to train them in the faith once they are saved) by

addressing the heart.

The Bible speaks to parents in both the Old and New Testament, and the

mandate given is to instruct their children in the Lord, which consist of evangelism when

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[8]Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 19.

they are lost and discipleship once they are saved. God designed parents to be the main source of influence in a teenager's life. The youth pastor serves the family in a vital role as a supplemental resource. A church ministry or position was not designed to replace the God-ordained role given to parents; it is intended only to serve the parents by providing additional instruction and application of God's Word. Moses in the Old Testament writes,

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9)

Paul in the New Testament book of Ephesians continues the thought that parenting is instructing in the Lord when he writes, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). The emphasis for parents is modeling, teaching, and training but they cannot save them. Only God brings about the miracle of conversion.

The majority of parents in our church context were neither equipped nor confident about how to fulfill their God-given responsibility of evangelism when their child is lost and discipleship when he or she is saved. They were discouraged and hopeless in their role, which God has designed for them to fulfill. I am convinced, through the teaching of the Scripture, if the church was going to produce young men and women mature in their faith intentional biblical instruction and training would begin in the home. Therefore, parents first have to understand their responsibility, to instruct their child's heart in the Lord, which first consists of sharing the gospel with them. Then instructing the teen's heart to confirm he or she does believe. Once a child does believe, the parent can focus on discipleship to help the teen mature in their faith. Sadly, what was occurring in the majority of homes in the church is behavior modification instead of instructing a child's heart to the Lord. Parents reward good behavior and punish unacceptable behavior without any attention given of how the gospel affects the heart.

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The result being that the heart of the teenager never experiences lasting change because the teen was only confronted with the parent's rules instead of the gospel. The parents exercised their authority with guilt, manipulation, and control while the teen responded with the external behavior of rebellion or compliancy. In either scenario the heart had not been confronted with the gospel, which means lasting change is impossible.

The pursued method was to provide a training environment focused on a parent's biblical responsibility with their teen. The training focused on parents building relationships with other parents in order to provide encouragement. Next, the training environment equipped parents with the skills of engaging the heart of their teen with the gospel. Last, the parents had the opportunity to apply the studies practically with their teenager.

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The purpose of this project was to equip and encourage the parents of teenagers to increase their effectiveness in fulfilling their biblical responsibility to disciple their teenagers once they are saved by engaging the heart issues of their teenagers with the gospel. The word discipleship is defined:

> Becoming like Christ. A primary goal of discipleship is becoming like Jesus (Luke 6:40). This is also understood by Paul to be the final goal of eternal election (Rom 8:29). The process of becoming like Jesus beings the disciple into intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as such, is the goal of individual discipleship. . . . As disciples become salt and light in this world, walking the narrow path, loving and providing hope to the world, they become living examples for others to follow. Such is Paul's entreaty, 'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ' (1 Cor. 11:1).[9]

The author and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his classic work *The Cost of Discipleship* emphasizes the correlation between discipleship and the person of Christ:

> Adherence to Christ, and, because Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship. . . . Discipleship is bound to Christ as the Mediator, and

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[9]Michael Wilkins, "Discipleship," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 177.

where it is properly understood, it necessarily implies faith in the Son of God as the Mediator.[10]

Discipleship is an invitation for a person to follow Christ whole-heartedly, which consists of affections, thoughts, and behavior.

God's plan from the beginning was for parents to be a catalyst to promote biblical change in the life of their children. Biblical change occurs through the process of discipleship. The biblical intent is that the discipleship process begins in the home as parents direct their children's attention to the person of Christ. A parent directs their child's attention to the person of Christ by taking the initiative to have conversations, which help the child understand their need for the gospel through everyday situations. Parents have an indispensable responsibility to both instruct (tell) and emulate (show) their child on what it means to follow Christ. The discipleship process for parents involved these two crucial elements of telling and showing.

The limitations of this project were as follows: The length of this project was fifteen weeks: two weeks for a pre-seminar survey in order to measure the existing condition of knowledge, attitude, and skill level as it relates to the parents discipling their teen; a twelve-week class taught on Sunday night while the teens are in youth group; and two weeks for a post-seminar survey in order to evaluate the project. Due to the fifteen-week time limit, it was difficult to measure the long-term benefit of the project.

The second limitation had to do with the participants in the project: the participants in the project consisted of the parents of teenagers. The project's focus was concentrated on the parents and contained different assignments each week for the parents to discuss with their teen. Therefore, the feedback I received on the project only came from the parent's perspective.

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[10]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 59.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to provide biblical hope and encouragement to the parents of teenagers. At the beginning of the project, the parents had an opportunity to complete a survey to evaluate their present attitude regarding parenting. After the project, the same survey was given, and the results were compared. During the training sessions the parents were in small groups based on the age of their teenager. For example, the seventh grade boy parents were together in one group and the parents of girls in another. Dividing the parents into small groups gave them the opportunity to meet other parents in the same season of life, which increased morale.

The second goal was to teach parents their God-ordained responsibility to instruct their teenager's heart with the gospel then once they come to faith in the person of Christ to disciple him or her in their faith. The misconception held by many church-going parents was that the church would provide all the evangelism and discipleship of the teenager. During the training sessions the parents were taught their God-ordained responsibility from the Scripture. At the beginning of the project a survey was given to the parents to measure their level of understanding regarding their biblical role as a parent. After the project the same survey was given, and the results were compared.

The third goal was to equip parents with the competence of how to disciple their teenager once they are saved by engaging their heart with the gospel. After each training session the parents were given a take home assignment to complete with their teenager. The intent in sending parents home with an assignment to complete with their teenager was to ensure they began to develop competence in the skill of addressing their teen's heart.

The fourth goal was for me to grow in becoming a better communicator with parents in the area of how to practically instruct the heart of a teen with evangelism for those who are lost and discipleship for those who are saved. As I created and presented the curriculum, I expected to improve in the area of communicating a biblical paradigm of change through the gospel. My objective was to have a biblical and practical

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curriculum, which will be helpful to parents as they address the heart of their teenagers through the context of the gospel. As I developed in proficiency, I had ample opportunities to practice communicating the biblical curriculum with other discouraged or ill-equipped parents of teenagers.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE CHURCH
TO EQUIP PARENTS OF THE RESPONSIBILITY
TO INSTRUCT THEIR TEEN

God instituted the family structure in the book of Genesis with the declaration

of marriage. When God brought Eve to Adam as a helper, Genesis 2:24 describes what

followed as the institution of the union of marriage, "Therefore a man shall leave his

father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."[1]

Genesis records the next action by God: to bless the couple and pronounce a command

for them to obey, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have

dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living

thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28). When God gave the command for Adam and

Eve to have children a new role and responsibility was created for them called

parenthood. One of the many divine blessings of the marriage relationship is the aspect of

procreation, which produces children. The Bible speaks of children as a blessing from the

Lord (Ps 127). Throughout the Bible when God blesses, people typically respond in a

sinful manner. Unfortunately, the blessing of a child is no different for a majority of

parents. Sadly, the common temptation for parents is to rebel against God's design for the

family by making the child the center of their home versus the relationship between

husband and wife. Jay Adams articulates the danger when the child becomes primary

focus in the home:

> In our society, the parent-child relationship has become the more significant one, to
> the detriment of children and marriage partners alike. Yet, God put a husband and

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[1]All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version, unless
otherwise noted.

his wife in the garden, not a parent and child. Contemporary parents all too often live for their children. They are urged to give their best time and energies and money and thoughts to their children. The tragedy of it all is that in doing so they seriously deprive their children. Many evils follow the attempt to make the parent-child relationship basic. Family life cannot escape the consequent suffering, since the attempt.[2]

On the contrary, the most instructive gift a parent can provide for their children is to obey God's instruction by modeling a godly marriage to their children. Adams writes about the greatest blessing a parent can give a child:

Children need most to see parents who know how to love and live with each other. That is the most precious gift that parents can give to their children. They need parents who know how to live as parents; but even more as husbands and wives.[3]

When parents practically apply the gospel in the context of their marriage a child has the opportunity to receive their greatest need, which is salvation. Ideally, the home becomes a place where the child is exposed to the gospel. A godly marriage lays the foundation in the child's life for the gospel to take root in the child's heart by providing an atmosphere of love, stability, trust, and respect for God and others. As the home functions in the manner God designed with the primary relationship being between mom and dad and the children secondary, it is the child who benefits because he has experienced godly order and structure. The children will leave home with practical biblical insight and understanding of how to establish a family of their own. However, the difficulty of parenting is that there is no guarantees the child will choose to trust in the gospel, despite the best intentions of parents. Sadly, children do not always follow the blessed examples of godly parents.

According to God's divine plan, the marriage relationship was created to be a permanent institution in contrast to the temporary union between a parent and a child. Genesis clearly communicates that one day the child will grow up and leave the home (Gen 2:24). A parent's biblical responsibility is to prepare their children for the transition

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[2]Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 52.

[3]Ibid., 53.

into adulthood, which does not happen by making them the center of the family. Instead, the biblical responsibility of a parent is to faithfully train and teach the child on how to live for God when the child is no longer in the home. A child is given to parents not only for a season but also for some significant reasons. The Bible teaches that children are born into a fallen world with a sinful nature (Rom 5:12, 18-19). According to the Scriptures, parenting begins with evangelism. Therefore, a parent's initial responsibility is to consistently share, in the context of love, the gospel with their child by both words and actions. Since the child begins his or her journey unsaved, the parent has to be intentional in engaging the child's heart with the gospel. The parent is regularly directing their child's attention to the Lord by showing the child his or her need for a Savior while communicating their own need for a Savior. The difficulty in parenting involves wrestling with the biblical teaching that salvation belongs only to God. God is the ultimate agent in bringing salvation to the child. A parent has to be careful not to force their child to make a decision to please them instead of trusting in God's timing to save the child. The parental emphasis is on modeling, instructing, teaching, and training, but the parent cannot save the child.

The biblical description of a parent's responsibility is to faithfully train and teach their children in the Lord when they are lost and if they are saved to disciple them in the faith. The Bible does not guarantee that a parent will have the privilege of discipling their children. If by God's good pleasure a child experiences salvation by trusting in Jesus Christ work on the cross, then the parent can engage in the process of biblical discipleship. There are two New Testament words for discipleship "*mathetes*" meaning "learner" or "*mimeomai*" meaning "to imitate."[4] God created the family structure with dad, mom, and child as a means to accomplish the goal of children being

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[4]Cameron Lee, "Parenting as Discipleship: A Contextual Motif for Christian Parent Education," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 19, no. 3 (1991): 270.

discipled by their parents, which has the connation of both learner (the understanding of certain principles) and imitator (following an example).

God blesses parents with children because they are the catalyst He uses to help reveal the areas where a parent needs to change and grow. As parents engage in the process of faithfully teaching and training their children, they will become aware of a continual need for a Savior whether their child is lost or saved. Philip Yancey in his article 'To Rise, It Stoops' discusses how parenting mirrors the character of God: "God yearns for us to grow toward the parent stage of sacrificial love, which most accurately reflects God's own nature. We draw near to God in likeness when we give ourselves away."[5] The process of instructing and training one's own children challenges parents to understand their own need for the sacrificial love of the Father and how to practically share His love with children. John and Judy Allison in their article "Parenting as Discipleship," make a noteworthy remark concerning the faithfullness a parent has to exercise to fulfill their God-ordained responsibility: "Our children cannot be left to discover for themselves the truths of God. The family is the place within society that is most crucial for the passing on of beliefs and traditions."[6] Biblical parenting, as designed by God, requires a parent to be aware of his or her own limitations and to ask God for help during the highs and lows of parenting. God's original plan has always involved parents passing down truths about God to their children. However, the passing down of the truths about God are contingent on if the child is open and receptive to the teaching of the gospel.

God's design was never for parents to attempt to fulfill the responsibility to instruct their children in the Lord by themselves. The community of faith served the family for support and encouragement in both the Old and New Testament (Israel in the

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[5]Philip Yancey, "'To Rise, It Stoops': How Parenting Mirrors the Character of God," *Christianity Today* 44 (2000): 136.

[6]John Allison and Judy Allison, "Parenting as Discipleship," *Ashland Theological Journal* 29 (1997): 52.

Old Testament and the church in the New Testament). When the church began in the book of Acts, it was established as an equipping institution with the purpose to build the body up in Christ (Eph 4:11-12). God ordained two institutions to impact the spiritual lives of children: the family and the church. Therefore, a planned partnership between the church and the family became imperative for the spiritual development of the child to happen.[7] The partnership between the parents and the church consists of the parents understanding that they are the primary disciple-makers and the church champions their role by offering training and accountability to ensure the biblical responsibility is being fulfilled.[8]

The Old and New Testament describe parenting as modeling, instructing, teaching, and training, and if saved, discipling. Both the Old and New Testament provide biblical guidelines for parents on how to fulfill their biblical responsibility to faithfully teach and train their children in the Lord. Particularly in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 articulates the importance of instruction as a both conversation and a lifestyle. The Psalmist in Psalm 78:4-8 encourages parents to share about God's past faithfulness with the intent it will give the next generation hope to trust in God in the future. Solomon in Proverbs 22:6 describes a general biblical principle to implement when training because two paths are before children: wisdom or foolishness.

The New Testament reinforces the Old Testament's concept that parenting consists of discipline and instruction. In Ephesians 5:22, Paul focuses on the external and internal training for the child. Lastly, at the beginning of Ephesians 5:22 and Colossians 3:21 Paul provides the manner by which a parent should train. The training of a child by the parent should not provoke him or her to anger but instead motivate them to love

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[7]Jay Strother, "Family Equipping Ministry Church and Home as CoCampions," in *Perspectives on Family Ministry 3 Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 146.

[8]Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 52.

others and God. The following evaluation of Scriptures will help parents understand and hopefully by His grace fulfill the responsibility God has entrusted to them.

Old Testament Parenting

The pages of the Scripture exhort parents to teach and train their children in the Lord. When the Bible mentions parenting, it is synonymous to instructing, training, teaching, modeling and if saved, engage in discipleship. The Old Testament writers provide a couple of different passages explaining the parental responsibility. Before addressing the issue of parenting, it is important to understand the culture in Ancient Israel as it relates to the family structure. The Israelite family structure like most ancient Near Eastern Cultures were "patriarchal" (ruled by the father). God entrusted specific responsibilities to the father/husband, which was not intended to be carried out in a dictator manner but to inspire trust and security to his family.[9] The health of the family depended upon the father/husband personally modeling strict fidelity to Yahweh.[10] Biblical teaching is clear that the wife was to serve in a functionally subordinate role to the husband but her dignity (made in the image of God) and influence in the family (instructing her children) are held in high regard. Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones note in their book *God, Marriage, and Family* the profound influence of a mother:

> During the first decade of the child's life, he or she was the special concern of his or her mother. Since in ancient Israel the home was the primary place for education, the mother's example and instruction are vital. Once the children reach adolescence, they would increasingly spend more time with their fathers, though this does not mean a mother's influence was no longer felt. Mothers would train their daughters for their future roles as wives and mothers.[11]

[9]Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 86.

[10]Daniel Block, "Marriage and Family in the Ancient Near East," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 47.

[11]Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 89.

Children in ancient Israel were viewed as a sign of God's favor as barrenness was considered a sign of disfavor. Children held value because they would pass on the legacy of their parents to the next generation, which meant the worship of Yahweh. The expectation of children growing up in Ancient Israel was multi-faceted with the overall emphasis being on respect for parents. Daniel Block in his article "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," lists four expectations of children: "1) respect for parents, 2) helping around the parental home in a variety of ways, 3) providing for parents in their old age, and 4) guarding the genealogical integrity of the family."[12]

Deuteronomy

God created family unity as the means to pass on the continual worship of Him from generation to generation. Throughout the Bible, the concept of passing on principles and concepts to the next generation is repeated numerous times. Moses in the book of Deuteronomy prepares the Israelites for their entrance into the promised land. Therefore, Deuteronomy's purpose is to remind the Israelites of God's covenant love for them, which would hopefully motivate them to a live in obedience versus disobedience (blessing versus cursing) to His statutes because of His covenant love for them. Moses constantly challenges the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy to pass on the teachings of Yahweh to the next generation. In Deuteronomy 6 he addresses the family structure:

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9).

It is significant to note that before Moses addresses the responsibility of parents toward their children, he reminds the Israelite community of the character of the God

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[12]Block, "Marriage and Family," 92-93.

whom they worship and that the correct response is to obey Him with every element of

one's body. Moses begins in chapter 6:4 with the famous Shema, "The Lord our God is

one Lord," declaring that Yahweh alone is worthy of covenant love.[13] The Shema

expresses the uniqueness (being the only) and unity (being one) of God. Peter Craigie

writes in his commentary concerning the importance of the Shema:

> As one God, when he spoke there was no other to contradict: when he promised, there was no other to revoke that promise; when he warned, there was no other to provide refuge from that warning. He was not merely the first among gods, as Baal in the Canaanite pantheon, Amon-Re in Egypt, or Marduk in Babylon; he was the one and only God.[14]

Moses continues in 6:5 with God's desired response to the Shema, which is the

greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with

all your soul and with all your might."[15] The Greatest Commandment in its context flows

from a place of gratitude and faithful (*hesed*) love that God has shown Israel. Moses

emphasizes through the Greatest Commandment the importance of loving God with your

heart, soul, and might. Eugene Merrill in his commentary on Deuteronomy explains the

different aspects of heart, soul, and might:

> The heart (*leb*) is, in Old Testament anthropology, the seat of intellect, equivalent to the mind or rational part of humankind. The soul (better, "being" or "essential person" in line with commonly accepted understanding of Heb. Nepes) refers to the invisible part of the individual, the person qua person including the will and sensibilities. The strength (meod) is, of course the physical side with all its key functions and capacities. That is, Israel must love God with all its essence and expression.[16]

The tangible expression of love toward God has to be displayed through one's entire

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[13]J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy,* Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 141.

[14]Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 169.

[15]This phrase is repeated in Deut on numerous occasions: 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:4; 19:9; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10, 16, 20.

[16]Eugene Merrill, *Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture NIV Text*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 164.

essence before obedience to God's command is possible. God was teaching ancient Israel about the centrality of loving Him and the practical implications. Craigie points out the centrality of loving God and its implications:

> The command to love is central because the whole book [Deuteronomy] is concerned with the renewing of the covenant with God, and although the renewal demanded obedience, that obedience would be possible only when it was a response of love to the God who had brought the people out of Egypt and was leading them into the promise land.[17]

The biblical principle regarding love is when a person's affections are stirred for God; it produces worship, which leads one to obeying God's commandments.[18] God's exhortation to the Israelite community was the importance of passing on its faith to the next generation. The implication of loving God is to love one's children by teaching them the statutes of God.

Moses exhorts parents to teach their children in verse 6 by reiterating the need for their own inward obedience: "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart" (Deut 6:4). The idiom "be on your heart" implies a sense of thinking, pondering and mediating on God's active work in one's life. The Hebrew meaning of the idiom "be on your heart" has the connotation to be in one's constant, conscious reflection.[19] Craigie writes about the significance of the idiom "be on your heart":

> The people were to think on them [commandments] and meditate about them, so that obedience would not be a matter of formal legalism, but a response based upon understanding. By reflecting on the commandments, they were reflecting on God's work; and by understanding the path of life set down by the commandments, they would at the same time be discovering the way in which God's love for them was given expression. Having understood the commandments for themselves, the people were then responsible for their children: you shall repeat them to your children (a

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[17]Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 169-70.

[18]Lou Priolo, *Teach Them Diligently: How to Use the Scriptures in Child Training* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 2000), 11-12. To the degree that one loves and delights in God's Word (Ps 119:24, 47, 48, 113, 127, 143, 159, 165, 167) one will love and delight in Him.

[19]Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

theme already familiar). The commandments were to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the begining of the day to the end of the day.[20]

The process of passing on one's belief in Yahweh to the next generation has to take root in the heart of a parent. Therefore, a parent has to be introspective about the work God is doing in their own heart before they can provide adequate instruction and training to their children. The process of discipling one's child has its origin in the heart of the parent's relationship with God. Andrew Murray writes in his book *The Children for Christ*,

> Parental instruction must be from the heart. We all know how little influence commands or instructions exercise, when given by a listless or uninterested teacher. It is only the heart that gains the heart, the loving warmth of interest and affection that can waken corresponding emotions in the bosom of pupil.[21]

For the ancient Israelites, the passing on of God's statutes was designed by God to happen in the context of the family relationships in order that the covenant relationship would never be forgotten.

In Ancient Israel parents were vital to accomplishing God's agenda for the family structure. Moses continues in Deuteronomy to describe that the main responsibility of a parent is to fulfill the role of teacher with their children. God entrusted parents with the responsibility of teaching their children about Him so that His legacy would be passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, the biblical understanding of parenting is synonymous with faithfully teaching and training because of the emphasis placed on another person with the intent of showing them how to live for God. Moses clearly communicates in Deuteronomy 6:7 that the teaching and training in the Lord intended by God is to begin in the home. Moses writes speaking to parents, "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." The teaching of God in the context of the home is passed on by a parent to a child not by enforcing a law code

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[20]Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 170.

[21]Andrew Murray, *The Children of Christ* (Goodyear, AZ: Diggory, 2007), 38.

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but by making the truths of God the fabric of life and conversation.[22] However, the Scriptures teach that a child can be faithfully taught and instructed in the Lord, yet choose in his or her heart to rebel or resist the teaching concern the Lord (Isa 1:2).

According to Deuteronomy 6:7, parents are mandated by God to faithfully take the initiative to teach their children about God. Moses describes the teaching, which should be done in the home with the verb "diligently." The Hebrew verb 'diligently' means 'to whet' or 'to sharpen,' which translates in the context of Deuteronomy 6:7 'to teach incisively.'[23] When the Hebrew verb form is in the piel, as in Deuteronomy 6:7, the meaning is one of repetition, repeat, saying again and again.[24] Moses urges parents to teach their children diligently, which involves two crucial aspects: (1) repetition with precision and (2) repetition in application.

First, for the parent to teach their children in the manner God intended, the instruction should involve repetition with precision. When a parent is teaching a child diligently it means that the parent is repeating their words often and using sharpness in delivery concerning the correct doctrine of the faith. Adams insightfully writes in his book *Back to the Blackboard*, how the verb "diligently" means "repeating": "Then, it comes to mean, "say it again" or "repeat." It is used of sharpening a sword because in the whetting process the blade is repeatedly struck or rubbed against a honing stone."[25] The parental instruction about the teaching of God to a child happens over and over reminding the child of correct doctrine to believe. However, repetition is not engaged without the parent

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[22]McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

[23]Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), s.v. "diligently."

[24]William Lee Holladay and Ludwig Kohler, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1994), s.v. "diligently."

[25]Jay Adams, *Back to the Blackboard* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 1988), 103.

becoming a student of their child. The repeated teaching needs to be accompanied with sharpness and precision in the delivery. The sharpness or precision component involves the image of an engraver of a monument who takes a hammer and chisel in hand and creates art.[26] Moses instructed the Israelites to be skilled craftsmen seeking to penetrate the heart of their children with God's Word in order that the next generation would walk with obedience to His commandments. Moses understood this objective would be accomplished as the parents carefully considered how to best gain both the child's understanding and affections in the spirit of love through the preparation of prayer.[27]

The second aspect of being diligent to instructing a child involves the parent using repetition in application. The verb also diligently implies that the parent is having ongoing conversation with a child, which should naturally draw practical implications for the child on how to respond in a godly manner to the different circumstances he or she will encounter. Repetition in application is an important aspect of parenting because the main focus is on practical theology. Moses concludes verse 7 by affirming the concept that instruction to children about God is always continuous and consists of applying God's principles to everyday life: "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." Moses refers to the totality of time when he writes, "when you lie down and when you rise" meaning a child has to understand how to navigate using God's Word through the entire day. Adams provides a concise and clear definition of the second aspect of teaching a child with diligence, which is with repetition in application:

> The second factor in the word moves away from the idea of repetition as merely rote learning, to the idea of applying the truth to situation after situation to which it corresponds. Surely, one must learn the truth, but repeatedly he must show its application to everyday, real life circumstances. Truth must be integrated with life.[28]

[26]Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

[27]Murray, *The Children of Christ*, 39.

[28]Adams, *Back to the Blackboard*, 103.

Parental instruction was to occur in a continuous manner throughout a given day helping the child to permeate every sphere of life with a God-honoring lifestyle. Murray makes a keen observation regarding when the majority of parental instruction takes place:

> The instruction he had enjoined was not to be by means of set times, and stated formal lectures; the whole life with all its duties has to be interwoven with the lessons of God's love and God's Word, the ordinary avocations of daily life were to be no hindrance, but helps to lead the youthful hearts heavenwards. The children were to feel that it was no matter that could be done for the day, in the moments of morning or evening prayer; the continued and spontaneous outburstings of the heart in the language of the lips was to prove that it was a life and a joy, that God's presence and love were a reality and a delight.[29]

Moses exhorted the parent to engage in consistent repetitive instruction concerning the teaching about God to their children with the that hope it would produce a lifestyle of worship of God in every sphere of the child's life. The parental responsibility according to Moses is for the parent to initiate God into the fabric of the home. In the home parents are commanded to place God as the central figure with hopes that their children will come to believe in God's promises for them by both the words and actions of the parent.

Lastly, Moses' desire is for the home to have a distinguishing characteristic. Therefore, he provides the parent with one final charge: "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates" (vv. 8-9). A debate among the commentaries exists whether these verses should be taken literally or metaphorically. Craigie is helpful when he writes, "Whether taken literally or metaphorically, the signs described in vv. 8-9 indicate that the individual, his home, and his community were to be distinguished in their character by obedience to the commandments as a response of love for God."[30] The signs of binding the hands and forehead, and writing on the doorframes were all to serve as symbols of covenant affiliation.[31] During the course of Jewish history, both post-biblical

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[29]Murray, *The Children for Christ*, 39-40.

[30]Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 171.

[31]Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 168.

and to the present day, the binding of hands and foreheads was common on special occasions. A box called a phylactery would be placed on the forehead and forearm. The box contained verses from the Torah (Exod 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deut 6:4-9 and 11:13-21).[32] The writing on doorframes of Israelite houses and gatepost was a common post-biblical practice, which included a small metal receptacle containing Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 was placed on the right of the doorway.[33] The practice would identify the home and the community as belonging to the Lord. The symbols Moses instructed for the family were to show an internalization of an outward requirement. God intended for the family structure to consist of both outward and inward obedience as McConville describes: "There is no conflict in Deuteronomy's understanding, however, between outward signs and inward condition; its concern is that there should be harmony between the two. Here, the law of God is one with piety and lifestyle."[34] The biblical foundation for a God-centered response begins in the home as the parents incarnate the love of God to their children.

Psalms

The Psalms are a collection of hymns written to encourage the Hebrew people of the sufficiency of their God in the midst of a variety of circumstances. The Psalms by God's design directs one's attention off their current circumstance and instead upon the character of God. C. Hassell Bullock in his book *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, writes regarding the importance of the book of Psalms:

> It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in the arena of faith the book of Psalms has been a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night for Israel and the church. The reasons are not elusive. The collection of ancient hymns represents a wide spectrum of life experiences, a broad range of social ranks from kings to commoners, a microcosm of human emotions and situations, and a catalogue of spiritual experiences. . . . Whatever an individual finds himself on the journey of faith, the Psalms provide a

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.

[34]McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

place of rest and a time of repose and reflection, as well as a stimulus to send him on his way.[35]

The Psalms are not silent about addressing the responsibility of a parent. Psalm 78 is a historical psalm, which attempts to give a chronological record of Israel's past.[36] The psalm is attributed to Asaph, one of David's chief musicians. During the first eight verses of the Psalm, the psalmist instructs the parent, particularly the fathers, on two separate occasions to tell the coming generations what the Lord as done (vv. 4, 5). Leopold Sabourin in his study of the Psalms writes concerning the practical implication of verses 1-8: "The glorious deeds of the Lord must be proclaimed and a lesson drawn from history."[37] Parents are the agents by whom God has entrusted to take the initiative on communicating with their children about God's deeds and character.

Psalm 78 speaks directly to a parent's responsibility to their children:

> He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep his commandments. (Ps 78: 5-7)

The psalmist begins by explaining that children learn about the testimony and law of God through their parents when he concludes verse 5 saying, "Fathers to teach to their children." The Hebrew word "teach" means "to make known" and "declare."[38] The connotation of the word "teach" in this passage refers to providing instruction.[39] The content of the message being declared consists of the story of Yahweh's goodness toward Israel.

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[35]C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 111.

[36]Leopold Sabourin, *The Psalms Their Origin and Meaning* (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1970), 389.

[37]Ibid., 392.

[38]Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. "teach."

[39]Marvin Tate, *Psalm 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 288.

Yahweh's divine word and divine action have to be expressed by the preceding generation to the upcoming generation. The biblical understanding of parenting has no room for neutrality when it comes to teaching the next generation.[40]

The psalmist writes concerning the goal in teaching the next generation the law and commandments of God in verse 6: "that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children." The goal of instructing the next generation is that they would come to attain knowledge about God. The Hebrew word for "know" has multiple meanings: "notice," "observe," "find out," "experience," "be acquainted with," "recognize," "understand," or "perceive".[41] Marvin Tate in his commentary on Psalms writes about the two avenues by which Israel came to understand the nature of God:

> Israel has been able to know Yahweh in two ways. One way is through his words, the law that he has established for her. Even before the law, however, was the divine action: exodus preceded covenant. Both are necessary for understanding of Yaweh and the way to live in relationship with him. . . . God's instruction is to be the subject of discourse among God's people.[42]

God is accessible through both his Word and also by his past actions. The psalmist reminds parents both of these avenues are available when instructing their child to know God. The psalmist concludes verse 6 by repeating a familiar command to parents: "arise and tell them to their children." According to the psalmist, teaching and instructing children about God in the home is not optional but imperative. The next generation will perish spiritually without the centrality of the gospel being presented through the context of the home. Only God can change a child's heart but a parent has to be faithful to teach the child the story of God through the Scripture and their own experiences.

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[40]Derek Kidner, *Psalm 73-150: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 14b (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1973), 281.

[41]Holladay and Kohler, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. "know."

[42]Tate, *Psalm 51-100*, 288-89.

Next, the psalmist in verse 7 describes the purpose of teaching children the law and commandments of God: "So that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." The purpose clause "so that" introduces three reasons why it is important to teach the next generation about God: (1) hope in God, (2) not forget his works, and (3) keep his commandments. Derek Kidner in his commentary on Psalms explains the three reasons as a cord of faith to the next generation: "The three phrases of verse 7 show a threefold cord of faith, as personal trust, informed and humble thinking, and obedient will."[43] First, for a child to hope in God shows they have personal trust in God, which means a reliance on God instead of themselves.[44] Second, for a child not to forget God's work implies they are thinking correctly how God's character relates to their life. Tate writes, "Only by understanding the old traditions can the present generation avoid repeating the sins of the previous ones. The man without memory is not able to be a faithful man."[45] Third, for a child to keep God's commandments demonstrates a person who loves God with all their heart, soul and mind (Matt 22:37). The psalmist's intent for instructing parents to teach the next generation about God is that God-willing their children would place their confidence in Him and live a life committed to His service.

Proverbs

The main theme in the book of Proverbs is wisdom. Solomon, the author of Proverbs, throughout the book depicts two different paths an individual can choose between wisdom and foolishness. In opening chapter of Proverbs Solomon explains to the reader where wisdom comes from: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;

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[43]Kidner, *Psalm 73-150*, 281-82.

[44]Ibid., 281.

[45]Tate, *Psalm 51-100*, 289.

fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov 1:9). Ronald Allchin in his dissertation

"Ripening Sonship: A Wise Father's Counsel to His Son," brings insight to understand

wisdoms origin and implications:

> So wisdom whether vocational, political, or social, has its foundation in the Lord. Wisdom is not to be understood as only some mental capacity but must be primarily seen as the skills a person acquires and lives by to have a successful life with others and with his God.[46]

Since Proverbs speaks wisdom to all of life, the book does not omit giving principles

about how to parent children. The important aspect to remember regarding Proverbs is

that it offers general principles but does not give promises. Tremper Longman III in his

commentary on Proverbs defines a proverb as "a brief, pointed statement. Proverbs can

state an insight, make an observation, . . . or offer advice in the form of an admonition or

prohibition."[47]

The familiar and often misinterpreted Proverb related to parenting is Proverb

22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart

from it." Proverb 22:6 is an example of the writer using a poetic genre known as a

synthetic parallelism meaning that the second line supplements the first.[48] The second

line of the proverb provides the reason for the command or admonition given in the first

line. The command is presented to parents in the first phrase of the proverb, "Train up a

child." The Hebrew word "train" has the connotation of "dedicating" a house (Deut 20:5)

or a temple (1 Kgs 8:63).[49] The idea behind the phrase "train up a child" is that parents

have been given a responsibility from God to dedicate themselves to faithfully teach their

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[46]Ronald Allchin, "Ripening Sonship: A Wise Father's Counsel to His Son" (D.Min. project, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989), 9.

[47]Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 31.

[48]Robert Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 34.

[49]Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. "train."

child by encouraging them to daily choose wisdom over folly. Derek Kidner in his commentary on Proverbs offers a helpful reminder to parents about their limitations in training a child:

> Many are the reminders, however, that even the best training cannot instill wisdom, but only encourage the choice to seek it (2:1). A son may be too opinionated to learn (13:1; 17:21). A good home may produce an idler (10:5) or a profligate (29:3): he may rebel enough to despise (15:20), mock (30:17) or curse (30:11; 20:20) his parents; heartless enough to run through their money (28:24), even to turn a widowed mother out of doors (19:26).[50]

Therefore, parents have to be dependent on God when training their children in the Lord because they cannot control the outcome. The only control parents have is choosing to obey the God-given command to train their children in the Lord. Charles Bridges in his commentary on Proverbs writes that training a child consists of "praying for your child. Teach your child how to pray. Instruct him from childhood in the holy Scriptures as the sole rule of faith and way to behave."[51] Training a child involves teaching him or her practical biblical principles from the Scriptures, which will help them choose wisdom over foolishness in their daily lives.

The next phrase "in the way he should go" has been interpreted to have several different meanings. The phrase is translated literally from Hebrew as "in accordance with his way."[52] The phrase is an idiom, which means "on the mouth of his way."[53] Duane Garrett in his commentary on Proverbs explains the two popular interpretations:

> 'Train a child in accordance with his nature,' meaning that the teacher must take into account the idiosyncrasies of the child and customize the method of training

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[50]Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1964), 51.

[51]Charles Bridges, *Proverbs,* The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 202.

[52]Duane Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 187.

[53]Alden, *Proverbs,* 160.

accordingly. Others, take it to mean simply that one should train a child in the way he should go.[54]

The latter meaning described would be interpreted as in the way of wisdom or the right way. According to this particular proverb, a parent is commanded to train their child in wisdom but it does not answer the question of how to train. Garrett in his commentary takes the meaning a step further than simply training in wisdom he completes the thought by emphasizing the manner by which a parent trains a child:

> A better interpretation is, loosely rendered, 'Train a child in a manner befitting a child.' In other words, one should train a child using vocabulary, concepts, and illustrations a child can understand. It does not mean one should be tailor-made for each individual child but that one should begin instructing a child in elementary principles of right and wrong as soon as possible.[55]

A parent training a child in wisdom using language and concepts the child can cognitively understand appears to be the more holistic approach. The Proverb reinforces the biblical concept of the parent's responsibility to teach their children in the ways of the Lord. The ways of the Lord has a variety of meanings: 'walking in His ways,' 'the way of His footsteps,' 'the way of His commandments,' 'the way of wisdom,' 'the way of righteousness,' 'the way of holiness,' 'the way of peace,' and 'the way of Christ'[56]. A parent is constantly pointing the child to Christ and encouraging their child if saved to walk in Him.

The last half of Proverb 22:6 gives the reason why it is important to train up a child, Solomon writes, "even when he is old he will not depart from it." The danger is to interpret this phrase as a promise meaning that when a parent faithfully teaches the child will not stray. The general principle of the proverb is true. The child will more than likely, if trained in wisdom, stay on that path through adulthood. However, he or she can fall into the temptation of negative peer pressure and be led astray; there are no

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[54]Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 187.

[55]Ibid., 187-88.

[56]Murray, *The Children for Christ*, 55.

guarantees in parenting.[57] The Proverb reminds the parent to follow God's command by training the child in the Lord and to trust in Him to change the child's heart. Murray in his book *The Children for Christ,* describes the interplay between the parent's responsibility and the moving of God's Holy Spirit:

> Where the believing parent seeks not only to form the habits of obedience, but in prayer and faith to mold and guide and strengthen the will of the child in the way of the Lord, he may count upon the workings of God's Holy Spirit to do what God alone can do.[58]

New Testament Parenting

The family structure in the New Testament parallels the Old Testament and the Greco-Roman milieu regarding the highly patriarchy (rule of the father) influence. The New Testament family can be classified into three distinct divisions: the governor (the husband), the governed (the wife), and the auxiliary (the children).[59] The emphasis is not on worth or value (because each member is created equal) but instead on the responsibility God has given each member in the family. The New Testament teaches that the source of authority in the household rests with the father as the paterfamilias. According to Craig Keener, in his article "Family and Household,"

> A father was expected to govern his household. Indeed, because the skills necessary to govern a household were the also those necessary to govern cities and because it was natural to reason from private to public affairs many regarded this demonstration as a prerequisite that one could govern in the larger society.[60]

The father's role in the home was three-fold: (1) to materially provide for the family, (2) to ensure discipline with the children, and (3) to educate the children in the law of the

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[57]Longman, *Proverbs*, 405.

[58]Murray, *The Children for Christ*, 57.

[59]Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 48.

[60]Craig Keener, "Family and Household," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. David Aune (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 357.

Lord.[61] The father was responsible for being the chief educator in his child's life with goal being to enable the child to contribute to society and have a vibrant relationship with the one God and Father of all.

The New Testament describes the mother's role as indispensable to the family structure. She is created equal to her husband and given the responsibility of helpmate. The mother's biblical responsibilities in the home are also three-fold: (1) managing the home, (2) supporting the husband, and (3) helping educate the children, which as seen in the Greco-Roman world by the child, especially a son, staying predominately with the mother until age seven and the daughter until she was married.[62] The mother was characterized as the nurturer of the family providing gentleness and a loving environment for the family.

During the New Testament time period, children were viewed through both positive and negative light. Judith Gundry-Volf in her article "The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament," explains the different perspective on children during the first century Greco-Roman context:

> On the one hand, parents loved and took pleasure in their children as necessary to their economic survival and well-being and as heirs in whom they would live on after death. The state considered children indispensable for economic, cultural, and military purposes. On the other hand, childhood was viewed largely negatively as a state of immaturity to outgrow.[63]

During the first century, children occupied the lowest rung on the social ladder and had no rights of their own. The Roman philosopher Cicero wrote concerning children, "the thing itself cannot be praised, only its potential."[64] However, Jesus frequently in the Gospels does not look down on children but rather uses them as examples for entrance

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[61]Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship*, 82-83.

[62]Keener, "Family and Household," 358.

[63]Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 31-32.

[64]Ibid., 32.

into His kingdom. Köstenberger and Jones in their book *God, Marriage, and Family* explain the implications of Jesus using children as examples of faith, trust, and belief: "By repeatedly pointing to children as models of the kingdom values and attitudes, Jesus elevated those who are lowly in this world and humbled those with status, power, and position."[65] Jesus did value the worth of children but he still required them to fulfill their God-given responsibility. According to the New Testament, the responsibility of children in the home is to obey parental authority. The expectation for children to obey their parents was universally accepted during the New Testament time period. Obedience to parents included honoring them as well. The Jewish philosophers Philo and Josephus, who drew on both Jewish and Greek thought, strongly emphasized both obeying and honoring parents as a common exhortation and expectation given to children.[66] Craig Keener describes how children showed honor to their parents: "Young children were responsible to honor their parents by obeying them and adult children honored their parents by caring for them in old age."[67]

Ephesians and Colossians

The New Testament teaching, which addresses the parent's responsibility regarding instructing their children in the Lord, is found in the books of Ephesians and Colossians. Paul, the human author of both Ephesians and Colossians, adopts a literary device known as the household codes when describing the God-ordained responsibility of parents to their children.[68] The phrase household codes comes from a German word

[65]Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 104.

[66]Keener, "Family and Household," 355.

[67]Ibid., 354.

[68]Philip Towner, "Households and Household Codes," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters,* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 418.

Haustafel ("House Table"), which was coined by Martin Luther to describe the New Testament passages that address various members of the family.[69] A number of New Testament letters have been classified as household codes: Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; 5:1-2; 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-3:8; 1 Peter 2:13-3:7.[70] The passages provided instructions on how each member of the family should fulfill their God-given responsibility. Paul uses the literary device of the household codes to help the family understand the issue of stewardship. Each member of the household is a steward because God entrusts them with a role and responsibility to fulfill. Therefore, each member of the household is accountable to God to faithfully execute the duties assigned. Philip Towner summarizes the significance of the household codes in "Households and Household Codes":

> The effect of Paul's use of household imagery is to depict the people of God as God's household, a living and growing family whose life together requires mutuality of service and care, recognition of responsibilities, and a sense of identity, belonging and protection. As a household it would be understood that the community of God's people would be comprised of varieties of people, roles and responsibilities, and that to function effectively order would be maintain.[71]

Paul, in the household code found in Ephesians 5:22-6:4, addresses the believing fathers in Ephesus in Ephesians 6:4 by giving them specific instructions regarding how to instruct their children in the Lord. Paul addresses the fathers in light of the hierarchical structure, which had fathers responsible for the entire family. Even though mothers are not named in this context, the responsibility is implied.[72] Mothers

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[69]Philip Towner, "Household Codes," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 513.

[70]Ibid., 514.

[71]Towner, "Households and Household Codes," 418.

[72]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to The Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 398.

have a significant role to play in instructing a child to the Lord (Prov 31). Paul communicates the God-ordained job description for the believing fathers of Ephesus: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Paul provides the Ephesian fathers with a new perspective of parenting by not emphasizing power over children but rather intentionality to the spiritual maturity of children. Paul explains the father's responsibility by using two contrasting imperatives, which are the negative exhortation "do not provoke" and then the positive "bring them up." These two imperatives are crucial to understanding the responsibility God has given parents in instructing children in the Lord.

First, the positive imperative is discussed because it describes for what the parent is responsible, while the second imperative explains from what to refrain. Paul uses the adversative conjunction "but" to introduce the positive imperative because he is contrasting it with the preceding negative imperative. The positive exhortation to parents is stated by Paul in the second half of Ephesians 6:4: "but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The imperative "bring them up" has the connation "to rear," "to nurture," and "to bring up from childhood" with the object being the Lord.[73] The imperative "bring them up" implies the manner by which instruction from the parent to the child happens. According to Harold Hoehner in his commentary on Ephesians, the best translation of "to bring them up" would be "nurture," "because the word "nurture" possesses a broader scope encompassing the physical, psychological, and spiritual nature of a person."[74] Paul presents the command to parents that a spirit of nurture, not control or power, is the motive driving the desire to fulfill the biblical responsibilities in

[73]Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. William Arndt, Frederick William Danker and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "bring them up."

[74]Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 767.

parenting. The nurture parents offer to their children comes directly from their relationship with the Lord. Murray, in his book *The Children for Christ*, explains that the emphasis on nurturing children consists on the focus being the person of Christ:

> Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as our Lord and Master, with His personal presence, His love and rule in heart and home, must be our aim; we must educate our children as 'unto the Lord.' That they may know and love Him, that they may be fitted to obey His will and to serve Him, must be what all our education strives after. And it can only be this, as we very earnestly study His will, and Spirit to guide and to sanctify us for our work. Our whole nurture is to be the nurture of the Lord.[75]

The positive imperative 'bring them up' introduces two responsibilities that parents have been given by God when it comes to instructing their children in the Lord: (1) to provide discipline (training) and (2) to provide instruction. Andrew Lincoln in his commentary on Ephesians summarizes these two biblical responsibilities of parents when he writes, "What is called for is teaching and correcting of children through practical example and through words that are aimed at producing lives shaped by the tradition about Christ the lord.[76] However, before parents can instruct their child in the Lord, the parents themselves have to be willing to follow Christ's example and practice his teaching. Parents cannot provide their child with discipline and instruction in the Lord if they are not committed to Him.

According to Paul, the first responsibility assigned to parents is to provide discipline for their children: "bring them up in the discipline" (Eph 6:4). The noun "discipline" explains the practical application of how a parent should instruct their child in the Lord. Discipline is a crucial component in instructing a child in the Lord. The word "discipline" denotes "the upbringing and handling of the child which is growing up to maturity and which thus needs direction, teaching, instruction and a certain measure of compulsion in the form of discipline or even chastisement."[77] The word "discipline" in

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[75]Murray, *The Children for Christ*, 118.

[76]Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 409.

[77]Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v.

this context conveys two meanings: (1) education and (2) training.[78] The importance of

discipline in a child's life is that it provides guidance and structure for the child to obey

by giving proper training and education. Lou Priolo, in his book *Teach Them Diligently*,

presents a more comprehensive definition of discipline as it relates to parenting: "It's the

kind of training that may involve chastisement or the discipline of being made to practice

something (like a musical piece or a gymnastic routine) over and over until it is learned.[79]

Paul's emphasis with using the word "discipline" is on the training of the child's external

life. The training and discipline parents provide their children are interconnected.

Reflecting back on the Old Testament, parental training involved communicating to their

children God's discipline throughout Israel's history.[80] Parents have to be persistent in

their training regarding their child's external life by exercising both guidelines and

restraint simultaneously. The parents have to implement age appropriate forms of both

training (practical guidelines for living) and discipline (disobedience and sinful attitudes)

for external behavior.[81]

Next, Paul discusses the second responsibility given to parents, which is

instruction. The first responsibility, discipline, focuses on the external (training) while the

second responsibility, instruction, addresses the internal (verbal correction). The word

"instruction" conveys several different meanings: (1) counsel, (2) admonition, and (3)

correction.[82] The Greek word for instruction, *nouthesia*, means "to place or set in the

"discipline."

[78]Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "discipline."

[79]Lou Priolo, *Teach Them Diligently*, 73.

[80]Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 797.

[81]Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide To Raising a Family* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 9.

[82]Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "instruction."

mind."[83] The best translation of instruction appears to be admonishing because the term refers to correction and warning and emphasizes the verbal aspect of teaching.[84] Paul communicates through the word "instruction" that a parent's responsibility is to help a child think biblically about the world around them (God, Man, Satan, suffering, sin, etc). When a parent has noticed their child embracing unbiblical thought, their responsibility is to use the Scriptures to admonish them back on the right path. Lincoln describes the importance of admonishing: "The activity of admonishing can take place through encouragement or reproof but usually implies that there is some difficulty or problem in the attitude or behavior of those receiving the admonition that needs to be resolved or some opposition to be overcome."[85] The Scriptures are sufficient to help correct attitudes, actions, thoughts, and motives. The parent has the privilege to help their child change by using several biblical components: repentance, confession, and forgiveness, forsaking sin, restitution, and restoration.[86]

The household codes not only address the positive responsibilities of parents, but a negative command is also stated. Paul's instruction to the parents would be incomplete without a warning about what to refrain from while providing training and instruction to a child. The negative command is presented in both Ephesians and Colossians. The opening phrase of Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 repeat the same warning: "Fathers, do not provoke your children." The imperative "do not provoke" communicates that God is concerned with the manner by which parents fulfill their biblical responsibility to instruct their child in the Lord. Parents should not be carrying out their biblical responsibility in a

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[83]Ibid., 680.

[84]Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 768.

[85]Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 407-08.

[86]Priolo, *Teach Them Diligently*, 51.

patronizing manner, which would manipulate, exploit or crush their child.[87] Instead

parenting should be understood as a privilege and embraced with a spirit of humility in

the context of love. Since children are created in the image of God, they are to be shown

compassion, care, and treated with kindness and respect by their parents.[88] Therefore,

Paul uses the command "do not provoke" when communicating to the fathers in Ephesus

about from what to refrain. The meaning of the phrase "do not provoke" is significant in

the context of parenting because it does not imply for a parent "stop doing what has already

started" but rather "make it a practice not to do it."[89] The God-given authority parents

have over their children was never intended to be used as a license to promote harm but

instead to instill godly thoughts, motives, and behavior. The phrase "do not provoke" is a

biblical warning for parents about being careful not to habitually assert their authority in

a manner that would promote resentment rather than obedience to God.[90] Paul is

challenging parents to take an introspective examination of the methods they use to instruct

their child in the Lord. The next generation is attentively observing and they will receive

their impression of God from a parent's instruction or lack thereof..[91] Authority was

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[87]Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 446.

[88]Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest," 57.

[89]Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 796.

[90]Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 398.

[91]Lou Priolo offers parents a list of twenty-five most common ways to provoke a child: (1) lack of marital harmony, (2) establishing and maintaining a child-centered home, (3) modeling sinful behavior, (4) habitually disciplining while angry, (5) scolding, (6) being inconsistent with discipline, (7) having double standards, (8) being legalistic, (9) not admitting your wrong, (10) constantly finding fault, (11) parents reversing God-given roles, (12) not listening, (13) comparing them to others, (14) not making time just to talk, (15) not praising them, (16) failing to keep your promises, (17) chastening in front of others, (18) not allowing enough freedom, (19) allowing too much freedom, (20) mocking your child, (21) abusing them physically, (22) ridiculing or name calling, (23) unrealistic expectations, (24) practicing favoritism, and (25) child training with worldly wisdom. Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger* (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 1997), 30-50.

entrusted to parents as a catalyst to offer repentance and hope to their children and not to be used to promote a strong-arm mentality.

Paul continues in both the Epistles of Ephesians and Colossians to explain the result of provoking a child. Paul uses two different phrases "to anger" stated in Ephesians and "least they become discouraged" written in Colossians to describe the outcome provoking as on the child. The two phrases use different words, "anger" and "discouraged," but the meaning is the same. Hoehner in his commentary on Ephesians explains how the two words carry a similar connation:

> Logically, the irritation caused by nagging and demeaning fathers in the context of everyday life may in turn cause children to become angry. This anger grows, no doubt, out of the frustration of never being able to please fathers who constantly nag or demean them.[92]

Instead, parents are instructed by God to maintain an atmosphere in the home that promotes love, not resentment or bitterness. Biblical instruction to children should always be given through the context of love. The challenging endeavor in parenting is to continue to fulfill their biblical responsibility in love while fighting the temptation to promote biblical change in the child by their power. Parents have the privilege to model for their children, in spite of their behavior, the biblical truth: "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7).

Conclusion

Thankfully, God has communicated through the Scriptures the responsibilities parents have with their children to faithfully teach and instruct and if saved to disciple them. Parents have to both understand and apply these responsibilities in order to be equip the next generation in the Lord. According to the Scriptures, parents are responsible to faithfully pass on to their children the gospel through both words and actions. A parent does not have enough power or control to bring their child to a saving

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[92]Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 796.

knowledge of Christ but they can daily pursue their child with the wisdom of the Scriptures. The Scriptures explain in Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Ephesians, and Colossians a parents' biblical responsibility to instruct, train, teach, model, and discipline their child in the Lord. These specific directives help the parent to fulfill their particular role and responsibilities. The parental roles and responsibilities given by God are engaged through the context of love.

      Biblical parenting is a form of stewardship because God has entrusted a parent with a priceless gift to help mature them in the faith. Appropriate time and effort should be expended in helping parents understand their roles and responsibilities so that they may be good stewards of the lives entrusted to them. God has called parents to faithfully and diligently trust Him with the outcome of their children. The parenting process has the potential to be the catalyst of a parent's spiritual growth as Paul describes: "Being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18).

CHAPTER 3

PARENTAL NEED TO UNDERSTAND THEIR TEENS
AND TEEN CULTURE IN ORDER TO ENGAGE
TEENS BIBLICALLY WITH THE GOSPEL

Parenting a teenager is one of the most challenging but also rewarding responsibilities given from God. When a child enters the teenage years, he or she begins to experience a desire to be autonomous. The teen is seeking to answer the question of identity: "Who am I?" The journey towards answering this question has the potential to strike fear and anxiety in the hearts of parents. During the teen years, the teen is presented with a plethora of options to answer the question of "Who am I?" Sadly, numerous teens make destructive choices attempting to find the answer to this question in the world around them, through drugs, drinking, sex, crime/violence, excessive gaming, defiance to authority (parents, teachers, coaches, bosses, etc.), partying, pornography, unhealthy friendships, and a narcissistic attitude. The destructive behavior has the potential to cease when one's heart is confronted with the hope of the gospel. According to the Scriptures, parenting does not come with any guarantees or promises that a teen will never struggle with their identity or ultimately believe in the person of Christ for their salvation. However, the biblical mandate to parents is consistent throughout the Scriptures. Parents' responsibility should be directing their teen's attention outside themselves and onto the person of Christ. Parents have the privilege to offer a compelling biblical vision to their teens during these significant years. Chap Clark in his book *Hurt 2.0* summarizes the importance of investing time, energy, and guidance into the next generation: "No society that alienates its youth and sets them adrift can continue to exists, for it is already in a

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state of collapse."[1]

There is a tremendous need for parents to spiritually engage the hearts of teenagers. Teenagers represent a significant percentage of the American population. Approximately 33 million teenagers live in America alone. Researchers have labeled this group as the Mosaics, Millennials, or Gen Y (those born 1984 through 2002). The research confirms that the majority of teenagers are both in the church and spiritually interested in the claims of Christianity. The National Study of Youth and Religion conducted the largest and most detailed study on the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers from 2001 to 2005. Christian Smith and Melinda Denton published the results of the study in the book *Soul Searching*. The study noted more than one third of US teens experience an intimate relationship with God, another one third feel either distant from or do not believe in God, and another one third feel something in the middle, neither intimate nor distant.[2] Recent research by the Barna Group discovered that teenagers are some of the most religiously active Americans compared to other age groups. Seven out of ten Americans surveyed recalled going to Sunday school or other religious programs for teens at least once a month.[3] The result being that the conversion rate to Christianity is higher with those who are under the age of eighteen than any other age category.

Further research is showing sober findings by observing a drastic decrease in church involvement and spiritual engagement with the preceding age bracket of 18 to 30. A study by the Barna group in 2006 reported that 61 percent of young adults who had attended church as teenagers are currently absent from church involvement.[4] LifeWay

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[1]Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 56.

[2]Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 39.

[3]David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 23.

[4]Leslie Fields, "The Myth of the Perfect Parent," *Christianity Today* 54 (2010):

Research had a similar disturbing conclusion regarding the church attendance of those 18 to 30, by concluding that 7 in 10 adults who worshipped regularly in high school stopped attending church.[5] Recent research conducted in 2011 reports similar findings to the previous studies. Millions of young adults who were active in church involvement as teenagers are leaving the church. David Kinnaman in his book, *You Lost Me*, writes,

> Overall, there is a 43 percent drop-off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church engagement. These numbers represent about eight million twentysomethings who were active churchgoers as teenagers but who will no longer particularly engaged in a church by their thirtieth birthday.[6]

The research indicates that for a large number of teenagers, church attendance is not translating into long-term faithfulness to the gospel. Researcher and author Ed Stetzer in his research was surprised at how many of the younger unchurched indicated at one time in their life a consistent pattern of church involvement.[7] Instead, numerous young adults who were involved as teenagers are speaking negatively about the church being hypocritical, too focused on getting converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental.[8]

Simple answers to challenging circumstances will not suffice regarding the spiritual vitality of teenagers. There is no formula to prescribe for instant spiritual awakening in the hearts of teenagers. Research has shown that church attendance by itself is not adequate in producing long-term, spiritual faithfulness in teenagers. The average church only has 40 hours in a given year to influence the life of a teenager.[9] However, to

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[5]Ibid., 54.

[6]Kinnamon, *You Lost Me*, 22.

[7]Ed Stetzer, Richard Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and The Churches That Reach Them* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 11.

[8]David Kinnamon and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 29-30.

[9]Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine The Impact When Church and Family*

combat the churches limited time of influence the solution appears to be the church being more intentional about partnering with parents. The average parent has 3,000 hours per year of influence on their teenager.[10] The church and parents have to strive to partner together to better understand the times and how to effectively engage the hearts of teenagers with the gospel. Therefore, this chapter will define the origin and word teenager and then present a biblical understanding of the characteristics of a teenager. Additionally, this chapter will examine the constant changing world of a teen by discussing first the internal change they are experiencing due to puberty and second the external change because of culture. Five specific resources used to help parents engage, teach and train their teen will be evaluated. Finally, a model will be presented, which will concentrate on addressing the teenager's heart with the gospel.

The Origin and Definition of the Word Teenager

The word teenager is not found anywhere in the Scriptures. However, the Scriptures do refer and address the type of characteristics of young people. Especially in the book of Proverbs, as a father is instructing his son about how to keep his way pure (Prov 20:13). During biblical times an individual would pass through two stages: childhood and adulthood. However, around the 1900s Western society added a transition stage called adolescence. The origin of the adolescent stage occurred because of two major societal impacts: the Industrial Revolution and the Great Depression. Prior to the 1900s, children age 13 through 19 worked on the farm and helped their parents provide for the family. The child would work until he was married and then once married begin a farm of his own.

The first major change happened during the Industrial Revolution when society moved from an agrarian to an industrial society. The workplace moved from the farmland

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Collide (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2009), 87.

[10]Ibid., 88.

to the factories. When the Industrial Revolution occurred, the family began to fragment because the man would leave the home and spend the majority of his day at work in the city away from his family.

The second event that propelled the teenage stage was the Great Depression in the 1930s. Gary Chapman, in his book *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers*, writes, "With the collapse of the economy, jobs evaporated. The few jobs that were available went to fathers, and these adolescent workers were left standing idle. Feeling that they were a drain on their families, thousands took to the road in search for work."[11] The number of young people out of work and wandering the streets created both a national and social problem. Sociologist, Grace Palladino describes that the dilemma forced the government into action to help deal with the adolescent runaways or transient youth, as they were called.[12] The rise in unemployment created young people with less responsibility and more free time. Therefore, with the newfound freedom, their attention turned to discovering the world of dance, radio music, dating, driving, and fun.[13]

Next, the word teenager needs to be clearly defined in order to have an understanding of how to engage this age group. The word teenager was dubbed in the 1940s by advertisers who began to notice an opportunity to make money off of this new age group. The advertisers at first called them "teeners," then "teensters," and lastly "teenagers."[14] The teenage years, which are between the ages of 13 to18, are synonymous with the term adolescence. Chap Clark in his book *Hurt 2.0* defines the term adolescence as

> a psychosocial, independent search for a unique identity or separateness, with the end goals being a certain knowledge of who one is in relation to others, a

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[11]Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers* (Chicago: Northfield, 2010), 263.

[12]Ibid., 264.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

willingness to take responsibility for who one is becoming, and a realized commitment to live with others in community.[15]

The period of adolescence has to be understood and engaged by parents because the well-being of millions of teenagers are at stake. Sadly, the period of adolescence, which ranged from 13 to 18 years of age, has been extended well past puberty. Recent research reveals that the adolescence stage is ending when a person is in their middle to late twenties (twenty five has become the new fifteen).[16] The research is concerning because, with the extension of the adolescence stage, it communicates that teenagers are having a difficult time transitioning into being an adult. The primary cause for extending the adolescence stage has been the breakdown of the family. Clark communicates what happened in the 1960s and 1970s and how adolescents were affected:

> As the culture virtually dismantled previously rigid guidelines for the family life, a new family imbalance occurred as men and women attempted to redefine their roles and relationships within the family system. The consequences of this imbalance began to fall to the child/adolescent, who was left to fend for himself or herself as parents sought to find their own way in life.[17]

The difficulty in engaging teenagers is providing them stability in the midst of constant changing culture. Therefore, it is paramount for parents to be aware of not only the cultural but the physical changes as well. A teenager is constantly enduring both cultural and physical changes at an alarming rate. The world of a teenager is vastly different than it was 40, 30, 20, and even 10 years ago.

A Theology of Teenagers

Before addressing the internal and external changes teenager's experience, it is important for parents to understand the natural character flaws in their teenager. A parent, in order to wisely engage their teen, must recognize the teen's tendencies and shortcomings

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[15]Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 9.

[16]Ibid., 11.

[17]Ibid, 16.

with their character. A parent who understands that their teenager is entering a significant period in life where their character is developing will be better equipped to provide guidance and direction for their teen. The parent cannot force the teenager to change and take hold of wisdom rather than folly. A parent who is aware of their teenager's shortcoming will be able to be intentional in addressing it. Robert Johnston, in his article "Parents-Teens Bridging the Generational Gap," list six traits commonly displayed among teenagers, which are helpful for parents to comprehend as they seek to engage their teenagers: "1) The push for independence, 2) newly awakened sexual desires, 3) worldly influences, 4) questioning parental values, 5) becoming emotional, and 6) learning by trial and error."[18] The traits mentioned by Johnston reflect the mindset of a teenager and has the potential to cause conflict between the teen and parent. A parent can use these traits as a catalyst for growth in character instead of resulting in a dysfunctional relationship with their teen.

As mentioned before, the Bible does not specifically use the word "teenager," however, the Scriptures are not silent when it comes to addressing a young person. The Bible has a plethora to say concerning young people and can be beneficial to parents because it addresses flaws in their character. Paul Tripp, in his article "What is 'Success' in Parenting," explains how the Bible bridges generational gaps and is helpful for parents in understanding the character shortcomings of their "young person":

> The Bible is transcultural and transgenerational. The Bible speaks to the typical struggles of young people in every culture. It works in a situation when a son says to his dad, "Father, I forgot to bed down the camel," and works when a son says, "Dad, I forgot to put gas in the car." It spans generations. It's not hard to look at Scripture and realize that the Bible is right when it defines the typical struggle of a young person. Those struggles are opportunities for discerning parents.[19]

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[18]Richard Johnston, "Parents-Teens Bridging the Generational Gap," *Eastern Journal of Practical Theology* 2 (1988): 37-38.

[19]Paul David Tripp, "What is 'Success' in Parenting Teens?" *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 3 (2005): 17.

The book of Proverbs, written by King Solomon, is helpful when it comes to describing the type of character of a young person. The first nine chapters of Proverbs is an account of a wise father offering practical advice to his son. The wise father on numerous occasions in the book refers to his son as "the simple." Derek Kidner in his commentary on Proverbs provides a definition of "the simple":

> The verb formed from this word (like our verb 'to fool') means to deceive or seduce and accordingly, is the kind of person who is easily led, gullible, silly. Mentally, he is naïve (the simple believes everything). The locus classicus of the 'simple' in chapter 7, where he is seen at his most typical: aimless, inexperienced, drifting into temptation—indeed almost courting it.[20]

During the first nine chapters of Proverbs, the wise father is intentional about addressing his son, whom he refers to as the simple, and defining the shortcomings of his character. Paul Tripp, in his book *Age of Opportunity*, based on the first nine chapters of Proverbs, lists six characteristics of a young person: "1) no hunger for wisdom or correction, 2) a tendency toward legalism, 3) a tendency to be unwise in their choice of companions, 4) a susceptibility to sexual temptation, 5) an absence of eschatological perspective, and 6) lack of heart awareness."[21] These six characteristics provide parents with a framework when it comes to understanding the character struggles of their teenager. If a parent is committed to engaging their teen, there is no better place to begin than orientating themselves with these six characteristics.

The first characteristic of a teen is a lack of hunger for wisdom and correction. Tripp writes regarding the teen's lack of hunger for wisdom:

> Most teenagers simply don't have a hunger for wisdom. In fact, most think they are much wiser than they actually are, and they mistakenly believe that their parents have little practical insight to offer. They tend to think that their parents "don't really understand" or are "pretty much out of it."[22]

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[20]Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1964), 39.

[21]Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), 76-89.

[22]Ibid., 76.

A parent, like the wise father in Proverbs, has to remind their teen to seek out wisdom because he understands the natural tendency for a teen to rely on his own strength. The wise father writes, "Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance. For the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov 1:5-7).

The second characteristic of a teen is having a tendency to be a legalist. A teenager has a tendency to focus on performance or outward appearance versus the motive behind the biblical commands. Therefore, a teen becomes self-righteous in their attitude when they are keeping the letter of the law. Tripp explains how legalism in a teenager displays itself: "They (teens) see things in black and white. They love to debate boundaries. They push hard to get what they want. They don't particularly love God's law. God's law is like a fence to them—it keeps them away from the good things they want."[23] The wise father in Proverbs refutes the legalist type of thinking by directing the youth's attention to the beauty of wisdom: "She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov 3:15-17).

The third characteristic of a teen is being unwise in their choice of companions. During the teenage years, friendship is a powerful influence for both good and evil. Sadly, many friendship at the teen level are destructive versus constructive. Tripp writes regarding a teen's thought process when it comes to the topic of friendships: "Yet teenagers typically assume they won't be influenced and will respond to our concern with, 'I can handle it.'"[24] A teen lacks discernment because of their lack of life experience concerning how to select a good friend. The wise father in Proverbs offers this biblical advice: "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the

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[23]Tripp, "What is 'Success?'" 18.

[24]Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 83-84.

evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on" (Prov 4:14-15).

The fourth characteristic of a teen is a susceptibility to sexual temptation. Both genders male and female are susceptible for different reasons to fall into the temptation to have sex outside of marriage. Tripp describes why the sexual struggle is a significant characteristic for parents to address: "The teenage years are a time of physical awakening. For the first time, children become desirous of relationships with the opposite sex. Lust and fantasy often become the private sins of teenagers."[25] The vulnerability to sexual temptation is a powerful desire for a teen to resist. Martha Peace and Stuart Scott in their book *The Faithful Parent* provide a helpful illustration of the strong sexual desire of a teen: "As a fish is drawn to the worm on the hook, the young man is drawn to the immoral woman."[26] The father devotes two chapters in Proverbs, to state a specific warning to his son about the need to remain faithful in the area of purity with the opposite sex. Proverbs 5 and 7 offer a compelling biblical vision and describe specific instructions concerning why to flee the promiscuous woman.

The fifth characteristic is a teen's absence of an eschatological perspective. Typically, a teen does not live with the end in mind. A teenager is consumed by instant gratification instead of delayed gratification. Tripp speaks to how the culture encourages a teen to have a lack of eschatological perspective:

> Who are the heroes of Western culture? Are they people of character who live with a harvest mentality, investing in things of eternal significance? No, they are people with good voices, expensive clothes, hot cars, big muscles, and huge bank accounts. They are people who [teenagers] live for the moment, people who are laying up treasure on earth. They are typically people who have no more sense of eternity than the most immature teen. In God's eyes they are, in fact, antiheroes who lead our children to believe lies and to live for what is passing away.[27]

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[25]Ibid., 85.

[26]Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 108.

[27]Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 88.

The mantra for many teenagers is "live for the moment" with complete disregard for the long-term consequences they might encounter in the future. The wise father in the book of Proverbs urges his son to obey God's commandments because the long-term obedience to God's commands will bring him peace: "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for the length of days and years of life and peace will add to you" (Prov 3:1-2). The principle being that the choices made today will have implications on tomorrow. Paul repeats this principle in the New Testament when he writes, "For whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Gal 6:7). The challenge in dealing with a teenager is to help them understand that daily choices should be made with the future in mind.

The last characteristic of a teen is a struggle with heart awareness. A lack of heart awareness refers to being spiritually blind. All ages struggle at some degree with being spiritually blind, but for a teen the issue is prominent. A lack of heart awareness is prominent in a teen because a teen lacks self-awareness. The lack of heart or self-awareness causes a teen to become defensive and blame shift in times of confrontation. Tripp points out why teenagers struggle with self-awareness: "Teenagers do not tend to spend much time searching their hearts. They don't ask themselves challenging, revealing questions. They tend to stay focused on the external, present moments.[28] Therefore, the father in Proverbs encourages his son with an instruction concerning how to treat his heart: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov 4:23). C. H. Toy, in his commentary on Proverbs, explains the meaning of the word "heart" and the phrase "keep your heart":

> The word heart is to be understood as = self, and not as indicating a contrast between inward and outward life; such contrast is not found in Proverbs. The outward life is treated as the expression of the inward self. Life = prosperity. The

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[28]Ibid., 90.

sense of the couplet is: with utmost care guard thyself from sin thus wilt thou be happy.[29]

A teenager has to be intentional about guarding their heart against three common idols, which capture their worship: appearance, possessions, and acceptance.[30] The father in Proverbs understands that the heart is where lasting change begins because a person feels, thinks, desires, believes, and even rejects God's commandments from their heart.

The Most Prevalent Internal Changes
Happening to Teenagers

The biblical description of a teenager given by Solomon in Proverbs describes to parents the adolescent years have the potential to be a challenging time. One significant reason why the adolescent years have the potential to be challenging for both the parent and the child is because the amount of change, which is taking place in both the teenager and parent's life. Gary Smalley and Greg Smalley, in their book *The DNA of Parent-Teen Relationships*, describe the changes that effect both parents and teens during the adolescence stage:

> Parents: Marital dissatisfaction is greater when the kids are teens than when the kids are infants or adults. Many parents go through an identity or midlife crisis. Economic burdens increase. Many parents at this stage feel that their physical attractiveness is in decline. Caring for aging parents becomes a major responsibility.

> Teenagers: Friends become very important. Dating relationships develop. Acne may cover their faces. They want more independence. Peer pressure is a major influence. They become separate individuals. They tend to have an optimistic outlook on the future, seeing the time available to them as unlimited. They are at the peak of physical attraction.[31]

A parent needs to be aware of the change both in themselves and their teenager in order to have a sense of understanding as they seek to engage their teen. The first change this

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[29]C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 98.

[30]Tripp, "What is 'Success?'" 18.

[31]Gary Smalley and Greg Smalley, *The DNA of Parent-Teen Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 9-10.

paper will explain is the internal change going on within the teenager. The changes that will be addressed are the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual. The internal change a teen is experiencing can cause tension between the parent and the teen. Hopefully, when a parent understands the changes a teen is experiencing internally they will choose to address them in an understanding versus a condescending manner.

Physical

The first internal change a teen experiences due to the onset of puberty is the physical changes. During this period, a teen is growing in height and weight. Due to the disproportionate rate of growing clumsiness develops, hair begins to surface where their once was none, their voice begins to change, and sexual reproduction organs emerge due to testosterone in boys and estrogen in girls.[32] The physical changes can leave the teen feeling awkward and insecure. Chapman articulates the types of questions teens are asking because of the physiological changes they are experiencing: "I'm becoming an adult, but what will I look like? Will I be too tall or too short? Will my ears protrude too far? Will my breasts be too small? What about my nose? Are my feet to big? Am I too fat or too skinny?"[33] A teen has the tendency to become extremely self-contentious, highly sensitive, and enamored with looking in the mirror while their bodies are experiencing a drastic change due to the on-set of puberty.

Social

A teen is not only changing physically but also socially. Once a child enters the adolescent stage they desire to spend more time around friends rather than family members. Walt Mueller writes in his book *The Space Between*, about the paradigm shift

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[32]Jim Burns, *Teen-ology: The Art of Raising Great Teenagers* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2010), 50.

[33]Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*, 19.

from family to friends: "Adolescence is a time when teenagers begin to disengage from the family while building extensive and meaningful relationships with their peers. This shift in social orientation from parents to peers is normal."[34] As a teen is transitioning socially, from parents to peers, an increase in the power of peer pressure will happen. Parents cannot afford to be caught off guard by the power and influence of friends during the teen years. Teens socialize through friendships called clusters, and the cluster your son or daughter chooses to be involved with will be a significant influence in his or her life.[35] Today, it is more difficult to know a teen's friends than in past generations because of current technology and all the different forms of social media (texting, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapshot, etc.).

Emotional

The teenage years have often been described has a roller coaster full of ups and downs. The emotional life of a teenager can quickly sky rocket up or crash down within minutes depending on a variety of factors. During the teenage years, learning how to handle stress becomes an important issue because often times stress triggers the emotions one feels. John Townsend in *Boundaries with Teens* writes, "A teenager feels intense and extreme emotions. These strong emotions, which are important to teens, affect their judgment."[36] Therefore, it is important for a parent to understand their teen's emotions and what causes he or she to experience both negative and positive ones. Mueller explains what causes a teen to experience both negative and positive mood swings:

> Negative mood swings can also result from academic failure, poor peer relationships, family disunity, a break up, and the anxiety of perceived rejection by members of

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[34]Walt Mueller, *The Space Between: A Parent's Guide to Teenage Development* (El Cajon, CA: Zondervan, 2009), 48.

[35]Burns, *Teen-ology*, 52.

[36]John Townsend, *Boundaries with Teens: When to Say Yes How to Say No*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 77.

the opposite sex. Periods of elation, excitement, and youthful exuberance are triggered in numerous ways, too. . . . Climbs up the roller coaster can also result from peer acceptance, the purchase of a coveted object, academic success, making the team, and other achievements.[37]

Since teenagers are growing up in a postmodern world where faith is defined by feelings rather than God's authority, stress level is heightened because they are attempting to live life by what feels good. The feel good mentality over the duration of time creates more stress because all of the attention is directed to oneself. The mantra "do what feels good" leads to an emotional nightmare for teens.

Intellectual

The next significant internal change a teenager encounters is intellectual. A child thinks concretely, but once he or she transitions into the adolescent stage they have the ability to think abstractly, logically, and with reason. Townsend writes about the teen's mental ability to process information and the implications:

> Adolescents can use abstract reasoning, make hypotheses, and use deduction. These changes help get them ready to function successfully in the adult world, where they will need to draw conclusions from information, exercise judgment, and make all decisions that they will be held accountable for having made. These changes also increase your teen's ability to challenge and argue with you.[38]

The teenager's ability to think abstractly, logically, and with reason present a new challenge for a parent. The parent has the opportunity during the teenage years to elaborate and explain to their teen the why certain belief systems are more robust than worldviews. A parent cannot control what their teen will believe but they can present the biblical worldview in a thoughtful provoking manner to their teen. However, it is important for parents to understand that their teenager's brain is still developing both structurally and chemically. Foster Cline and Jim Fay in their book *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic* describe what is happening to the brain during the teenage years:

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[37]Mueller, *The Space Between*, 74.

[38]Townsend, *Boundaries with Teens*, 76-77.

The hypothalamus, which deals with impulses, is being impacted by very provocative hormones. Oxytocin, the neurochemical elixir of love, tries to wiggle in the door of hypothalamic synapses while the prefrontal areas of the cortex, the thinking and reasoning area of the brain, rush to make changes as if hoping to keep the hypothalamus in check with just a bit of rationality.[39]

A teenager's new mental processing skills can lead to an increase in arguments between the teen and the parents. It is common during the teenage years for parents to complain that their teen is argumentative, which does have some merit. A teenager is flexing his or her new mental muscles, often times inappropriately, but it does provide an opportunity for a parent to engage in a meaningful conversation consisting of logic, reason, and love. Foster and Fay list several changes a parent may observe as their teen relates to them due to their developing mental skills:

> 1) You will be less likely to hear long and detail-packed stories of movies, friends, school, or other activities. 2) For the first time, your child understands the meaning of parables and sayings such as, "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." 3) You will no longer hear questions that seem to have such obvious answers. The phrase "I don't get it" will fade away. 4) Your children will begin to question, for the first time, whether the end justifies the means. 5) Your children will no longer buy into your value system automatically just because they love you. 6) Your teen will begin to question and comment on parental behavior from a more objective perspective.[40]

The Most Prevalent External Changes Facing Teenagers

A teenager is not only changing from within. There are significant external factors from culture pressing themselves into the lives of teenagers. Parents cannot afford to sit quietly and passively observe the culture dictating what is acceptable and beneficial for their children. Culture is relentless in influencing, modeling, and shaping teenagers with a false message of hope. The culture's message has left teenagers hurt, isolated, and discontent. Mueller, in his book *Youth Culture 101*, writes about the importance of understanding the teenage culture:

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[39]Foster Cline and Jim Fay, *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic: Preparing Adolescents for Responsible Adulthood* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 112.

[40]Ibid., 113-14.

I like to think of culture as the "soup" in which our teenagers swim around and soak every day. The soup's ingredients include values, attitudes, and behaviors—as well as the media, peer group, language, and so on that express them. To know kids, we must lift the lid on the soup pot and see what's in the mix. "We can't escape the reality that those elements—as strange and frightening as they seem—shape their worldview and govern their lives. We might be tempted to close the lid because we don't like what we see." But if we hope to effectively protect our kids from harm, provide for their well-being, and lead them to a vital faith in Christ, we must understand their world . . . a world that's very different from the world we knew when we were that age.[41]

There are four crucial ingredients that the culture has used to deeply impact the heart of a teenager: (1) breakdown of the family, (2) smorgasbord spiritually, (3) narcissism epidemic, and (4) unlimited technological access.

The Breakdown of the Family

The first external ingredient, which the culture has used to impact the heart of a teenager, is the breakdown of the family. The breakdown of the family unit has resulted in teenagers feeling alienated and abandoned from the ones God intended to care for them, their parents. The breakdown of the family includes two elements: 1) divorce and 2) the widening relational chasm between a parent and teen. These two elements have left numerous teens in a precarious dilemma of having to parent themselves. The natural reaction a teen has to being alienated or abandoned by his or her parents is a distrusting mentality toward adults. The distrusting mentality causes the teen to reject what was designed by God to assist them in their development into adulthood. First, recent research is showing that divorce is a common occurrence among numerous married couples. In the 1940s, divorce affected only 2 percent of the married population.[42] As of 2002, divorce affected 43 percent of first-time marriages.[43] The implications on the children, as of 2008, is that 67 percent of children ages 0 to 17 live with two married parents, which is down

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[41]Walt Mueller, *Youth Culture 101* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 35.

[42]Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 16.

[43]Ibid.

from 77 percent in 1980.[44] According to Kinnaman, the absence of the father has been increasing in recent years: "In the 1960's, 5 percent of live births were to unmarried women; currently, the percentage is 42 percent. In other words, today's kids are eight times more likely to have come into this world without married parents then were Boomers."[45] Therefore, teenagers (Millennials) have grown up in a culture where they have experienced all kinds of family structures: traditional, blended, nontraditional, single families, and same sex partnerships. The response to the breakdown in the family structure has been that each generation since the Boomers has taken longer paths to adulthood, which can be defined as leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having a child.[46]

Second, the breakdown of the family includes the growing relational chasm between parents and teens. The growing relational chasm between parents and teens have caused what Chap Clark titles "systemic abandonment." Clark defines the term "systemic abandonment": "In every system and structure, organization and institution, we have literally left our kids adrift in a growing tempest without the power or compass to help them navigate their way around through the storms that life will throw at them."[47] The culture has taken a dramatic shift from encouraging the family to spend time together to seeing the family as an obstacle, which hinders one's production at work. Sadly, it is easy for parents to underestimate their importance in their child's life and willingly busy them with activity instead of relationship. It is common for parents to sign their children up to participate in different organizations (sports, dance, scouts, music, drama, clubs), which

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[44]Ibid.

[45]Kinnamon, *You Lost Me*, 22

[46]Ibid., 46-47.

[47]Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a MySpace World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 73.

is not wrong done in with the correct perspective (that these activities supplement what is going on at home, not replace it). These adult driven programs, systems, or institutions were never intended to replace the role of parents. Often times these programs, systems, or institutions are more concerned with the adult's agenda, needs, and dreams, which creates hurt in the child. Chap Clark writes about the hurt inflicted on a child when the parental support looks toward other organizations to fulfill the parental role:

> We have evolved to the point where we believe driving is support, being active is love, and providing any and every opportunity is selfless nurture. We are a culture that has forgotten how to be together. We have lost the ability to spend unstructured down time. Rather than being with children in creative activities at home or settings them free to enjoy semisupervised activities such as "play," we as a culture have looked to outside organizations and structured agendas to fill their time and dictate their lives. . . . The systemic pressure on American children is immense. Too many of us actually enjoy the athletic, cultural, or artistic babysitting service provided by those organizations. Even with the best of intentions, the way we raise, train, and even parent our children today exhibits attitudes and behaviors that are simply subtle forms of parental abandonment.[48]

The culture is slowly eroding the family by communicating the message of "more, more, more" to parents. The message of "more, more, more" distracts parents to focus on the temporary instead of the eternal. The hearts of children are screaming "more, more, more," but it is about desiring a parent's time instead of their toys.

Smorgasbord Spiritually

The second external ingredient the culture uses to affect the heart of teenagers is the smorgasbord spiritually it presents to teens. The culture in the 1960s made a drastic change in worldview from modernism to postmodernism. Modernistic worldview has its origin during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. The general concept was that right and wrong were absolutes and objective truth could be known.[49] The postmodern worldview, which is widely prevalent especially among teenagers, believes objective and

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[48]Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 31.

[49]Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, 51.

transcendent truth cannot be known, instead it is discovered or invented by the individual.[50] Therefore, the religious climate among teens is a melting pot of beliefs, ideas, concepts, and experiences. Teenagers are highly religious, but they do not hold to the Christian orthodox tenants of the faith.

The dominant religion of today's American teenager is a concept developed by Smith and Denton in their book *Soul Searching*, called "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." Smith and Denton conducted thousands of interviews with teenagers from across America and developed a five-point creed based on their findings to describe the belief system of "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism":

> 1) A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. 2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. 5) Good people go to heaven when they die.[51]

The disturbing reality of the findings of Smith and Denton is the religious climate of the culture has already greatly affected the spiritual life of teenagers. According to the research by Smith and Denton, before the church is too hard on teenagers, it is appropriate to examine the belief system of parents because research reveals that teens are responding or reacting to what they are being exposed to by adults:

> In most cases teenage religion and spirituality in the United States are much better understood as largely reflecting the world of adult religion, especially parental religion, and are in strong continuity with it. Few teenagers today are rejecting or reacting against the adult religion into which they are being socialized. Rather, most are living out their religious lives in very conventional and accommodating ways.[52]

The disturbing realization is that the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism belief system, which a majority of teens embrace, has been passed down from parents to their children.

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[50]Ibid.

[51]Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-63.

[52]Ibid., 170

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Researchers are concluding that the next generation becomes what the previous generations both taught and modeled. For example, of adults in the age category of 42 plus (the Boomers and Elders), which acknowledge a commitment to Jesus, only 9 percent hold to a biblical worldview.[53] The confusing aspect of the teenage culture is that 80 percent ascribe to a belief in God.[54] Researchers are discovering that around 32 percent believe not in the God of the Bible, but are ascribing belief to a moralistic, therapeutic, deistic deity.[55] The clarifying question to ask is, "When you say you believe in God, would you define the God you are talking about having belief in?"

The Narcissism Epidemic

The third external ingredient the culture uses to influence the heart of a teenager is bombarding him or her with a narcissist message. Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell in their book, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, offer a list of synonyms for the word narcissism, which included arrogance, conceit, vanity, grandiosity, self-centeredness, and lastly they love themselves too much.[56] The culture is obsessed with the word "self" and the next generation will not be immune to the addiction with oneself. Self-help books have promoted the teaching of self-love, self-esteem, and self-image as the cure-all and their message is "believe in yourself and anything is possible."[57] The teaching of self-love, self-esteem, and self-image is faulty because it directs the human heart inward upon

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[53]Kinnamon and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 76. "A person with a biblical worldview believes that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and he still rules it today, salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned, Satan is real, a Christian has a responsibility to share his or her faith in Christ with other people, the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches, unchanging moral truth exists, and such moral truth is defined by the Bible." Ibid., 75.

[54]Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 41.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in The Age of Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 15.

[57]Ibid., 18.

self not outward toward God.

The prominent teaching of self-love, self-esteem, and self-image has created among young people a mentality of self-admiration. Self-admiration is about a person meeting their need to be loved, accepted, and important. Many well-meaning parents have accepted a psychological-need theory and are parenting their children by this theory. A psychological-need theory is the concept that people are empty and have a God-given need for relationship with God who will fill the empty cup (Christ will meet their felt needs).[58] Therefore, parents begin the process of attempting to fill their child's felt needs with all good virtues such as love, belonging, acceptance, worth, and respect. For example, A common phrase often communicated from parents to children is, "God doesn't make junk." The statement resonates because it communicates love, acceptance, and importance. However, the danger occurs when the person of Christ is only about meeting psychological needs. Gradually, the child begins to learn simply to use God to get what they want so they will be happy. Ed Welch, in his book *When People Are Big and God is Small*, writes, "The good news of Jesus is not intended to make us feel good about ourselves. Instead, the good news humbles us."[59] Twenge and Campbell in their research affirm how parents are unintentionally passing down a destructive attitude to their children:

> Treating your child as if he's Christ, singing "I am special," and wearing a shirt that says "Too Cool 4 You" instills narcissism, not basic self-worth. America has

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[58]Ed Welch, *When People Are Big and God is Small*: *Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), 144. Jay Adams provides clarity on the origin of the needs base theory, "Psychologist Alfred Adler, Carl Rodgers, Abraham Maslow were the founding proponents of the needs based theory, which is widely accepted teaching that a person may achieve fulfillment only when his needs for security and significance were met. Adler and Maslow both have a list of hierarchy of needs for one to achieve self-actualization. The hierarchy of needs pyramid is predicated on the lower level being met before moving on to the next level." Jay E. Adams, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, and Self-Image* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1986), 31-33.

[59]Welch, *When People Are Big*, 146.

overdosed on self-admiration, and our "wonder drug" comes with serious side effects such as arrogance and self-centeredness. In the rush to create self-worth, our culture may have opened the door to something darker and more sinister.[60]

The humanistic worldview concern with loving oneself, having a positive self-image, and attaining a high self-esteem, is destroying the next generation. The practical message teenagers understand and are applying is until one's needs are met they cannot love or serve other people. Jay Adams states the result of a society accepting the psychology need-based theory brilliantly in his book, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, and Self-Image*: "God or man is loved in order to satisfy the needs of the one doing the loving."[61] The result of a society continuing to parent from a needs-based philosophy is the creation of entitlement among the next generation. According to the research done by Twenge and Campbell, the next generation has unrealistically high expectations for themselves: "In 2000, 50% of high school students expected to attend law, medical, dental, or graduate school, double the expectations of students in the 1970's. However, the number of people who actually attain these degrees have not changed."[62] The fascination with self has reached a whole new level with the Internet, because now teenagers can promote themselves 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Changing Technology Increases Access

Teenagers are on the cutting edge of new technological developments. The culture targets teenagers with its message through various media outlets (movies, magazines, television, and music) but none is more influential than the Internet. The last external ingredient the culture uses to influence the heart of teenagers is the emerging new digital technology, which provides a teenager with unlimited access to the Internet. The Internet has become the vehicle a teenager uses to connect with their world and those

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[60]Twenge and Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 17.

[61]Adams, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem*, 34.

[62]Twenge and Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 35-36.

around them. Digital devices such as personal computers, tablets, iPads, mobile devices and smartphones, which make the Internet accessible, have changed the landscape of the culture making information only a click away. Research by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2005 labeled 8 to 18 year-olds as "Generation M" (for Media).[63] According to the recent research by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2009, "Young people today live media-saturated lives, spending and average of nearly seven hours and thirty eight minutes a day with the media."[64]

The concern for parents in this new digital age is the profound influence the culture is having on teenagers. Teenagers are being exposed to the culture's worldview at a faster rate than in the past. The culture's worldview has a tremendous influence on a teenager's beliefs, values, decisions, and behavior. Teenagers are on social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), media sites (YouTube, Netflix, and Hulu) and computer gaming at an increasing rate in larger part due to the development of the smartphone. The development of the smartphone has created a different challenge for parents to become technologically astute. Researcher David Kinnamon from the Barna Group cites, "Smartphones have apps for locating Thai food, checking the weather, watching a movie, sending and receiving money, listening to music, shopping, blogging, tweeting, and even finding sexual hookups within a five-mile radius of your location. [65] The Pew Research Center in 2012 found, "78% of teens now have a cell phone, and almost half (47%) of those own smartphones. That translates into 37% of all teens who have smartphones, up from just 23% in 2011."[66] The study also discovered that one out of four

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[63]Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, 79.

[64]Victoria Rideout, Donald F. Roberts, and Ulla G. Foehr, *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-olds: Executive Summary* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010) 2.

[65]Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 43.

[66]Mary Madden et al., *Teens and Technology 2013* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2013) 2.

teenagers are "cell-mostly" Internet users.[67] Technological advancements will continue to occur at a constant rate making information quickly and easily accessible for teenagers. Recently, other technological advancements such as Skype and FaceTime, which require Internet access, have become the new normal modes for communication among teens. These technological developments present parents with new challenges that previous generations did not encounter. Parents will have to instruct their teenager concerning how to use modern technology with wisdom because it can be used for either edification or self-gratification.

An Overview of Five Parental Books

A number of parenting books and resources are available for parents to use during the teenager years to help them engage and enhance their relationship with their teenager. Parents desire for their teenager to make the transition into adulthood and become a positive contributor to the world around them. These resources often vary greatly in content, quantity, biblical truth, and ease of use, but the end goal is to help the teenager mature into adulthood. In particular, the following books are presented and evaluated: *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic* by Foster Cline and Jim Fay, *Boundaries with Teens* by John Townsend, *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers* by Gary Chapman, *Teen-ology* by Jim Burns), and *The DNA of Parental-Teen Relationships* by Gary Smalley and Greg Smalley. First, the author's model of parenting will be explained followed by examples of how their approach addresses real life situations. Lastly, the strength and weakness of the author's approach will be evaluated. Based upon this research, the necessary components for a comprehensive, biblical, and user-friendly parenting resource should be identified.

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[67]Ibid.

Parenting Teens with Love and Logic
by Foster Cline and Jim Fay

  Parenting Teens with Love and Logic is written by a psychiatrist and school principal about how to prepare adolescents to become responsible adults. The parenting model presented in the book is based on two words, love and logic. It is important to define what the author means by love and logic. First, the authors explains their definition of love: "Love means maintaining a healthy relationship with our teens, empowering them to make their own decisions, to live with their own mistakes, and to grow through the consequences."[68] Second, the authors define the word logic: "Logic centers on the consequences themselves."[69] The premise of the philosophy of love and logic parenting is that teenagers should know they are loved by their parents, but because of that love a parent will not protect a teen from the consequences their actions deserve. Foster and Fay offer nine principles to the reader on how to apply the love and logic parenting approach:

> 1) Responsible teens feel good about themselves, 2) Responsibility is caught, not taught, 3) Teens should own their problems and their solutions, 4) Neutralizing teen arguing keeps the focus on them, 5) Gaining control through choices, 6) Setting limits through thinking words, 7) empathy plus consequences equals success, 8) Consequences don't have to be immediate, 9) Building a lifelong relationship.[70]

After defining and explaining the nine principles of love and logic, the authors show parents how to display empathy with consequences toward their teenagers. The authors address thirty-nine common problems parents meet during the teenage years. For example, one common problem mentioned is dating. The authors provide the following when discussing dating with your teen: "Dating and intimacy can lead to sexual involvement. Before you take such a step, you need to decide for yourself if having sex before marriage is a wise choice. Act responsibly, and the consequences of your decision

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   [68]Cline and Fay, *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic*, 14.

   [69]Ibid.

   [70]Ibid., 49-51.

will be easier to live with."[71] The objective of the parenting approach is for the teenager to achieve independence from their parents and make responsible decisions as they enter adulthood. A parent achieves the objective by lovingly allowing their teenager to experience the natural consequences of their choices.

The strength of the parenting model explained in *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic* is the authors' intention of preparing teenagers to be responsible adults. The parenting principles of love and logic have merit. For example, parents have a responsibility to love their children and teach them the principle of consequences of their actions. However, the weakness of the parenting philosophy of love and logic is the thinking consequences are the greatest teacher to change behavior. The faulty premise of the book is that it uses techniques to change behavior, which does not go far enough to provide lasting change. For example, a teenager who experiences enough of his/her consequences will change because, through the experience, they will be able to solve their own problems while the parent empathizes with them. A teenager cannot solve their own problems, instead they have to be directed to something outside of themselves.

Boundaries with Teens
by John Townsend

Boundaries with Teens is written to help parents understand when to say "yes" and when to say "no" by drawing clear boundaries with the teenager. The author describes the objective of parenting with boundaries when he writes, "Helping teens learn responsibility and self-control so that they can use freedom appropriately and live well in the real world. To do this, parents must help teens learn boundaries."[72] Townsend's parenting model consists of implementing the principle of boundaries into parenting.

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[71]Ibid., 206.

[72]Townsend, *Boundaries with Teens*, 11.

Therefore, it is significant to define the term boundaries according to the author's definition:

> Simply put, boundaries are one's personal property line. They are how you define yourself, say who you are and who you are not, set limits, and establish consequences if people are attempting to control you. When you say "no" to someone's bad behavior, you are setting a boundary.[73]

Townsend explains and applies the boundaries principle throughout the four parts of his book. First, the book challenges the parent to establish personal boundaries (when you are going to say "yes" and "no"). Second, the book describes the world of adolescence (what they are thinking and feeling). Third, the book shows how to implement boundaries with a teenager. Lastly, the book mentions a variety of problems and offers advice to the parent about how to handle them. For example, one common issue is the use of cell phones. The following advice was given for parents to set boundaries on their teens cell phone usage: "Don't pick up the phone if it is interrupting you while you are doing homework, doing chores, eating a meal, or doing something else with the family."[74] Parenting with boundaries attempts to teach the teen to have internal control rather than parental control by having consequences when established rules or broken.

The strength of the boundaries parenting model is the overall objective for parents to help teenagers have self-control and be responsible for their actions. Boundaries provide clarity in structure and expectations for both the parent and the teenager. However, the weakness of the boundaries parenting model is the emphasis only on the behavior. The potential danger of focusing only on the behavior is that it relies too heavily on rules and consequences instead motivation.

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[73]Ibid., 12.

[74]Ibid., 252.

The Five Love Languages of Teenagers
by Gary Chapman

The Five Love Languages of Teenagers presents a parenting model built on the foundation of love. Chapman argues in the book the most significant influence on a teenager's life is whether or not a teen feels loved by their parents. The book's objective is to help parents love their teenager more effectively. Chapman writes, "I believe that if this need [love] is met, it will profoundly affect the behavior of the teenager. At the root of much teenage misbehavior is a teen's empty love tank."[75] According to Chapman, the problem is that parents do not understand how to effectively communicate love to their teenager. *The Five Love Languages* are presented and explained as 1) Words of Affirmation, 2) Physical Touch, 3) Quality Time, 4) Acts of Service, and 5) Gifts. The parent's responsibility is to discover which love language makes their teen feel loved. Once parents understand how their teen receives love, they begin communicating love to their teen based upon their primary love language (how they feel loved). The outcome for parents would be as they fill up the teenager's empty emotional tank with love, the teenager would be able to navigate through the teen years into a healthy young adult.

The Five Love Languages of Teenagers does provide parents with a couple of important takeaways. The strength of the love language model to parenting is the importance it places on love. David Powlison, in his book *Seeing with New Eyes*, summarizes a couple of strengths to the love language approach: "Love is expressed in many different forms. People experience being loved in many different ways. People tend to demonstrate love to another in the same way they want to receive it, whether or not they are speaking that other person's language."[76] The weakness of the love language paradigm is constructed on a faulty premise because it plays to self-interest (if I scratch

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[75]Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*, 12.

[76]David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 225.

your back, you will scratch my back).[77] The faulty premise communicates that a teenager is an empty tank waiting to be filled. However, the biblical picture describes all of humanity as full of their own selfish interest.

The DNA of Parent-Teen Relationships:
Discover the Key to Your Teen's Heart
by Gary Smalley and Greg Smalley

The DNA of Parent-Teen Relationships teaches parents two significant principles to apply when engaging the hearts of teenagers. The two principles are to increase honor and decrease anger. The principles of increasing honor and decreasing anger are practical implications from the two great commandments Jesus gave: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39). The author's list three specific objectives in the area of increasing honor: "1) Helping parents and teens to highly honor God. 2) Helping parents and teens to highly honor others. 3) Helping parents and teens to highly honor themselves."[78] The book provides practical insight on how to address a variety of topics with a teenager such as anger, conflict, responsibility, trails, sexuality, personal convictions, rebellion, and leaving home. The book contains a helpful study guide at the end for parents to work through the material presented in each chapter.

The strength of *The DNA of Parent-Teen Relationships* is the plethora of material the authors provide for the parent in each chapter. The chapters consist of biblical references, personal stories, research concerning each topic, and practical advice to show parents how to engage their teen are some of the positive of this resource. The book does make some good observations and offers decent advice, but it leaves the parent in a

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[77]Ibid., 230.

[78]Smalley and Smalley, *The DNA of Parent-Teen Relationships*, 11.

position of behavior management. The subtitle of the book communicates, *Discover the Key to Your Teen's Heart*, but it under-delivers on its promise because it never addresses the teen's desires, wants, longings, or motivation.

Teen-ology: The Art of Raising Great Teenagers by Jim Burns

Teen-ology is written to parents of teenagers to both educate and encourage them in parenting their teen. The book informs parents about the teenage culture and then exhorts them to lead. Jim Burns communicates that the objective for parents during the teenage years "is to build up your children's character and to help them become responsible adults."[79] According to Burns, there are certain components a parent should implement in order to raise teenagers with character and responsibility: express expectations, set high standards, and hold them accountable.[80] The book suggest for parents to create a contract with their teen. The contract would include the issue, expectations, and accountability, positive and negative consequences. Lastly, the book addresses fifteen common problems (such as eating disorders, drugs and alcohol abuse, cyber bulling, etc.) and offers practical solutions to these problems.

The strength of *Teen-ology* is the overall challenge given for parents to be involved in the spiritual development of their teen. Burns understands the importance for parents to be pro-active versus re-active and emphasizes the significance for the parents to be together in their parenting. The book provides parents with helpful tools such as creating a contract with the teen. The book helps a parent become aware of destructive symptoms, but only offers techniques to stop the behavior. Expectations, high standards, or accountability while beneficial, was never enough to change the human heart.

[79]Burns, *Teen-ology*, 35.

[80]Ibid., 37.

The Necessary Components of a Comprehensive
Parenting Model for Teenagers

During the teenage years parents have the tendency to parent by establishing clear expectations, rules, and consequences if those rules are broken. Parents should have clear expectations, rules, and consequences if those rules are broken, but these methods are not sufficient to produce lasting change. A parenting model, which only addresses expectations, rules and consequences attempt to regulate good behavior and punish bad behavior. A teen may learn to be a compliant rule keeper but he/she never understands the origin of their problem. Parents are tempted to apply techniques and strategies for controlling behavior because they offer temporary effectiveness. Numerous parents settle for parenting according to the Nike way, "Just do it!"[81] However, behavior modification misses the most important aspect of parenting, the heart.

A comprehensive parenting model for teenagers begins with parents addressing the teen's heart. Biblically, the heart is what determines life direction, behavior, thoughts, desires, wants, and longing.[82] Jeremy Pierre in his dissertation describes four helpful categories as it relates to the heart:

> The uses of heart can be divided into at least four lexical categories: first, the heart is where feelings and emotions, desires and passions reside (affection). Second, the heart is the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection (cognition). Third, the heart is the seat of the will, the source of resolves (volition). And fourth, the heart is supremely the one center in man to which God turns and from which man turns to God by faith (relationality).[83]

The heart is crucial for parents to address because it is the moral compass of human behavior (affections, cognitive, and volition). The heart is the place of human motivation,

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[81]Tripp, "What is 'Success?'" 13.

[82]David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and "Vanity Fair,'" *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 36.

[83]Jeremy Paul Pierre, "'Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart' The Centrality of Faith in Christ to the Restoration of Human Functioning" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 35.

and behavioral sins find their root in the heart not the social environment.[84] Therefore, the primary problem for parents is addressing the sinful heart of their teenager. The sinful and self-exalting heart of teenagers leads them away from worshipping the one true God to the false worship of self. A sinful heart fixates upon something else to fulfill its desire to be self-sufficient.[85] The result of a self-sufficient heart is idolatry. In her book *Idols of the Heart*, Elyse Fitzpatrick says, "Idols aren't just stone statues. No, idols are thoughts, desires, longings, and expectations that we worship in place of the true God. Idols cause us to ignore the true God in search of what we think we need."[86] The problem of idolatry begins and finishes with worship. G. K. Beale in his book *We Become What We Worship* summarizes how worship influences idolatry: "What people revere, and they resemble, either for ruin or restoration."[87] As parents attempt to address the heart of their teenager, they will have to confront the common teen idols of acceptance, appearance, and possessions.

At Fellowship Bible Church, a twelve-week program was implemented to help parents to be biblically-equipped to engage their teenager's heart with the gospel. During the twelve-week program, parents learned the importance of their role and responsibility as well as were given biblical instruction on how to address the heart of their teenager with the gospel. The program began by presenting biblical hope and encouragement for parenting. Sadly, many parents can become paralyzed by fear or disappointment to engage their teenager. They simply give up! Session 2 defined and explained the biblical roles and responsibilities of parents. This session laid the biblical foundation of parenting

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[84]Powlison, "Idols of the Heart," 38.

[85]Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 147.

[86]Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 23.

[87]G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 16.

by answering the question: What is a parent supposed to do? Session 3 described the difference between behavior modification and parenting the heart. This session also taught that heart change begins with an understanding of the gospel followed by daily trusting in it. If a teen does not come to trust in the gospel a parent has to continue to present the good news to their teen. Discipleship cannot occur until the teenager places his or her trust in the person of Christ for salvation. Sessions 5 through 12 addressed common problem areas for teenagers. Parents were shown how to respond biblically by engaging their teenager's heart with their need for the gospel regarding issues such as identity, communication, dating and sex, money, substance abuse and eating disorders, technology, friends, and depression.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of time, the essence of the faith is the ability of the current generation to pass it down to the next generation. God entrusted parents with the role and responsibility to be the primary influence in their children's life. A parent is like a prophet of old, calling their children to come out of darkness and experience the kindness of God. The church is full of parents who have great intentions but were never taught how to direct their child's affection to the person of Christ. The parenting model of addressing a teenager's heart would provide a tremendous amount of hope in the midst of challenging years. Parents would be encouraged to go the Scriptures for guidance and direction instead of using shame, guilt, and manipulation with their teens. Pastors and churches need to work toward strengthening the family by helping parents through a program that is both biblical and practical. Malachi communicates the intended desire for a biblical parenting approach when he writes, "And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Mal 4:6).

CHAPTER 4

ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR A HOLISTIC
PARENTING PROGRAM

Introduction

Research shows that the church has a limited amount of time to influence the

spiritual growth of teenagers (typically a Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday

night format). Since the church's time with the next generation is limited, the church

must be strategic concerning how they use the time. For various reasons, the reality is

that an alarming number of teenagers (more than half) who once were involved in the

church stop attending when they enter adulthood. The spiritual vitality of Christianity has

always been predicated on the effectiveness of passing the faith to the next generation.

Today, a majority of parents are not engaged in the process of discipling their children

and instead leave it to church professionals. Often times, when a parent does engage the

child to grow spiritually it is presented in the form of behavior modification versus

directing their hearts to the person of Christ. The sober truth about Christianity is if God

is out of the equation, it is one generation from extinction. However, since Jesus is in

charge of building the church, the Christian faith has been able to endure from generation

to generation and will continue until His return. Due to the demographics of the area and

the current number of families (both who are and will be parenting teenagers) at

Fellowship Bible Church, the church recognized the need to partner strategically with

parents. Therefore a parent program was established, which by design partnered the

church with parents of teenagers. The church retained the age-organized student ministry

but was intentional about engaging parents by embracing their responsibility to be the

primary disciplers and offer a biblical plan for their teenager's spiritual development.[1] The plan the church provided to parents was a holistic parenting program. A holistic parenting approach is one that addresses all the areas of the heart: (1) cognitive, (2) volition, and (3) affection. One of the advantages of a holistic parenting program is the ability it provides to equip parents not only to disciple their own teen, but to become mentors for other parents in the future. This chapter reports the implementation of this ministry project at Fellowship Bible Church.

This project attempts to address the need for a holistic parenting approach. The focus on this project is for parents to have the confidence to engage their teenager's heart with the truths of the gospel and then be able to communicate its implications in their daily life. A parent cannot change the heart of their teenager. The teenager's heart will begin to experience change when he or she begins to understand and then acknowledge their need for the person of Christ. This project attempts to equip parents with the adequate biblical training to understand their biblical responsibility and assist them on how to implement it daily with their teenagers. Prior to this project, sufficient training was lacking for parents at Fellowship Bible Church. The only biblical input of parenting came from an occasional message on a Sunday morning.

One of the objectives of this project was to provide an opportunity for parents to receive encouragement and affirmation regarding their biblical roles and responsibility toward their teenager. The general response toward parenting teenagers is one of fear. This project's goal was to be intentional about helping parents replace an attitude of fear with trusting in the person of Christ. In order to accomplish this purpose, the parenting program was strategic in using a small group approach. Throughout the project, parents were divided into small groups according to the age of their teenager. The small group approach

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[1]Jay Strother, "Family Equipping Ministry Church and Home as CoCampions," in *Perspectives On Family Ministry 3 Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 144.

allowed the parents to not only be encouraged by Scripture, but also by each other.

Another objective was to create a biblical parenting approach, which emphasized not only behavioral issues, but also how to address the behavior from a heart perspective. The goal was to be as comprehensive as possible, however, some topics could not be included within the fourteen-week timeframe. Therefore, the most pertinent topics were selected: (1) the gospel, (2) identity, (3) communication, (4) money, (5) sex and dating, (6) self-abuse, (7) technology, (8) peer pressure, and (9) depression. The topics were not simply defined, but motives were attached to the topics in order to help parents understand what their teenager was wanting or longing for when engaging each topic. Biblical instructions for each topic were given concerning how to address the desires, wants, or longings of the teen.

The parenting program was to be user-friendly. The intent of the program was for the parents to experience community with other parents in a small group setting. The application of the project took place as the parent took the material home and discussed it with their teenager. Each lesson included a specific agenda for the session, a clearly define topic, appropriate scriptural references for each topic, discussion questions, and homework assignments. The parenting program lasted one and a half hours because it coincided with the student ministry meetings on Sunday night.

The final objective of this project was to have a minimum of two married couples with teenagers to be trained and equipped to lead other parenting classes in the future. These married couples needed to have a healthy and growing marriage. They had to be intentional about engaging their teenager's heart with the gospel at home. They also needed to have a passion to engage other parents with the material they learned.

Prayerfully, if these objectives were achieved, the spiritual vitality of the next generation would visibly change at Fellowship Bible Church. Parents would not engage in behavior modification, but in instructing and training their teenager's heart toward the person of Christ. Only the Spirit of God can prompt a teenager's heart to be receptive to

the gospel. Therefore, a parent's responsibility is to be faithful once they understand their roles and responsibility to apply biblical principles to the heart of their teenager. This project was undertaken because of the biblical mandate for parents to faithfully instruct and train their teenager and the results are for God's glory and honor.

Phase I

Parent Survey

Phase I of this project consisted of data gathering. First, parents received a written letter that described the details of the class regarding timeframe, content, and expectation. Then a phone call was made to answer any questions and encourage parents to attend. Once the parents committed to attending the class, a pre-project survey was given to them to fill out. The intent of the pre-project survey was to measure the parent's current attitude regarding their teen, the understanding of their biblical role, and their confidence to implement their biblical role with their teen. Parents were told at the beginning of the project that they would be assigned to a small group based on the age of their teen. If the parents had more than one teenager, they could select in which small group to participate; the class would be more beneficial for them to process the content together versus separate. When they signed up for the class it was with the understanding that the information given during the class was to be applied in the home (accountability was built in during the small group time each week). Two parenting classes were offered on Sunday to coincide with the student ministry times: (1) middle school parents 5:00 to 6:30, and (2) high school parents 7:00 to 8:30.

The majority of the parents who participated in the class were age 41 to 50. The number of years parenting teenagers ranged from 0 to 20, with an average of 5 years. The pre-project survey revealed that the parents at Fellowship Bible Church could accurately articulate their biblical responsibility as a parent. The pre-project survey recorded that parents wrote down words such as instruct, teach, train, and guide their teenager toward the Lord to describe their biblical responsibility. The survey revealed

that a significant number of parents understood that Scripture taught their role regarding parenting: to be a coach, teacher, and counselor to their teenager.

However, the pre-survey revealed a discrepancy between a parent's knowledge of what God expected and the competency to faithfully engage in the spiritual development in crucial areas a teenager encounters. The pre-project survey showed that parents typically rated themselves low when describing their confidence in engaging their teenagers in the areas of the gospel, identity, communication, sex and dating, self-harm, money, technology, peer pressure, and depression. The pre-project survey revealed the common obstacle that hindered parents from fulfilling their biblical responsibilities: they did not know how to apply the Scriptures to the life of their teenager. The goal of this project was to address this need with the intent of training parents to be competent on how to engage their teen with the gospel.

The parents' general attitude regarding their teenager was positive. The majority of parents felt optimistic about the challenges the teenager years present. Parents who articulated having fear when it came to parenting their teen consisted of three primary issues: addressing conflict, knowing what to say or how to communicate, and watching their teen make destructive choices.

Overall, the parent pre-project survey was helpful in distinguishing how to equip the parents at Fellowship Bible Church. The survey revealed a couple of noteworthy observations. The parents were interested in learning how to engage their teenager's heart with the gospel. They communicated that they predominately default to lecturing when discussing an issue with their teenager. The overarching reason is because they have difficulty asking their teen probing questions, which would reveal the teen's heart or motives behind the behavior. The last noteworthy observation was that parents seldom pray with their spouse for their teenagers. This was crucial feedback to attain because the project can incorporate built in time for parents to pray with their spouse for the heart of their teen. Parents can faithfully teach, train, and instruct, but the Lord causes

the heart to change: "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (Jas 5:16b).

Mentor Group

One of the objectives of the project was to train other couples to assist with the implementation of the parenting class. The ideal goal was for each class to have one couple to serve as a mentor (two mentors would be equipped). The mentor role involved helping lead some of the sessions in the short-term, and long-term be able to lead the class by themselves. The rationale to have mentor couples was two-fold: (1) to equip other parents: "To equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12), and (2) to reproduce or multiply: "Entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2).

A criterion was established to help in the selection of the mentor couples. The couples had to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and should not be a recent convert. The couple had to display the implications of the gospel in their marriage by how they interacted with each other. Their marriage should be characterized as spiritually growing and living at peace with each other. It was important for the couple to be placing themselves in environments where they would continue to grow, such as (1) regularly attending church, (2) attending a small group ministry, and (3) serving in the church body. The couples needed to have a teenager in the home or have already raised their child or children. The mentor couples had to be in agreement with the biblical principles of parenting taught throughout the lessons. Ideally, the couple was already implementing these biblical principles within the context of their home. Since most parents do not even realize that their current parent philosophy is behavior modification, they will have to be receptive to changing their approach. Lastly, it was imperative the couples had a passion to come alongside other parents and were willing to offer both time and biblical insight on parenting from a heart perspective.

The mentor couples had to agree on an additional training time apart from the fourteen-week parenting class. Since Fellowship Bible Church does not have a Sunday

school program in the morning, it was decided to have the apprentice couple training time on Sunday morning before the worship service. The mentor couples for each class (middle and high school) would meet together for one hour from 8:30am to 9:30am with the youth pastor. Currently, Fellowship Bible Church is a portable church meeting in a school; while parents were in the training time, the children were able to help with various Sunday morning setup procedures. The training intent was to be sensitive to the parents' time and cover the material in a manner the mentor couples would feel adequately trained. Therefore, the duration of the training on Sunday morning covered a six-week time period where two lessons per week were discussed prior to the lesson given to the parent participants. The couples received a binder of the fourteen-week parent class two weeks before the training began in order for them to read ahead on the content.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of this project was the development of a parenting program that engages the heart of a teenager with the gospel. The goal of the parenting program was to be an encouraging and hopeful experience, instill competency in parents on how to address the heart, be user-friendly, and develop others parents to facilitate the class in the future. The parenting program consisted of thirteen sessions. The program's first four lessons laid a foundation for parenting, which involved hope, encouragement, biblical responsibilities, and the biblical principles of parenting from the heart. Lessons 5 through 12 offered training for the parent to gain competency on implementing a biblical approach to parenting a teen's heart by addressing eight common topics parents encounter during the teen years. Each lesson included a clearly defined topic, Scripture references corresponding to the topic, discussion questions, and reading and homework to be completed at home. The youth pastor and the selected mentor couple facilitated different aspects of each lesson.

Session 1 to 4

Sessions 1 and 2 were combined over a two-week period and covered the same

topic of encouragement and hope. Session 1 consisted of gathering data from the parents. The questions were about current parenting philosophy, attitude regarding their teen, hopes and dreams for their teen, greatest fear when it comes to their teen, areas of difficulty about trust God with their teen, etc. Session 1 concluded with reminding the parents of the promise that they are not alone when it comes to parenting. The lesson reminded parents that encouragement and hope were found in the character of God, as well as within the community of other parents. The common temptation when parents feel alone is to become fearful in the parenting process instead of trusting in the nature of God. Parenting by fear manifests itself in control, manipulation, guilt, shame, anger, bribing, and appeasing. The topic of trust was discussed because parenting tangibly reveals a parent's need to trust in someone other than themselves. Parents were reminded the person of Christ could be trusted in the midst of uncertain circumstances because of His character and love.

Session 2 continued to address the topic of hope and encouragement, which could be found in both relationships with other parents and God's character. The lesson began by asking the parents to discuss specific ways they could consistently encourage each other. Next, the lesson addressed how the character of God offers both hope and encouragement to parents. A selected list of God's attributes was chosen with appropriate Scripture references. The list included attributes such as faithfulness (never leaves me), sufficient (gives me hope), loving (cares for me), holy (perfect when I fail), and sovereign (calms my fears). These attributes were discussed and applied in the context of parenting. Lastly, the lesson mentioned how to respond biblically when expectations of a parent are not meet. For example, several biblical responses for parents are to fight bitterness not God, God understands, resist isolation, be humble, do not compare, keep short accounts, fight for their heart, remember the story is not over, etc.[2]

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[2]Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 171-208.

Session 3 covered the biblical roles and responsibilities of a parent. The lesson addressed both Old and New Testament references. The roles and responsibilities and corresponding references discussed in this lesson were teacher (Deut 6:4-9, Ps 78:5-7), coach (Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4), and counselor (Eph 6:4). Specific questions were asked to help parents create a plan of action to be intentional about implementing biblical roles and responsibilities into their daily routine. Another responsibility of a parent is to create a peaceful atmosphere in the home especially as it relates to their relationship with a child. The lesson concluded by listing specific ways parents could create anger in their child. Parents were encouraged to be conscientious of the list and when they unintentionally or intentionally create anger in their child to ask for forgiveness both from God and their child.

Session 4 discussed a biblical approach to parenting, which involves addressing the inward root issue of a teen instead of focusing on managing their outward behavior. The root issue is placing an emphasis on engaging the heart of a teen with the gospel. Before the lesson covered the importance of addressing the heart, it started by describing the most common approach to parenting. The most common approach to parenting is behavior modification. Behavior modification focuses on a parent exerting techniques and strategies to control the external behavior of a teen. Therefore, a parent rewards good behavior in a tangible manner and punishes bad behavior. Next the lesson challenged the parents to process what is happening in their own hearts. A helpful list of parental desires, longings, and wishes that have the potential to become a source of worship were mentioned for discussion. Lastly, a biblical understanding of the heart was given and its functions described. Parents were presented with helpful questions to ask their teen, which would reveal their source of worship. The significant change occurs when a parent recognizes the teen's behavior is a window into their hearts. Parents were given specific Scripture references, which communicated that behavior flows out of the heart (Mark 7:20; Luke 6:45).

Sessions 5 to 13

Session 5 through 13 began the process of training parents on how to address the heart of their teen with the gospel. The eight sessions covered eight pertinent topics parents encounter during the teenage years and for which they need to have the competency to address with their teen.

Session 5 covered the topic of the gospel. This lesson was the starting point of all the lessons to follow. Parenting teenagers has to begin with parents taking the initiative to share the gospel with their teenager. An understanding of the gospel is foundational for a teenager to experience discipleship by a parent. The lesson was highly evangelistic in content because the majority of teens have bought into a counterfeit gospel. The counterfeit gospels were defined and explained. Once the counterfeit gospels were defined, a presentation of the true gospel was provided for parents to share with their teenager. Ideas were included in the lesson to offer tangible help to parents on communicating a need for the gospel with their teen.

Session 6 contained the topic of identity. The lesson began with the question, "Who am I?" The reality is teenagers run to a variety of places and people to answer the question of identity. A teenager gives a significant amount of thought about their appearance and how they are perceived. The struggle in the heart of a teen is to combat the desire to create or maintain a particular image. The temptation for teenagers as it relates to appearance is they will frequently worship their created image (themselves) instead of God. Therefore, the lesson articulated popular replacement identities where teenagers discover meaning, purpose, and significance apart from a relationship with Christ.

Next, the creation of man and then the fall of man in the garden were discussed to offer a biblical answer to the question, "Who am I?" Biblical principles were presented to help a teen recognize the unsatisfying temptation of self-worship. Self-worship has the destructive potential to make a teenager unaware of their need for God. The lesson explained that the solution to their identity search is found in the person of Christ. Scripture

references, such as 2 Corinthians 5:17 and I Peter 1:18-19, were discussed to explain and demonstrate how the person of Christ provides a teenager with a new identity. Numerous biblical references were given to describe a believer's new identity in Christ.

Session 7 covered the topic of communication. The intent of this lesson was to equip parents to handle conflict with their teen more effectively. Parents were asked to name the top three issues that have the most potential to create conflict with their teen. The typical response to conflict were given and explained. A biblical understanding of why conflict exists was offered based on James 4:1-3. James communicates that conflicts are caused by sinful lust and desires from a selfish heart. Therefore, parents need to have the ability to address the sinful lust and desires of their teen. A biblical model of how to handle conflict was provided, which included (1) listen for what your teenager wants, (2) clarify the teen's wants back to him or her, (3) ask the teen to think about a wise choice they made and the result, and (4) point the teen back to their need for Christ.

Session 8 addressed the topic of sex and dating. Since the subject matter has a plethora of information, it was divided into two sections. The main principle throughout this lesson was that sex and dating was not the problem, lust was. The first section covered sex. A biblical description for the purpose of sex was given with appropriate Scripture references. Next, a biblical view of sexuality was discussed about how sex reveals what is happening in the heart of a person. Scripture references were provided for parents to talk about with their teens on how to combat lustful thoughts, desires, and wants.

The second section covered dating. During the teenage years, lust and love can often be understood as a synonym, when they are actually antonyms. A description of biblical love was given according to 1 Corinthians 13. Questions were provided for parents to ask their teen to evaluate their teen's spiritual growth and maturity as it related to the biblical characteristics of love. One of the homework assignments in the lesson was for the parent and teen to sit down and write out the type of characteristics or qualities he or she should be looking for in the opposite sex. Lastly, a helpful quiz was provided for

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the parent to use with the teenager when the teen shows interest in someone of the opposite sex.

Session 9 discussed the topic of money. Teens have a limited perspective when it comes to the future and struggle with the concept of delayed gratification. Therefore, when it comes to the topic of money, the typical thought consists of "what can I buy me?" Possessions can be a common idol for a teenager. Teens naturally look around and compare what they have or do not have to those around them. The comparison mindset promotes an attitude of greed instead of thankfulness. The lesson on money began with the topic of biblical stewardship. Biblical stewardship teaches that God owns everything and a teenager's responsibility is to be good managers of God's provision. Scripture references on biblical stewardship were given and discussion questions followed. An action plan was provided for parents to assist them in helping their teen put off greed and put on generosity. The action plan included the following steps: (1) create a budget with your teen, (2) teach the teen the value of work, (3) confront their greed with the generosity of the gospel, and (4) communicate the value and implications of a thankful heart.

Session 10 addressed the topic of self-abuse. The lesson on self-abuse covered three important forms: substance abuse, self-mutilation, and eating disorders. Teens often resort to self-abuse as a destructive way to cope with pain or suffering. For each form of self-abuse, the lesson defined the term, described what was causing the destructive behavior, provided a helpful list of warning signs, and gave a biblical response to self-abuse. During the lesson, the teen was taught about the character of God. The lesson explained three characteristics of God using selected Scripture, which would remind the teen about God's character: (1) He is in control, (2) He is good, and (3) He cares. The implication of knowing and believing in God's character was to daily put on trust and put off attempting to control the circumstances. Jesus was the example given because He modeled and demonstrated the correct response when experiencing suffering.

Session 11 covered the topic of technology. Teens today have the accessibility

of all types of information at their fingertips. Teenagers are growing up in a media saturated culture with no sign of slowing down. The lesson on technology was not exhaustive. It concentrated on three frequently used aspects of technology that can lead teenagers to trouble: gaming, social media, and pornography. The lesson provided parents with stats regarding teen usage within each area. The majority of the lesson discussed how a parent should biblically respond to the growing use of technology. A parent should have guidelines and restrictions related to the use technology. However, guidelines and restrictions only monitor the behavior and fall short of penetrating the heart. The lesson helped parents to discuss the root issue of pride with their teen. The result of a prideful mindset is an attitude longing to be autonomous and self-sufficient. The teen was directed to the gospel as the power source for change. Hope was offered in the person of Christ, not a list of rules and restrictions. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Hebrews 4:14-16 were given to help communicate to the teenager that life under God's authority is better than experiencing life alone. A biblical understanding of confession, repentance, and accountability were included in the lesson. A couple of covenants for accountability between the parent and teen were included in the conclusion of the lesson.

Session 12 discussed the topic of peer pressure. The opinions of others, especially peers, can consume the thoughts of a teen. Often times a teen will struggle with the desire for approval from their peers. This desire will result in a teen worshiping at the altar of acceptance of others. A teen seeking acceptance from other people will be highly susceptible to peer pressure because the relationship with the other person is built on a taking versus a giving mindset. The lesson presented a biblical understanding of peer pressure. Peer pressure consists of a person encountering the fear of man. A person who struggles with the fear of man has a desire to please people and he or she lives in fear of rejection from others. A list of characteristics was stated for someone who struggles with the fear of man. A helpful survey was presented for parents to give their teenager that will rate the degree by which their teen struggles with the fear of man. Biblical principles

were provided with Scripture support to enable the parent to communicate the importance of putting off the fear of man and putting on the fear of God.

Session 13 covered the topic of depression. The emotions of a teenager can vary from high to low and anywhere in between depending upon the minute, hour, or day. Emotions can be a good barometer to measure what is happening internally with a teenager. Culture has created a system where teenagers feel pressure to constantly perform and compete to earn their worth/meaning. Culture pressure has led to an increase in focusing on what is best for the individual versus the community. The result is that teenagers are experiencing an increase in depression than in former years. Common words associated with depression are loneliness, despair, sadness, anger, and hopelessness. The typical reaction when teens experience depression is self-pity or self-loathing and despair (hopelessness).

The lesson provided parents with biblical help about how to engage a teenager when they are experiencing symptoms of depression. A definition of depression was provided for the parents to discuss. A list of symptoms of someone who is experiencing depression was offered as a helpful guide. The causes of depression were given, which consist of both circumstances outside of a person's control and inward thoughts or beliefs. Parents were given a biblical response to address depression by attacking the root source, which is unbelief. There are various forms of unbelief, such as not believing in who God is, what He has done, and what He can do. Selected Psalms were used throughout the lesson to describe the emotion of depression and how to biblically respond to it. The selected passages were Psalm 13:1, 22:6, 42:5, 55:4-7, 69:2-3, 88:3, 6, 13-14. Biblical characters were discussed who encountered depression (Abraham, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah). The application of the lesson was for the parents and teen to process their thoughts together when depression is experienced. The outcome would be to create a list of biblical thoughts to combat the lies, which would consist of the teenager preaching the gospel to themselves (2 Cor 10:5). For example, if the teen was experiencing the feeling

of hopelessness, the parent would offer an appropriate scripture to the teen and describe the implications of how the scripture applies to their current circumstances or inward thought pattern (to replace the old unbiblical thought with a new biblical thought).

Phase 3

Participants in the Class

The last week of the project was spent collecting data to evaluate the project's effectiveness by surveying the parents in the class. The identical survey, which was given to the parents at the beginning of the project, was administered again and the results were compared. The comparison measured the change in attitude, knowledge, and competency from the beginning of the project to the completion. The data showed minimum growth in the categories of attitude and knowledge. The survey revealed a substantial growth in the area of competency, which included an increase in confidence about how to address specific issues a teenager encounters by addressing the heart of the teen with the gospel.

Mentor Couples

The project would be a failure without the training of mentor couples to lead the two different classes (one for middle school and the other for high school) in the future. The couples chosen to be mentors were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the parenting class by answering several questions. The answers given to the following questions helped to improve the effectiveness of the parenting class.

First the mentor couples were asked, "What is the greatest need parents of teenagers have?" The answer to this question was unanimous from both couples. They felt the greatest need for parents was knowing that they are not alone in the parenting process. The teenage years are consumed with highs and lows, and a feeling of being alone is scary to parents. These parents wanted each lesson to conclude by drawing the parents back to the principle of not being alone or isolated from others in the parenting process.

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Secondly, the mentor couples were asked, "How has going through the parenting material strengthened your marriage?" The response to this question was insightful because both couple stated that an obstacle to a healthy marriage is raising children. They communicated, based on their experience and hearing from other couples, that many times the parents are not on the same page regarding the parental approach. The material challenged the mentor couples to re-evaluate their own life by being intentional, not only to pursue their teenager's heart, but also to model a godly marriage for their teen. The couples mentioned that a renewed sense of prayer both with each other and their teen was frequently discussed while participating in the parenting program.

Thirdly, the couples were asked, "What was your greatest fear regarding leading others through the parenting class?" A feeling of inadequacy was the main feedback. Each couple did not want to present themselves as having all the answers to the complexities of parenting. Instead, both couples desired to be fellow sojourners for parents to provide hope and encouragement heading in the same direction toward a gracious God. The couples communicated having a fear about how they would handle the response or lack of response by fellow parents. Fear of man was a significant obstacle in both couples to step out and lead.

Fourthly, the mentor couples were asked, "What were the biggest obstacles for parents to attend the parenting class?" The number one reason shared was that they were too busy to attend, which resulted in a lack of desire or vice versa. The second reason was that the class length was too long. The third reason given was pride, meaning they do not see their need for the class because they already know how to disciple their child.

Fifthly, the mentor couples were asked, "What were the strengths and weaknesses of the parenting class?" They mentioned the numerous biblical references, an interactive environment, the homework provided to engage the teen at home, and the list of resources. They appreciated immensely that the presentation of the lessons involved parents currently parenting teenagers themselves or have grown children.

The mentor couples identified several weaknesses in the parenting program. They would have liked for the lesson to include more case studies. The lessons were difficult to complete in the allotted time. Parents wanted a shorter segment of time instead of thirteen weeks without a break. Lastly, they wanted their son or daughter to provide feedback on how they were doing as parents, which the lessons did not originally contain.

The last question asked pertained to gathering feedback on the Sunday morning training time for mentor couples, "What could be improved to equip other parents more effectively to facilitate the parenting class?" The input given was not around the content but around the environment and presentation. The Sunday morning meeting time felt too rushed and more of a monologue than dialogue. The feedback included arranging future training times in a house where the environment was more intimate. The meeting could be conducted around a meal or a dessert, which would help the training to be more conversational. The home atmosphere would also create a more comfortable situation to discuss thoughts, concerns, and implementation of parenting.

Conclusion

As a youth pastor I am aware of the importance of equipping parents to be competent to instruct their son or daughter in the faith. Sadly, until this project, I never took the time to address the need to engage parents with biblical teaching concerning parenting. My dilemma would be parents approaching me and desiring biblical input, but often times it would be in the middle of a crisis. The most popular resources available to parents on the subject of parenting continue to promote a philosophy of behavior modification. The behavior modification approach to parenting is being implemented in churches worldwide and especially in the context of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Parents needed a resource to assist them in attacking the root, not simply the outward signs. A typical parent approach, which involves begging, compromising, bribing, manipulating, controlling, shaming, etc., does not address the greatest need of the teenager. Therefore, I

wanted to provide a comprehensive, biblical and user-friendly resource to help parents engage their teenagers with the gospel. It was a laborious undertaking but worthy of the time and energy.

The survey given to parents before the class began identified that the parents of Fellowship Bible Church desired input on parenting their teenager. The difficulty in compiling the lessons was which topics to address and which to leave out. Thankfully, Scripture has a plethora to say about the topics teenagers encounter, such as peer pressure, identity, sex, dating, communication, money, depression, self-abuse, and technology. Due to the limited weeks of the project, there where topics which I did not have the time to discuss. However, I believe the topics discussed laid a solid foundation moving forward in the ministry to parents.

Hopefully this project will be a catalyst as parents were intentionally encouraged to be equipped not simply by the youth pastor, but alongside other parents who have experienced the opportunity these years provide. The biblical principles learned throughout this project and the community of parents who participated have the potential to give hope and change the current trend of parenting the next generation at Fellowship Bible Church. Previously, the parents were immersed in behavior modification without even realizing it.

During the project, the parenting program at Fellowship Bible Church went from 0 to 2 organized sessions. Two couples were trained to facilitate new groups who show interest in the class. The prayer is for God to continue to use this material to both encourage and equip parents on how to address the heart with the gospel. As parents develop competency in instructing their son or daughter's heart, the reality of Deuteronomy 6:7-9 will be not only be a text, which is read, but a principle daily applied in the homes of the members of Fellowship Bible Church.

CHAPTER 5

A CULMINATION OF PROJECT RESULTS

The emphasis on this project was strategically focused on parents with a concentration on parenting teenagers. Fellowship Bible Church desired to be intentional concerning partnering with parents for engagement and equipping. A parent's role is more than simply taking their teenager to church. The church reinforced the biblical principle that parents are the primary disciple-makers in their teenager's life. However, the church not only reminded the parents of their biblical responsibility, the church provided a venue for the parents to be encouraged and equipped in creating a plan to instruct their teenager in the Lord.

The overall goal of this project was to take specific actions steps as a church to equip parents of teenagers in the aspect of biblical parenting. The intent of the project was two-fold: 1) for parents of Fellowship Bible Church to understand the importance of addressing the heart of their teenager, and 2) for the parents of Fellowship Bible Church to learn how to address the heart of their teenager. The project did not offer parents a strategy or technique to implement, but presented a person to their teenager. The premise of the approach was for parents of Fellowship Bible Church to direct their teenager's heart to their need for the person of Christ regarding all aspects of life. The project was established in the belief that Scripture is sufficient and addresses all of life. Second Peter 1:3 states, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." God has blessed Fellowship Bible Church with a plethora of families with teenagers. The desire of the church is to ensure parents have biblical training regarding how to faithfully engage their teenager with the gospel regardless of their spiritual state (lost or saved).

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip and encourage parents of teenagers at Fellowship Bible Church in order to increase their effectiveness in fulfilling the biblical responsibility of discipling their teenagers by engaging the heart issues of teenagers with the gospel. The biblical understanding of the parenting approach discussed the reality that salvation is a work of God and a response by humanity. However, a parent can still be intentional about engaging their teenager with instruction and training but discipleship does not occur until after salvation. Therefore, parenting begins with evangelism—until a teenager has placed faith/trust/belief in the person of Christ, discipleship cannot happen. A comprehensive and holistic parenting approach was compiled and presented to the parents of teenagers at Fellowship Bible Church. The project equipped parents with lessons in the specific area of biblical parenting. The encouragement of the parents was accomplished by having the parents in a small group setting during the training times. In addition, two couples were trained to facilitate the parenting class in the future. The purpose of the project was completed in full and apprentice couples were trained to facilitate the class in the future.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

The first goal of this project was to provide biblical hope and encouragement to parents of teenagers. Typically during the teenage years, parents are parenting out of fear rather than trust. The desire of this project was to move parents from a mindset of fear to one of trust by offering biblical hope and encouragement to them. To accomplish the goal, the project began by spending the first two weeks discussing a biblical understanding of hope and encouragement. Throughout each of the lessons, the message of hope and encouragement was repeatedly presented for discussion. The message was consistently stated to parents: hope and encouragement is not found in circumstances but in the person of Christ.

Once a biblical understanding of hope and encouragement was presented, the

parents needed an outlet for discussion to receive input from other parents. Dividing the parents into small groups gave them an outlet to receive hope and encouragement from fellow parents. Parents had the opportunity to experience community and the reality that parenting is not a responsibility God gives us to accomplish by ourselves.

The second goal was for parents to understand their God-ordained responsibility to faithfully love, instruct, evangelize and then when they are saved, to disciple their children. This goal was more cognitive in nature. To accomplish this goal, an entire lesson of the project was devoted to a biblical understanding of a parent's biblical role and responsibility regarding their teenager. The lesson selected appropriate Scripture references and explained the God-ordained roles and responsibilities parents have been entrusted with fulfilling. Through the various roles and responsibility of a parent, God desires more than anything for parents to be faithful in the parenting process regardless of the teenager's spiritual state. During each of the following lessons of the project, parents were reminded to continue to be faithful in the good work of parenting even when the results are not desirable.

The third goal was to equip parents with the competency of how to disciple their teenager once he or she was saved by engaging their heart with the gospel. The majority of the project dealt with equipping parents with the skill of biblical discipleship from a heart perspective. To accomplish this goal, topics were selected that teenagers encounter such as identity, peer pressure, dating, sex, technology, etc. During the project, the lesson addressed the selected topics by providing scriptural references, discussion questions, applicable homework assignments, and insight on how to address the topic at the motivational level, not simply behavioral. The completed lessons offered a biblical perspective on how to engage the heart of a teenager with the gospel on each topic.

The fourth goal was personal. I wanted to become a more effective communicator at helping parents fulfill their God-ordained responsibility to shepherd the heart of their teenager. The greatest challenge, but also one of the most rewarding aspects

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of the project, was compiling and presenting each lesson. Compiling the lessons was a laborious process but looking back I am grateful because it sharpened my thinking about the content. As a communicator, I wanted to stay within the ninety-minute timeframe and provide the parents with adequate small group discussion time. The ninety-minute timeframe forced me to think strategically about the presentation. Specifically, how long to spend on each section of the lesson. After the project, I felt confidence in communicating with parents about the necessity of their biblical responsibility of engaging the heart. Overall, the project accomplished all four goals it set out to meet.

Strengths of the Project

The first strength of this project is that its reference point is from a biblical perspective. A humanistic worldview is pervasive throughout culture, evident by all the self-help literature available. However, this project begins and concludes with an emphasis not on self but on God. Human wisdom is inept to produce godly change. Therefore, the paradigm for this project was on confronting parents with God's wisdom from the Scriptures. The project challenged parents to consider God's wisdom on parenting instead of relying on his or her own way of parenting. The topics addressed in the project are not based on man's opinions but on seeking to understand and apply biblical principles to current circumstances parents encounter.

Second, the focus is on the root issue of parenting, the teenager's heart. The most common form of parenting is behavior modification where the emphasis is on the external behavior. This project offered a different approach where the goal was internal versus external. The project did not teach parents a technique or strategy to implement in order to modify external behavior, instead, this project taught parents how to address the internal life world of their teenager, the heart. The project provided practical biblical insight to help parents penetrate their teen's heart with the gospel.

Third, the parenting program was comprehensive in the topics it addressed. Obviously, every issue a teenager encounters could not be addressed in the allotted

fifteen-week time period, however, the topics discussed pertained and were relevant to the life of a teenager. Parents had the opportunity to apply biblical insight and instruction to help their teenager navigate through the landmines of identity, sex, dating, technology, peer pressure, substance abuse, self-abuse, money, and depression. For the parent, each of the topics discussed contained scripture references, discussion questions, homework to engage with the teen, and additional reading.

Fourth, the project offered parents a community to experience encouragement and togetherness. The project gave the parents an opportunity to receive instruction and encouragement from both the youth pastor and other parents. The project helped to dismiss the thinking many parents have, which says, "I am alone!" Parents were given the opportunity to participate in community with other parents in the same season of life. The community aspect of the project created significant synergy between the parents involved.

Lastly, the project heightened the awareness for parents to live life on mission regardless of their season of life. Through the project it became apparent of the incredible need for mentor couples. Timothy writes in 2 Timothy 2:2, "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." One of the strengths of this project was that the couples who participated in the parenting program experienced a passion to share the information they had learned with other parents. For Fellowship Bible Church, exciting days are ahead as parents are not only being equipped but also equipping other parents in biblical parenting.

Weaknesses of the Project

The first weakness of the project was that it did not include enough case studies. The case studies would have given the parents a real life example to address as a group. The studies would have provided additional help to solidify their confidence concerning a particular topic. Parents would have had the opportunity to think through more concretely about how to apply biblical principles to current circumstances with their

teenager. The project provided a biblical framework, but more case studies would have enhanced the discussion between parents concerning implementation.

Secondly, offering specific actions steps for parents to take with their teenager was a weakness of the project. The action steps at the conclusion of each lesson needed to be sharper and more specific. It is easy to articulate the general principles but parents needed help with forming concrete action steps. Often times the actions steps for parents were general and vague.

Thirdly, the project did not use any multi-media during the presentation with the parents. Media has the ability to make a thought, principle, or action memorable. The project lacked the use of an image, song, or a story to stir the affections within parents. The use of media would have enhanced the presentation of the project by making it visually stimulating.

Lastly, it was difficult at times dealing with the sporadic attendance of the parents. The program was created with the intention that as parents continued to participate, trust would be developed and camaraderie established. However, some parents committed to attend but showed up occasionally, which affected their small group time. The over-commitment of parents was widely observed and the effect it had on them to build community with others.

What I Would Do Differently

One of the adjustments I would make to the project would be to make it more visible to the entire church body. The main source of communication was through student ministry forums (social media and sending out letters to current parents). However, moving forward, the parenting class should be communicated on Sunday mornings to the main church body. Church members need a variety of voices calling them to action and the pastor's voice has the potential to be a catalyst for them to answer a call for action. A pastor's challenge coupled with a testimonial by a parent about the class would raise the visibility among church members and peek their curiosity.

One of the objections for parents not to attend the parent program was due to my age (being younger than all of the parents) and the reality of not having teenagers of my own. The objection was never verbalized, but having served the church in the capacity of youth pastor for a number of years I am conscientious of how many parents interpret my position. I believe to overcome this objection it would have been helpful to have a couple, preferably empty nesters, come alongside me and teach the class. I am confident that having an older couple upfront presenting the content with me would have provided additional creditability.

Lastly, moving forward with the parenting program at Fellowship Bible Church I have learned it is important for both parents to be in attendance. The length of the program in terms of consecutive weeks was an obstacle for parents to overcome along with their other responsibilities. Therefore, to make the class more available to the majority of parents, I would intentionally consider the current demands of parents and create appropriate weeks off in the schedule to create margin for them to attend the class. Since the teenage years have the potential to be full, I would do my best to make the class accessible to all who desire to attend.

Theological Reflections

This project is based on the worldview that the Bible is essential and sufficient for all areas of life, including parenting. Therefore, this project confronts parents not with man's opinions or a specific technique about parenting, but with a direct word from the Scriptures. However, the challenge facing parents is the postmodern worldview, which declares autonomy, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance at a relentless pace through a variety of forms. The project brought parents back to a biblical worldview, which has the Scripture as the authority for all of life. The biblical worldview contradicts the natural propensity of humanity and reveals the need for a Savior. Parenting begins with an understanding of whose authority one is going to follow the culture or the Bible. Scripture makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 3:11 the only foundation that is going to last is

built on Christ: "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Therefore, parenting has its beginning in the person of Christ.

Since parenting begins with the person of Christ, it is crucial for parents to understand that their greatest need is not for their teenager to behave but for them (the parents) to have a relationship with Christ. The biblical model of parenting is predicated on the parents having a relationship with Christ to be able to articulate to their children. Recent research has revealed that the majority of parents are not passing on a biblical gospel to their children. Instead, children learn a different gospel from their parents, which includes a moralistic, therapeutic and deistic teaching of the gospel. This gospel is even presented by regular church going parents and is antithetical to the gospel taught in the Scriptures. Paul warns the church in 2 Corinthians 11:4 about this occurring: "For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel form the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough." The church cannot assume parents are correctly understanding the gospel and able to articulate it to their children. Therefore, the church as to continuously provide accurate gospel teaching and implementation for parents. As parents shepherd their children with a dependence upon Christ, instead of trying to fulfill their own desires and wants in their children, the Great Shepherd will change their hearts. Scripture teaches that God's design has always been to pass the faith to the next generation through the context of the family. For parents, the gospel first has to change one's own heart before it can be passed down to the next generation.

For parents, the gospel serves first as an evangelistic opportunity followed by a discipleship process. Parenting begins and concludes with the gospel as the primary reference point. The Scriptures not only reveal the need but also provide the solution in the person of Christ. Each topic addressed in the parenting program offered biblical guidance to parents about the importance of applying biblical principles with their teenager.

Personal Reflections

During the course of this project, I have been reminded of and encouraged by the ability of the Scriptures to adequately address the issues parents encounter while parenting their teenager. I have listened to numerous parents articulate their fear regarding parenting their teenager. I have experienced excitement with the opportunity to direct the parents to Scripture for direction and guidance about parenting. The writer of Hebrews summarizes beautifully the power Scripture has to make a profound difference in a person's life: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). The project has reminded me that the solution to any parent's dilemma is available in the Scripture because it provides the remedy for a sick heart, both the parent's and the child's.

Through the course of the project, I became more aware of how secular psychology has infiltrated the church. The secular psychological methods and techniques have been integrated with Scripture references, especially in the area of parenting, and the church has bought into them. The literature given to parents of teenagers communicates a predominant theme, which is behavior modification. The majority of parents who participated in the project embraced the behavior modification philosophy of parenting. The project gave me the confidence to refute the behavior modification philosophy of parenting. I was able to articulate the shortcoming of the behavior modification philosophy of parenting by its lack of emphasis on the heart. I was able to direct the parent's attention to Scripture for biblical insight and application on parenting. I had the privilege to offer a biblical perspective, which emphasized addressing the heart of the teenager, not simply his or her behavior. For many parents, their paradigm changed from a behavior model to a heart model. It was a rewarding experience for me to observe the conversation change from "how to get my teenager to behave correctly?" to "how do I show them their need for Christ?"

In the past, serving as a youth pastor, I devoted only a small percentage of time

to parents. Therefore, I did not have a significant amount of material available to offer parents when they encountered difficulties with their teenager. The project helped me to be a more effective resource for parents. Before the project, when a parent approached me with a particular issue regarding their teenager, I lacked the confidence to provide biblical feedback and practical application to them. I would have had to spend days trying to organize some material to provide for them, which often led to ineffectiveness. Due to the completion of the project, I have resources available on numerous issues facing teenagers, and if not, I know where to attain them in a timely fashion. Creating the lesson for the issues I addressed during the project required many hours of work but it was beneficial. The work of creating a resource for parents helped me to become better equipped and more effective assisting parents as they fulfill their God-given responsibility.

I was thankful for and blessed by the couples that participated in the mentor class and wanted to lead a class in the future. During the project I often felt overwhelmed with the amount of work involved in the project, from preparing the lessons, to leading the parent class, and lastly training the mentor couples. However, the motivational aspect of the project for me was the vision of having competent, confident, and faithful parents lead the class in the future. I was reminded on a couple of occasions during the project of Paul's words in Ephesians 4:12-13 of my primary job as a pastor:

> To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

The project had its times of both discouragement and encouragement, but the opportunity to train other parents to one day lead kept me motivated to finish well. I was aware of the difficulties many parents encountered with their teenager without receiving any intentional biblical guidance. I was confident, given an opportunity, parents would respond if the class was led by someone in the same season of life as them. I was

encouraged to discover, given adequate training, several couples were willing to lead the class. I observed in these couples over the course of the training time a confidence and competency to share the importance of directing a teen's heart toward the Savior.

During the project, I thought that this class could not only be beneficial to current church members but it could serve as an outreach into our local community. Since I have been a youth pastor, we have always had students attend the youth ministry whose parents do not attend the church. The parenting class created an avenue to connect with those parents and invite them to participate in the class. Another outreach opportunity would be for parents at the church to take initiative with those in the community (neighbors, co-workers, friends) to start parenting studies in their home. I hope through this project the foundation has been laid to have greater influence in the parents in the community. I felt a renew urgency and passion to assist parents both in the church walls and outside of them.

Overall, throughout this project God did a work in my own heart. I was convicted of my own parenting. During the project, I would often read, write, or facilitate a discussion on biblical parenting and afterwards in the car ride home feel convicted of my sin toward God and my children. I can vividly recall on numerous occasions confessing my sin to God and then apologizing to my children for trying to control, manipulate, threaten, or bribe them to be good. This project made me more aware of God's grace as I constantly recognized my own weaknesses, especially in the area of parenting. I began the process of completely trusting God's plan for my children by recognizing my responsibility was to be faithful by word and action and allow God's Spirit to move in their heart as He has decreed.

Conclusion

Parenting teenagers is a daunting endeavor because of the constant changes occurring both in the culture and in the development (physical, emotional, and mental) of a teenager. It is tempting for parents, in the midst of their fear, to focus their energy on

trying to manage the external behavior of their teenager. However, the Scriptures teach the antidote for fear in parenting is the belief in the gospel, which replaces fear with trust. The Scriptures do not offer parents a step-by-step methodology to produce godly children. Instead, the Scriptures teach principles on parenting but never offer promises regarding the future salvation of children. Therefore, parents encounter a dilemma, especially during the teenage years, to live a life consumed with fear regarding the spiritual outcome of their child or to trust God's will for their child. The Scriptures exhort parents to replace their fear with trust in the person of Christ. The result of a parent daily placing their trust in the person of Christ leads to a life of obedience following His commands. The Scripture commands parents to faithfully initiate the message of the gospel with their child whether or not he or she responds. A parent's main desire is to witness heart change toward God in the life of their teenager. The goal for a parent is faithfulness on their part to initiate the gospel through evangelism and discipleship. Parents have the privilege given by God to constantly communicate two life-changing principles of the gospel to their teenager: 1) the problem is not my circumstances or other people it is me, and 2) the answer to my problem is not inside of me but to look outside of myself to the person and work of Christ. Therefore, this project's emphasis is on the parents comprehending and applying the beauty of the gospel both to their hearts and then to the heart of their teenager. Overall, my prayer is this project has communicated to parents the resounding theme of Scripture, which screams to parents regardless of the outcome of their teenager's spiritually status, "God is enough!"

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-SEMINAR QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR CLASS PARTICIPANTS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your attitude, knowledge and skill level related to discipling your teenager. Chad Vinson is conducting this research for purposes of collecting data for ministry project. In this research, you will answer the questions before we begin and you will answer another set of questions after we complete the training. Any information you provide will be held in strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

1. How many years have you been parenting teenagers? _____

   Age
   ____ Less than 29
   ____ 30-40
   ____ 41-50
   ____ 51-60
   ____ 61+

2. Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your feelings in regards to the following statements:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

____ a. I am fearful about parenting my teenager.

____ b. I am hopeful about parenting my teenager.

____ c. I find myself regularly expressing thanksgiving to God for my teenager.

____ d. I feel confident on how to share the gospel with my teenager.

____ e. If your child is saved I feel confident on how to disciple my teenager.

____ f. I am intentional about pursuing a relationship with my teenager.

____ g. I create distance between my teenager and myself especially during difficult times.

____ h. I am interested in learning how to engage my teenager's heart with the transforming power of the gospel.

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3. I pray with my spouse for my teenager (Circle one of the below).
   Always   Most of the time   Seldom   Never

4. How many parenting books have you read and/or seminars on parenting have you attended? _____

5. What do you believe God's role is for you as a parent? (Circle all that apply)
   Provider Controller Friend Protector Manipulator Teacher Counselor Coach

6. What to do you believe the Scriptures teach about your responsibility has a parent?
   _____
   _____
   _____

7. What is the primary obstacle for you not to engage your teenager about what they are encountering on a daily basis? (Put an X by the primary reason)
   _____ Fear of conflict
   _____ Too busy or tired
   _____ Worried you do not know what to say and how to say it

8. When discussing an issue with your teenager, how often do you default to lecturing? (Circle one)
   Always   Most of the time   Seldom   Never

9. When discussing an issue with your teenager, how often do you ask questions to understand their heart/motives behind their choices? (Circle one)
   Always   Most of the time   Seldom   Never

10. How many parenting books have you read and/or seminars on parenting have you attended? _____

11. How often do you initiate a discussion concerning the spiritual development of your teenager? (Circle which one that applies)
    2-5 times/week   once/week   twice/month   once/month
    1 every couple of months   once a year   never

12. How confident are you about engaging your teenager about their spiritual development in the following topics? (On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest)

    _____ The Gospel
    _____ Identity in Christ
    _____ Communication
    _____ Sex and Dating
    _____ Eating disorders
    _____ Money
    _____ Technology (Porn, Texting, Gaming and Social Media)
    _____ Peer Pressure (Friends)
    _____ Depression
    _____ Substance Abuse and Self Injury

APPENDIX 2

POST- PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE TO MENTOR COUPLES

1. What is the greatest need parents of teenagers have?

2. How has going through the parenting material strengthened your marriage?

3. What was your greatest fear regarding leading others through the parenting class?

4. What were the biggest obstacles for parents to attend the parenting class?

5. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the parenting class?

6. What could be improved to equip other parents more effectively to facilitate the parenting class?

APPRENDIX 3

PARENTING CLASS OUTLINE

Session 1-2: Encouragement and Hope for Parents
      A. Pre-Survey Past Out and Completed by Parents
      B. Hope and Encouragement offered through a community of parents
      C. Hope and Encouragement offered through the character of God

Session 3: Biblical Roles and Responsibilities of Parents
      A. Teacher (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Psalm 78:5-7)
      B. Coach (Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4)
      C. Counselor (Ephesians 6:4)

Session 4: A Biblical Paradigm to Parenting
      A. The Behavior Modification Approach
      B. Addressing the Heart (Mark 7:20; Luke 6:45)

Session 5: The Gospel
      A. The Counterfeit Gospels (2 Corinthians 11:4)
      B. The Authentic Gospel (I Corinthians 15:3-5)

Session 6: Identity
      A. Replacement Identities
      B. Identity in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Session 7: Communication
      A. The Source of Conflict (James 4:1-3)
      B. A Biblical Plan of Action to Address Conflict (Proverbs 18:3)

Session 8: Sex and Dating
      A. God's purpose for Sex
      B. How to Combat Lustful Thoughts, Desires, Wants (1 Corinthians 6:12-20;
         1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)
      C. Definition of Biblical Love (I Corinthians 13)
      D. Becoming the Right Person/looking for the right person (Song of Solomon)

Session 9: Money
      A. Biblical Stewardship (1 Chronicles 29:11-12)
      B. Thankfulness vs. Greed (Luke 12:16-21; Matthew 6:19-21)

Session 10: Self Abuse
        A. Defining different types of self abuse
            1. substance abuse
            2. self-mutilation
            3. eating disorders
        B. A Biblical Response to Self Abuse
            1. God is in Control
            2. God is Good
            3. God cares
        C. Example of Jesus' suffering

Session 11: Technology
        A. Defining different types of technology
            1. Gaming
            2. Social Media
            3. Pornography
        B. A Biblical Response to Technology
            1. Pride vs. Humility (James 4:6)
            2. Awareness, Acknowledgement, and Accountability

Session 12: Peer Pressure
        A. The Fear of Man (Proverbs 29:25)
        B. The Fear of God (Proverbs 9:10)

Session 13: Depression
        A. The cause clearly defined (outside circumstances or inward thoughts)
        B. Despair, self-pity, loneliness replaced with hopefulness and contentment
          (Philippians 4:11-13)

Session 14: Post-Project Survey
        A. Survey Completed
        B. Results Measured

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ABSTRACT

ENCOURAGING PARENTS IN THE BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP
OF THEIR TEENAGERS AT FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH,
MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014
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This project seeks to equip parents of teenagers at Fellowship Bible Church to teach, train and if saved disciple their teenagers. Chapter 1 introduces Fellowship Bible Church and the surrounding area. Chapter 2 provides biblical and theological bias for the project by examining biblical text addressing parental responsibility related to child rearing. Chapter 3 explains the biblical characteristic of a teenager, the present state of teenagers and the major sources of conflict between teenagers and their parents. In addition the chapter evaluates various popular methods of teaching and training teenagers. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology of how to teach, train and if saved, disciple teenagers in the context of the local church. Chapter 5 analyzes and evaluates the results of the project and offers theological and personal reflection on the project.

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