

# STUDY GUIDE

STEP back for a moment from the daily pressures, interactions, and decisions of child rearing to reflect on our calling as parents. God has chosen us to be part of the most significant work on earth—the formation of a human soul. He has called us to prepare human beings for life in a broken and fallen world. He has commissioned us to teach young hearts how to think, desire, and choose. He has allowed us to be his voice as he unfolds the deepest mysteries of the universe to children who are still learning how to think. Most importantly, he has called us to help rescue them—not just from an evil world, but from their own sinful and foolish hearts—by leading them to Christ. There is no higher, more holy calling than this!

Much of this work takes place in the teen years. As teens assume greater responsibilities, enjoy new relationships, and experience greater independence, their hearts are exposed. This provides us with some of the deepest heartaches and greatest opportunities of our parenting years.

The question is, Are we ready to make the most of the opportunities? The answer is, Only as God enables us. As parents, most of us long for comfort and peace. We instinctively hate the tumult that teenagers bring into our lives. We don't like wondering what will come next as our lives careen from crisis to crisis. Yet standing in the middle of this turmoil is Christ the Redeemer. He really is “an ever present help in trouble.” He really is up to something good. In his love for our teens, he fights for their hearts by exposing them to us, so that he can use us to turn their hearts to him.

This is a drama of eternal significance, but it is easy to miss, even when it is happening right in front of us. It takes place in the mundane little moments and the boring, familiar locations of our daily lives. That's why we need to open our eyes to what is happening around us. Life is not lived in the “grand” moments of existence! Most of us only make three or four big decisions in a lifetime. Most of us will never be written up in history books. Not long after our deaths, the ones we leave behind will struggle to remember us. The fact is that most of the important things we do will take place *in the midst* of the utterly mundane. *This* is the place where God does his miraculous work of reclaiming and redirecting hearts. He is the sovereign Lord of the everyday and ordinary! His glory is waiting to be revealed in every little moment. As we see this, we can share it with our teenagers.

One more thing should be said about this glorious task of parenting: we are not up to the job! We simply don't have the love, patience, wisdom, and perseverance it requires. We are parents who still need parenting ourselves. We are wisdom givers who find ourselves in the grip of our own foolishness. We are sinners calling our teenagers away from sin. We are idolaters who want to help our teenagers smash their idols. We fall woefully short of the job description!

Yet there is hope when we face our foolishness and inability. The hope is found in Christ. *He* is our wisdom! *He* is our strength! His grace reaches to the deepest level of our weakness. He died not only to give us eternal life, but also to give us everything we need to do what he calls us to do in the here and now. He *does* meet the demands of our job description and we find our capability in him. Because of him, we can approach this awesome task with courage and hope. He is here in his power and glory, and he is for us!

This truth is the foundation for *Age of Opportunity* and this study guide. (For a free Leaders Guide, visit our websites: [www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org) and [www.prpbooks.com](http://www.prpbooks.com).) The guide is meant to help you deepen your knowledge of yourself and your teenager, and increase your practical skill at being part of what God is doing in his or her life. Take time to answer the questions that reinforce the essentials of a chapter. Prayerfully work through the personal evaluations, asking God to reveal your heart. Humbly confess. Joyfully commit to new ways of parenting. Look expectantly for a harvest of new fruit.

My sincere thanks go to Amy Knicely, who did the major work on the study guide. I have added chapter summaries and core goals. These together give you a biblical model for approaching the teen years.

May God richly bless you as you work through this guide. May he demolish strongholds in you and your teenager. May he deepen his claim on your heart and, in so doing, position you to minister to your teenager's heart. Finally, may he give you a sense of the magnificence of his grace and the stunning wisdom of his Word—and may this direct the way you walk with your teenagers through the familiar rooms of their everyday world.

Paul David Tripp

March 14, 2001

## I AGE OF OPPORTUNITY OR SEASON OF SURVIVAL?

**Core principle** We live in a culture of cynicism when it comes to teenagers. This cultural negativity has infiltrated the Christian family as well. This cynicism has its roots in a biological view of teenagers that sees them as little more than a collection of raging, rebel hormones, physically incapable of living responsibly.

**Chapter goals** Our goal is to help parents identify the ways in which the cynicism of the culture has influenced the ways they think about and respond to their teenage children. This chapter also calls parents to learn to recognize the big moments of change that are embedded in the little of moments of life that we share with them. We want to look for daily opportunities to be part of what God is doing in the life of our teenagers. Finally, this chapter is meant to help parents recognize attitudes that stand in the way of what God is seeking to do through them in their teenagers' lives.

### **Study Questions**

1. What attitude do many parents have toward the teen years?
2. What does it mean to have a biological view of teens?
3. What parenting goal typically flows from a biological view of teens?
4. What view of God's Word is demonstrated in a biological view of teens?
5. What would be a naive view of the teen years?
6. What does the author mean when he says that the battle raging in the lives of young people is not the battle of biology but a battle for the heart?
7. Why is the battle for the heart so dramatically important?
8. What does the author mean when he says that the struggle of the teen years is not only about teen biology and teen rebellion?
9. What kinds of things might teens expose in the lives of their parents?
10. What heart issues are displayed in the father described on pages 18 and 19?
11. What is the significance of the author's statement that we live in the world of the incredibly mundane?
12. What three fundamental doors of opportunity exist for every parent of teens?
13. What desires make teenagers susceptible to the temptation to rebel?
14. List some truths that can help teens handle their widening world.
15. What truths can help parents escape a cynical view of the teenage years?

### **Application Questions**

1. Cite an example from your experience (with others or your own life) that illustrates the way parents see the teen years as something to be dreaded.
2. Evaluate the way you respond to trials. Use the following rating scale:
  - 1 - Rarely
  - 2 - Occasionally

3 -Regularly	
With self-righteousness	1 2 3
With impatience	1 2 3
With an unforgiving spirit	1 2 3
With a lack of servant love	1 2 3
Showing weak faith	1 2 3
Craving comfort and ease	1 2 3

3. Think of the last three trials you faced. Describe the trial and then describe what Christ-like (or unChrist-like) characteristics you displayed in each.
4. List the ministry opportunities that are present in the following scenarios:
  - The last Pop Tart.
  - The cry of nothing to wear half an hour before school.
  - The report card crumpled in the pocket of jeans headed for the wash.
  - The pouting expression when the parent says “No.”
  - The third fender-bender in a month.
  - Constant words of discontent.
  - “Everybody else does.”
  - “I’m the only one whose parents make them . . .”
5. What biblical principles can help a teen struggling with his or her looks?

## 2 WHOSE IDOLS ARE IN THE WAY?

**Core principle** The anger, frustration, discouragement, irritation, impatience, and fear that parents feel during the teen years not only reveal that the teen is struggling, but that the parents are as well. If our hearts are controlled by something other than God, the great opportunities of the teen years will not be viewed as opportunities at all, but as a constant stream of hassles brought on by a selfish, immature person who upsets our otherwise comfortable life. Failure to deal with our idolatry will mean we will turn God-given moments of ministry into moments of anger. We will personalize what is not personal, become adversarial in our approach to our teen, and settle for quick, situational solutions that do not focus on the teenager’s heart.

**Chapter goals** The goal of this chapter is best summarized by Proverbs 20:5, “The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.” The goal is that parents would use the mirror of the Word (Luke 6:34–36; Ezek. 14:1–5; James 4:1–10) to examine their hearts. Which of the typical parental idols listed below best describes you?

*Comfort* (“I just wish life were a little easier, a little more peaceful, and a little more predictable.”)

*Respect* (“If it is the last thing I do, I am going to get her to respect me!”)

*Appreciation* (“I have done and done for them and this is the thanks I get? It is about time that I got a little credit for all of my hard work!”)

*Success* (“Do you know what it is like to do all this work and have him behave this way? What are people thinking about our family now?”)

*Control* (“If I had a little more control around here, life would be much easier and he would be in far less trouble!”)

The goal is that parents would understand that they must be willing to start with their own hearts if they want to be used by God to help transform the hearts of their teenagers. If we do not do this, we will be a hindrance, not a help, in what God is doing.

**Study Questions**

1. What is an idol?
2. Why is it a waste of time for parents to think about strategies for parenting without first examining themselves?
3. What is wrong with wanting life to be a resort?
4. Why will parents who demand comfort, ease, regularity, peace, space, quiet and harmony be ill-equipped to fight the war they are called to fight?
5. How might an idol of respect manifest itself?
6. Since children should appreciate their parents, what is wrong with parents having this as their goal?
7. What questions can parents ask themselves to avoid making appreciation their goal?
8. What is wrong with the belief that if parents do their part, their children will be model citizens?
9. Since it is so easy to lose sight of the fact that these are God’s children, what should parents remind themselves of regularly?
10. List three truths from God’s Word that are vital to remember if we want to avoid an idol of control.

**Application Questions**

1. Do you have an idol of comfort? Give specific reasons for your answer.
2. Evaluate the way you respond when your comfort is challenged. Use the following rating scale:
  - 1 -Rarely
  - 2 -Occasionally
  - 3 -Regularly

Fail to be effective and productive in strategic ministry moments	1 2 3
Tend to see the teen as the enemy	1 2 3
Tend to fight <i>with</i> teen rather than <i>for</i> him or her	1 2 3
Tend to do and say regrettable things	1 2 3
3. Give a recent example of a situation in which your comfort was disrupted. Record how you responded.
4. Rate yourself on how frequently you function as though you were entitled to this “right.”<sup>1</sup> Use the following rating scale:
  - 1 -Rarely
  - 2 -Occasionally
  - 3 -Regularly

1. Right to have and control personal belongings	1 2 3
2. Right to privacy	1 2 3
3. Right to have and express personal opinions	1 2 3
4. Right to earn and use money	1 2 3
5. Right to plan your own schedule	1 2 3
6. Right to respect	1 2 3
7. Right to have and choose friends	1 2 3
8. Right to belong, be loved, be accepted	1 2 3
9. Right to be understood	1 2 3
10. Right to be supported	1 2 3
11. Right to make your own decisions	1 2 3
12. Right to determine your own future	1 2 3
13. Right to have good health	1 2 3
14. Right to have pleasure	1 2 3

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *A Homework Manual for Biblical Living, Volume 1*, by Wayne A. Mack (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1979), pp. 5-6.

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- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 15. Right to have comfort                               | 1 2 3 |
| 16. Right to have ease                                  | 1 2 3 |
| 17. Right to be considered worthwhile and important     | 1 2 3 |
| 18. Right to be protected and cared for                 | 1 2 3 |
| 19. Right to be appreciated                             | 1 2 3 |
| 20. Right to have time off                              | 1 2 3 |
| 21. Right to have harmony                               | 1 2 3 |
| 22. Right to have quiet                                 | 1 2 3 |
| 23. Right to have predictability and a regular schedule | 1 2 3 |
| 24. Right to be treated fairly                          | 1 2 3 |
| 25. Right to be desired                                 | 1 2 3 |
| 26. Right to have fun                                   | 1 2 3 |
| 27. Right to raise children your way                    | 1 2 3 |
| 28. Right to security and safety                        | 1 2 3 |
| 29. Right to fulfilled hopes and aspirations            | 1 2 3 |
| 30. Right to be successful                              | 1 2 3 |
| 31. Right to have others obey you                       | 1 2 3 |
| 32. Right to have your own way                          | 1 2 3 |
| 33. Right to be free of difficulties and problems       | 1 2 3 |

Are we really entitled to anything?

- Do you have an idol of respect? Give specific reasons for your answers.
  - Describe a recent situation in which you were not shown proper respect. How did you respond?
  - Describe a time when you did something for someone else and received no appreciation. What was your response?
  - How do you generally respond when you are not appreciated?
  - On the scale of 1 to 3 below, rate yourself on the following:
    - Rarely
    - Occasionally
    - Regularly
- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| Do you have an attitude of ownership and entitlement?  | 1 2 3 |
| Have you subtly become ruled by reputation?  | 1 2 3 |
| Is it a struggle to love your child? Is your relationship distant because of that struggle?      | 1 2 3 |
| Are you oppressed by what others might think?  | 1 2 3 |
| Have you ever doubted the principles of God's Word and wondered why they haven't worked for you? | 1 2 3 |
- Do you have an idol of control? Give specific reasons for your answers.

### 3 WHAT IS A FAMILY? A DEFINITION

**Core principle** In Deuteronomy 6, God makes it very clear that he intends the family to function as his primary learning community. God has ordained that children would learn the most fundamental facts (truths) of human existence in the context of the family. The family is the best place for this to happen because, unlike a separated classroom, *life* takes place in the family. The many experiences and relationships that make up daily family life present natural opportunities to talk with our children about things that really matter. To understand the importance of the family's educational calling, par-

ents need a biblical understanding of who their children are. Parents will relate to their teenagers based on the way they have defined them.

**Chapter goals** The goal is to help parents think in a distinctly biblical way about their teenager’s basic makeup as a creature of God. First, the Bible would call us to view our teenagers as *covenantal beings*. This means that teenagers were made for a relationship with God. They were created to be worshippers, and if they do not worship God, they will give their hearts to God substitutes. (See Rom. 1:25.) Second, we must see our teenagers as *social beings*. They were made to live in loving community with others. In fact, God has given them the moral responsibility to live with their neighbor’s welfare in view. Third, teenagers are *interpreters*. This means that as they live life, they are always seeking to organize, interpret, and explain what is going on around them—and inside them. Teenagers think, so they do not live life based solely on the facts of their experiences, but also on how they have interpreted those facts. Teenagers are always assembling a functional worldview (God, self, authority, responsibility, right and wrong, past, future, etc.) that shapes their choices and behavior. As parents recognize the true identity of their teenagers, the goal is that parents would also recognize the need for the family to function as a vibrant learning community.

### **Study Questions**

1. What is shocking and sad about the situation in Judges 2:6–15?
2. What does Deuteronomy 6 say is God’s purpose for the family?
3. What are some of the opportunities parents will have to teach as they live with their children?
4. What does the author mean when he says that children are covenantal beings?
5. If children do not live in joyful submission to God, what will happen?
6. What is wrong with the self-sufficient, self-made individualism of Western culture?
7. What does the author mean by his statement that children are interpreters?
8. What do we need in order to interpret life correctly?
9. What controls our behavior? Support your answer biblically.
10. What does the author mean when he says that much of what we call Christian parenting is nothing more than “fruit stapling”?
11. If the heart does not change, what kind of fruit will result?

### **Application Questions**

1. Describe one of the last times you took the time to learn what your child was thinking. How long ago was it? How often do you take time to do this?
2. How often do you do this spontaneously as issues arise in the course of family life?
3. Describe a situation in which you learned what your children were thinking and worked to instill in them a biblical view of life.
4. Your teen yells, “Someone stole my bookbag!” What biblical principles would help this teen arrive at a different interpretation?
5. What heart issues might influence a bright student to get poor grades?
6. What heart issues might influence a sibling to borrow things without permission?
7. What would you say to the teen who mutters that she hates her face so much she is embarrassed to leave the house? Passages like Psalm 139 and Ephesians 2:10 point to God’s perfect knowledge of each person and his loving purposes in creating them as they are, so that they can accomplish the work that God has tailor-made for them.
8. Give an example of a way that a teen might demonstrate worship, not of God, but of some aspect of the created world.
9. What would you want to teach the child who takes the last chocolate donut? What would you want to teach the children who did not get the last chocolate donut?

## 4 WHAT IS A FAMILY? A JOB DESCRIPTION

**Core principle** To follow God’s design for the family, parents must do two things. First, they must approach parenting with an educator’s mentality. It is not enough to tell your teenager what to do or to correct and discipline him when he has done wrong. Rather, we are to constantly look for teaching opportunities to help our teenager look at life from God’s perspective. Second, parents need to know their subject matter. What are the foundational things that every teenager needs to know about life? This foundational body of thought can be organized into three areas:

*The family as a theological community.* Theology in its purest form is the study of God. All of life is connected to him. God (his existence, his character, and his plan) is the ultimate fact of human existence, and it is impossible to understand life if this fact is omitted. Since the “whole world is filled with his glory,” family life presents daily opportunities to talk about him.

*The family as a sociological community.* Here we recognize the Second Great Command by looking for opportunities to teach our teenagers God’s way of love. There is no better place to teach a teenager how to love his neighbor as himself, because in the family he is required to live with people with whom he did not choose to live.

*The family as a redemptive community.* Here the focus is on the gravity of our condition as sinners and the glories of God’s provision of grace in Christ Jesus. As we teach the teenager to admit his sin, we point him to a God of love who has not offered him a *system* of redemption, but instead has given his Son as Redeemer. In Jesus we find the only true place of hope as we admit that we are fallen people living in a fallen world.

**Chapter goals** Our first goal is to encourage parents to structure their family life to promote this teaching function. We cannot hope to teach our children such important truths in forty-five second intervals between activities. Our second goal is to help parents to master these biblical themes themselves. A parent cannot give his teenager something that he does not have himself. Our final goal is that parents would grow in their ability to recognize the God-given teaching moments that are sprinkled throughout every day.

### Study Questions

1. Why do we often present Bible passages out of context to our children, in the hope that it will somehow motivate them to do what is right?
2. What is theology?
3. What does this statement mean? “It is God’s plan that the family function as a theological community.”
4. All of life becomes meaningless unless it is rooted in what?
5. Why is there no divine 911 telephone line?
6. What do teens (and adults) tend to mistakenly believe is most important?
7. When teens express their desires as needs and demand that we fulfill them, how should we respond?
8. Many teens would say that all they want out of life is to be happy. What is wrong with this?
9. Why is it important that teens see their lives embedded in the story of God?
10. What does the author mean when he states that we live life in the utterly mundane?
11. Once one has biblically clarified one’s responsibilities, what is the only proper response?
12. What is the teen’s job in situations that are outside of his or her control?
13. What is wrong with the thinking of the girl who told her mom, “If it’s the last thing I do, I am going to teach my brother to stay out of my room”?
14. When the parents tried to eliminate their children’s arguments over the CD player by devising a weekly schedule for its use, what teaching opportunity did they miss?
15. Why is the family an ideal environment to uncover issues of the heart?

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16. How does facing the harsh realities of the Fall revealed in family life pave the way for something wonderful?
17. How can the family function as a redemptive community?
18. What is the key to the family functioning a redemptive community?
19. Why is it helpful to recognize the utter impossibility of fulfilling the law?
20. Why do we often miss opportunities to “do redemption”?
21. What are you communicating when you ask a sinning child, “How could you?” or “Why would you?”

### **Application Questions**

1. When Joey is mocked because of his “bobos” sneakers, how do you make that a teaching moment?
2. When Sarah tells you at 9:45 p.m. that she needs poster board for a project due the next morning, how do you make the most of this teaching opportunity?
3. When Josh stands in front of a well-stocked refrigerator and says there is nothing to eat, how do you capitalize on that moment?
4. When Pete walks in with hair that he has just dyed with lime Jell-O, what truths do you teach?
5. How would you respond to a child who asks, “Why do we have to obey all of these rules?”?
6. How could you respond to the son who says, “I just have to have those shoes! Dad, I need them!”?
7. How could you respond to the son who says, “No one wants to be friends with a kid who has character! All of the popular kids at school, all of the leaders, are jerks. They are the center of attention, they get all the girls, and here I am, a nice guy who can be trusted, and I have no friends! I’d be better off being a jerk! Why be good if nobody notices?”
8. Your daughter says, “If it’s the last thing I do, I am going to teach my brother to stay out of my room!” In what areas does she need to learn to trust?
9. In what areas does she need to obey?

10. Give an example of a way a parent might respond self-righteously to his or her teen.
11. When was the last time you went to your children and confessed sin?
12. How can you model for children that there is a Redeemer who forgives, delivers, reconciles, and restores when they are fighting with one another?
13. List two occasions when you shared your struggle with sin to show your children the mercy of Christ.
14. For each of the following examples, write out two ways of handling it.  
 In column 1 write a quick, surface solution that ignores the issues of the heart.  
 In column 2 write a way to address the problem that develops a heart of Christ-like love.

Example	Column 1	Column 2
A fight over the last drop of milk at breakfast		
A shove in response to an accidental bump in the hallway		
An argument over time spent in the bathroom		
A discussion over borrowed clothes that weren’t returned		
Willingness to participate in put-down humor		
A demand for assistance combined with an unwillingness to help others		
A lack of willing participation in household chores		
A debate over who gets the front seat of the car		

## 5 PARENTS, MEET YOUR TEENAGERS

**Core principle** We have already concluded that we cannot accept the current cultural definition of our teenagers. It is biologically based and does not recognize the teenager's heart. So we look to Scripture for help in defining our teens. The first several chapters of Proverbs define in practical life terms the typical struggles of youth. In so doing, the Proverbs give us a wonderful, functional definition of the teen years. As we recognize these common struggles, we also begin to recognize that our teenagers' struggles are not far from our own. As we admit this, we realize that, contrary to popular opinion, our teenagers are more like us than unlike us.

**Chapter goals** The goal is that our interactions with our teenagers would be (1) informed by a biblical understanding of their struggles and (2) infused with gospel hope. We want to become skilled at recognizing the doors of opportunity to lasting heart change that these struggles give us. When we recognize that our primary ministry opportunities come in moments of trouble, God can use us to prepare our teenagers to live responsibly before him, even after they have left our homes. The teenager's lack of hunger for wisdom and correction, tendency toward legalism, lack of wisdom in choice of companions, susceptibility to sexual temptation, lack of eschatological awareness, and lack of heart awareness all provide opportunities to prepare our teens for life by helping them to deal with their own heart issues. The goal is to help parents use the opportunities that are present amid trouble.

### Study Questions

1. In Proverbs, the father emphasizes to his son that one thing is of great value and importance. What is it?
2. What can parents do to avoid inflammatory confrontations and verbal power struggles?
3. The author states that giving wisdom is not hitting your teen over the head with words. What is it?
4. What three things does the author do when his teens are being defensive?
5. For what things might a parent need to seek a child's forgiveness?
6. What should you do if you begin to lose it while talking to your teen?
7. How can a parent pursue his or her teens?
8. In what sense do teens tend to be legalists?
9. What kind of teaching should parents do to combat such legalism in their teens?
10. If you point out legalism and remind teens of the true spirit of God's requirements, how can this encourage in them a hunger for Christ?
11. To what does legalism lead?
12. How do teens tend to perceive a parent's rejection of their friends?
13. Rather than attacking their children's friends, how can parents help their teens in this area?
14. What is the key in helping our teens remain sexually pure?
15. What is eschatology?
16. What is meant by the statement that teens don't have an eschatological perspective?
17. How does our culture reinforce the falsehood that life is found in present, earthly, physical treasure and that the successful person is the one with the biggest pile?
18. What does Proverbs describe as the control center of our lives?
19. What higher agenda should parents have as they work with their teens?
20. What approach to discipline can help teens grow in self-awareness?
21. How will parents with a survival mentality of the teen years respond differently from those who see these years as a time of preparation?

### **Application Questions**

1. Do you respond to your teen in ways that make wisdom appealing? How?
2. Do you make correction sweet? How?
3. Teens tend to push parents' buttons. What are some of your buttons?
4. What specific things do you do to pursue your teen?
5. How could you respond to a teen who attempts to avoid correction by pointing out flaws in your parenting?
6. Give two examples of ways you have seen teens emphasize the letter of the law rather than the spirit.
7. What are some biblical principles of friendship that you would want your teen to know and apply?
8. At what age will you bring up the topic of sex with your children? What will you do to keep it "on the table"?
9. What have your children learned from you about the sexual relationship?
10. Do you know if any of your children struggle with lust, fantasy, or masturbation?
11. How do your children view relationships with the opposite sex?
12. What are some of the world's sexual lies? Have your children been exposed to any of these? Have your children adopted any of them?
13. In what situations, locations, and relationships are your teens being tempted?
14. Do your teens feel comfortable discussing sexual issues with you? How do you know?
15. Give two examples of everyday issues your teens face that you can use to teach a focus on eternity.
16. How do you help your child recognize the desires that rule his or her heart?

## **6 GOALS, GLORY AND GRACE**

**Core principle** The task of parenting a teenager is often exhausting and discouraging. Clearly, it is beyond the wisdom, character, and strength of every parent. It is very easy to give in to defeat, discouragement, and fear. When we do this, our encounters with our teenager are colored by our own hopelessness. Our only hope of loving and consistently doing what we have been called to do is Christ. In his presence and power we find strength to fulfill our calling. We must learn as parents what it means to live out of the rich resources of the gospel, refusing to give way to discouragement and despair and holding onto his promises.

**Chapter goals** The goal is to have the present benefits of the work of Christ give us hope as we struggle with our children through the teen years. The goal is to look at them and ourselves through the window of the gospel (Eph. 3:20; John 17:20–23; 2 Pet. 1:3–9). The goal is that there would be no struggle so grave as to lead us to give up, since Christ's work for us daily gives us reason to continue. The goal is that we would see the mountain range of the teen years from the vantage point of the majesty of Christ and his grace.

### **Study Questions**

1. What encouragement does God's Word give us when we are weary and feel that we lack the strength to do what we have been called to do?
2. Why do we often miss the experience of God's power?
3. What kind of family unity is possible because Christ gave us his glory?
4. Why, according to 2 Peter 1:3–9, are believers ineffective and unproductive?
5. Why do many Christian parents lack the qualities needed to be effective?
6. Because God has already given us everything we need to do the parenting job he has called us to do, what should we *not* do?
7. What truths can lift us out of weariness and discouragement?

**Application Questions**

1. How would you characterize the unity in your home? (Circle one the following.)
  - 1 - Rarely is there any evidence of unity. Our home is characterized by discord and strife.
  - 2 -The members of our family don't live in discord and strife but each goes his or her own way. Apathy and indifference would describe us better than unity.
  - 3 -Unity comes and goes in our home. At times we work diligently to be unified but we are easily distracted.
  - 4 -Our home could be characterized by unity. This doesn't mean our home is perfect, but we are all working to grow in this area and we make a conscious effort to seek God's glory, not our own.
2. What would increase unity in your family?
3. Rate your efforts to grow in the following qualities. (Use the following scale.)
  - 1 -I rarely exert effort to grow in this quality.
  - 2 -I occasionally exert effort to grow in this quality.
  - 3 -I make regular effort to grow in this quality.

Faith	1 2 3
Goodness	1 2 3
Knowledge	1 2 3
Self-control	1 2 3
Perseverance	1 2 3
Godliness	1 2 3
Brotherly kindness	1 2 3
Love	1 2 3
4. Rate yourself: how much does each of the following characterize you when you are at the end of your strength?
  - 1 -Rarely
  - 2 -Occasionally
  - 3 -Regularly

I give in to discouragement.	1 2 3
I quit.	1 2 3
I run away.	1 2 3
I settle for a little bit of faith.	1 2 3
I grow.	1 2 3
I remember God's rich resources.	1 2 3
I seek to do more and better.	1 2 3
I remember I have been forgiven of my past sins.	1 2 3

**7 THERE'S A WAR OUT THERE**

**Core principle** Ephesians 6:10–18 provides a much-needed biblical view of life. Paul essentially says that life is war. He is not talking about the fights over situations and relationships that capture our thinking and emotions, but a deeper, more significant war. There is a war for the hearts of our teenagers that takes place in every situation, location, and relationship of daily life. This war is fought on the turf of their hearts. It is fought for control of their souls. Every decision, action, and word of our teenagers reflects this war. It is the great conflict of human life. This war is the reason for all the other wars fought between people. The problem is that our teenagers tend to live in a world that is shockingly physical; that is, they tend to live with little recognition of this great spiritual struggle. Teenagers' lives tend to be dominated by three concerns: appearance, possessions, and acceptance. They need to learn how to understand and participate in the deeper spiritual

struggle.

**Chapter goals** The goal is to help our teenagers recognize the spiritual struggles beneath the seemingly mundane problems of daily life. In these moments, their hearts are progressively being given over to service of Christ or subtly being enslaved to the world. The goal is to teach our children to see how their words and behavior reflect the war that is going on in their hearts. Finally, we want to encourage them to take on the qualities of a successful spiritual warrior.

### **Study Questions**

1. To keep difficult situations from driving a wedge of distance and anger between parents and teens, how should parents view the situations?
2. Why do parents need a concrete set of goals *before* they face difficult moments?
3. What goal should parents avoid?
4. If the parents' goal is control, how will they begin to function?
5. How might a parent try to motivate a child with guilt?
6. How might a parent try to motivate a child with fear?
7. How might a parent try to motivate a child by manipulation?
8. When we seek to inflict guilt, instill fear, and manipulate our children, how does it show that we are trying to do God's job?
9. Why will a rules-and-regulations approach fail?
10. How does a "pastoral" model of parenting differ from a rules-and-regulations approach?
11. What are some "heart-disclosing" questions parents could ask when their teens do wrong?
12. What attitudes should parents have in their encounters with their teens?
13. What two deadly lies do teens tend to believe?
14. What is the difference between a peacetime mentality and a war mentality?
15. What two things keep us from teaching our children to face and fight the spiritual battle?
16. Give an example of how parents might show a greater concern for what is seen than for the unseen.
17. What will result if parents are more concerned about the physical, seen world than the unseen, spiritual world?
18. What five qualities will be present in teens who understand and participate in the spiritual struggle?
19. What does it mean to have a fear of God?
20. Should we expect and accept rebellion in our teens? Why or why not?
21. If I reject God's authority, what, in fact, am I doing?
22. Evaluate this statement: If a teen is going to live a God-honoring life, he needs to acquire biblical knowledge.
23. What does it mean to be biblically self-aware?

### **Application Questions**

1. Give two examples of times when you may have tried to motivate with guilt.
2. Give two examples of times when you may have tried to motivate with fear.
3. Give two examples of times when you may have tried to motivate by manipulation.
4. To what extent do you see yourself trying to motivate by guilt? (Circle one.)
  - 1 - This would be very uncharacteristic of me.
  - 2 - I do this occasionally but not habitually.
  - 3 - I do this habitually.

If you gave yourself a 3, take the following steps. Put a check beside each step once completed.

1. Seek God's forgiveness and your teen's forgiveness.

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2. Ask your teen and spouse to alert you when they see you functioning this way.
3. When alerted, stop, seek forgiveness, and redo it the right way.
5. To what extent do you see yourself trying to motivate by fear? (Circle one.)
  - 1 - This would be very uncharacteristic of me.
  - 2 - I do this occasionally but not habitually.
  - 3 - I do this habitually.If you gave yourself a 3, take the following steps. Put a check beside each step once completed.
  1. Seek God's forgiveness and your teen's forgiveness.
  2. Ask your teen and spouse to alert you when they see you functioning this way.
  3. When alerted, stop, seek forgiveness, and redo it the right way.
6. To what extent do you see yourself trying to motivate by manipulation? (Circle one.)
  - 1 - This would be very uncharacteristic of me.
  - 2 - I do this occasionally but not habitually.
  - 3 - I do this habitually.If you gave yourself a 3, take the following steps. Put a check beside each step once completed.
  1. Seek God's forgiveness and your teen's forgiveness.
  2. Ask your teen and spouse to alert you when they see you functioning this way.
  3. When alerted, stop, seek forgiveness, and redo it the right way.
7. Think of a time when you had a conflict with your child and you asked questions to get to the heart. What specific questions did you ask?
8. With each of your children, evaluate their three best friends in terms of the following characteristics of biblical friends.
  1. My friend is fully devoted to God; he or she has a deep and meaningful relationship with God.
  2. My friend is loving.
  3. My friend is joyful.
  4. My friend is not quarrelsome.
  5. My friend is patient.
  6. My friend is gentle.
  7. My friend is generous, willing to share.
  8. My friend is dependable.
  9. My friend is kind.
  10. My friend is self-controlled, disciplined.
  11. My friend is honest.
  12. My friend is respected and valued by his or her family.
  13. My friend is devoted and loyal to his or her family.
  14. My friend is sensitive.
  15. My friend fulfills God-given responsibilities.
  16. My friend is friendly.
  17. My friend builds up his or her family; my friend is an encourager.
  18. My friend is devoted to ministering to others.
  19. My friend is consistent and steadfast in doing right.
  20. My friend is an industrious, hard worker.
  21. My friend is unselfish.
  22. My friend is more concerned about internal beauty than external beauty.

23. My friend takes care of him/herself physically; my friend is concerned about his or her appearance, but not excessively so.
  24. My friend is not overly intense or serious; my friend is a fun person to be with.
  25. My friend is content and satisfied; my friend desires growth, progress, and biblical change but is not overbearing about it.
  26. My friend is a good listener.
  27. My friend is thoughtful of others, putting them at ease, communicating respect and concern for them.
  28. My friend's speech is constructive and wholesome.
  29. My friend seeks to grow in wisdom, to sharpen him/herself intellectually.
  30. My friend exercises foresight; my friend plans ahead.
  31. My friend handles money wisely; my friend practices good stewardship.
  32. My friend is grateful.
  33. My friend is considerate.
  34. My friend does not complain.
  35. My friend takes care of problems quickly.
  36. My friend is forgiving.
  37. My friend is not stubborn.
  38. My friend is not pushy.
  39. My friend is submissive to authority.
  40. My friend is willing to be vulnerable.
9. With each of your children, evaluate their ability to be a biblical friend in terms of the above list of characteristics.
  10. Where are your children susceptible to temptation? How can you hold the mirror of God's Word before them in these areas? How can you help them anticipate temptation and teach them how to avoid it?

## 8 CONVICTIONS AND WISDOM

**Core principle** Often parents are so busy making decisions for their children that they do not impart to them the critical biblical thinking skills that will enable them to make sound choices after they have left the home. We need to be looking for opportunities to teach our children how to use the commands, themes, principles, and perspectives of Scripture to make sense out of life. To equip teenagers to determine how God would have them respond to the diverse situations of life, we need to teach them two things. First, they need internalized biblical convictions and applicable biblical wisdom. It is not enough to say “yes” and “no” to particular questions. We must show our children how we have arrived at the critical decisions that are so important to biblical living.

**Chapter goals** The goal is to help your teenager differentiate between boundary issues (issue of conviction where Scripture gives them a clear “thus says the Lord”) and wisdom issues (places where there is no clear command, but many biblical principles that apply). We want to assist our children as they internalize biblical convictions, and we want to help them learn how to apply the wisdom of the Word to the everyday life decisions. To do this, it is not always best to say a quick “yes” or “no” to a moral question. It may be better to see the specific circumstance that prompted the question as a God-given opportunity to help the teenager to develop his internal convictions and apply them to his situation.

### **Study Questions**

1. What are “clear boundary” issues?
2. What does a teen need to handle situations involving clear boundary issues?
3. For each of the following, indicate whether it is characteristic of a conviction or a preference.

Based on truth.	Constant.
Based on personal desire.	Demands faith.
Changes with desire.	Relies on the emotions of the moment.

4. What are six characteristics of biblical conviction?
5. List six things you can do to help develop a sensitive conscience and a wise heart.

### **Application Questions**

1. Describe a time in your life when you took a stand on something that was a clear boundary issue. Why did you do it? What was the outcome? What was your response to the outcome?
2. List at least eight biblical principles that would apply to the following situation: Your daughter has been nominated as homecoming queen at the local public high school.
3. List at least eight biblical principles that would apply to the following situation: Your son has been given a four-year athletic scholarship to a secular university.

## **9 LIFE IN THE REAL WORLD**

**Core principle** Teenagers never live in a vacuum. They are always in contact with culture. Human beings made in the image of God interact with God’s world and culture is what results. Culture is all the relationships, customs, institutions, structures, media, beliefs, arts, and values of any society of people. There is no way to escape the cultural struggle. We are always living under culture’s powerful influence.

The Christian family has tended to respond to culture in two ways. Some seek to solve the problem of culture by attempting to live in isolation from it. This is a defective choice because the only way to escape human culture is to cease being a human being! (Where people go, there is culture.) This choice also ignores the Bible’s call for the people of God to function as salt and light. Others make the choice to assimilate into the culture, thereby losing their distinctive place as ambassadors of Christ. We must teach our teenagers a third way, and show them how to participate in their culture in a way that is redemptive.

**Chapter goals** We want to teach our children to do five things:

- We want them to understand the power of culture to shape our beliefs, relationships, and decisions.
- We want to help them recognize the influence of the surrounding culture on them personally.
- We want to help them develop biblical analytical and decision-making skills.
- We want to help them to recognize the idol themes of the surrounding culture.
- We want to teach them how to influence their culture in a way that is wise, alert, and redemptive.

### **Study Questions**

1. What does the philosophy, “Evil is in the thing, so avoid the thing” mean?
2. What dangers exist in separating oneself from the world?
3. If evil is not an organic presence within certain things, what is it? Why is this important?
4. What is the assimilation philosophy?
5. What dangers are associated with the assimilation philosophy?
6. What is culture?
7. Is there any way to escape culture? Why or why not?

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8. Match the following themes with the correct definition (pp.148–149).

___ Relativism	A. No sense of innate, natural responsibility to a higher authority than self. No functional recognition of the existence of God and the call to live to his glory.
___ Individualism	B. Focus on the present; living for the moment. Focus on present personal happiness. No sense of delayed gratification, investment.
___ Emotionalism	C. No higher goal than my happiness and pleasure. No higher purpose than meeting my own needs, wants, rights, and desires.
___ Presentism	D. No sense of personal responsibility for actions. Belief that I am what my experience has made me. My defects are the result of people and situations outside my control.
___ Materialism	E. No absolute standard for life. Each person determines what is right for him. Right changes with the situation.
___ Autonomy	F. No recognition of the spiritual world. Goal of life is experiencing physical pleasure and possessing material goods. Focus on what is seen.
___ Victimism	G. Feelings are the most influential, important indicator of what is right and best. Feelings as personal guidance system.

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9. Match the following themes with the fruit seen in individuals (pp.148–149).

___ Relativism	A. No consistency of lifestyle or conviction. No internal restraint. Susceptibility to influence of others. Dislike of rules.
___ Individualism	B. Regular patterns of blameshifting. Excusing, rationalizing bad behavior; defensiveness. Lack of confession. No sense of need for personal change.
___ Emotionalism	C. Selfishness, self-centeredness, “rights” focus. Lack of commitment to others. Laziness, irresponsibility. Grumbling, complaining.
___ Presentism	D. Tendency toward rebellion to authority. No real Godward focus in life. Authority and correction seen as negative.
___ Materialism	E. Teen moved by what feels right; good feelings focus. Seldom acts against feelings. Sensitive to approval or disapproval of others.
___ Autonomy	F. No independent pursuit of the things of the Lord. No focus on character and attitude. Focus on clothing, beauty, friends, and things.
___ Victimism	G. A “got to have it now” mentality. No focus on long-term investment. No sense of consequences. Impulsive decisions.

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10. Match the following themes with the biblical alternative (pp.148–149).

___ Relativism	A. Creaturehood: Life guided by a recognition of the Creator and lived to his glory.
___ Individualism	B. Spirituality: A life shaped by a seriousness about heart issues and one’s relationship with God.
___ Emotionalism	C. Two Great Commands: Life shaped by practical commitment to love God and to love neighbor.
___ Presentism	D. Sin: Humble recognition of struggle with sin within and temptation without. Thankfulness for the forgiving grace of Christ.
___ Materialism	E. Biblical Faith: Commitment to test everything by the truths of Scripture.
___ Autonomy	F. Truth: Willing submission and obedience to the commands and principles of Scripture.
___ Victimism	G. Eternity: A personal commitment to do everything with an eye toward the reality of eternity.

11. What error do we tend to make in dealing with culture’s vehicles?
12. What strategies does the author suggest for talking to your teens about culture?
13. In what four ways does the author indicate culture influences our lives?
14. What is the alternative to isolation and assimilation?
15. Why is it important to interact with the culture?
16. What are the fundamental objectives of the redemptive interaction strategy?
17. What are five ways you can prepare your teens to interact redemptively with their culture?
18. What is involved in each of the above strategies?

**Application Questions**

1. Do you personally tend toward rejection or assimilation in your approach to culture? What are you doing to avoid the dangers listed by the author?
2. Which view of culture do you believe each of your children has adopted?
3. Using Figure 1 on pp. 148–149, evaluate yourself and your children in regard to which idols are the biggest danger. Explain why you answered as you did.
4. After studying Phil. 1:12–18, answer the following questions:
  - What does this passage teach us about God, his character, and his plan?
  - What do we learn about ourselves, our nature, our struggle, and the purpose of our lives?
  - What does this passage teach us about right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false?
  - What instruction does it offer about relationships, love, authority, etc.?

- What does this passage teach us about life’s meaning and purpose?
  - What does this passage teach us about the inner man, the heart and how it functions?
  - What have we learned from this passage that would guide the way we live and make decisions?
  - How does this passage help us understand and critique our culture?
5. After studying Gen. 50:15–21, answer the following questions:
- What does this passage teach us about God, his character, and his plan?
  - What do we learn about ourselves, our nature, our struggle, and the purpose of our lives?
  - What does this passage teach us about right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false?
  - What instruction does it offer about relationships, love, authority, etc.?
  - What does this passage teach us about life’s meaning and purpose?
  - What does this passage teach us about the inner man, the heart and how it functions?
  - What have we learned from this passage that would guide the way we live and make decisions?
  - How does this passage help us understand and critique our culture?
6. After studying Jeremiah 17:5–10, answer the following questions:
- What does this passage teach us about God, his character, and his plan?
  - What do we learn about ourselves, our nature, our struggle, and the purpose of our lives?
  - What does this passage teach us about right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false?
  - What instruction does it offer about relationships, love, authority, etc.?
  - What does this passage teach us about life’s meaning and purpose?
  - What does this passage teach us about the inner man, the heart and how it functions?
  - What have we learned from this passage that would guide the way we live and make decisions?
  - How does this passage help us understand and critique our culture?
7. After studying Rom. 1:18–32, answer the following questions:
- What does this passage teach us about God, his character, and his plan?
  - What do we learn about ourselves, our nature, our struggle, and the purpose of our lives?
  - What does this passage teach us about right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false?
  - What instruction does it offer about relationships, love, authority, etc.?
  - What does this passage teach us about life’s meaning and purpose?
  - What does this passage teach us about the inner man, the heart, and how it functions?
  - What have we learned from this passage that would guide the way we live and make decisions?
  - How does this passage help us understand and critique our culture?
8. Watch the evening news on TV. Choose three news stories and critique them biblically as follows: What view of life is expressed? What is right and wrong with this view? What is the common ground with which we can identify?

## 10 A HEART FOR GOD

**Core principle** It is no exaggeration to say that this is the ultimate goal of parenting. It is the fundamental motivation for doing everything else we do. It is the reason for all the talking, praying, instructing, correcting, saying “no” and “yes.” We do all of these things with the hope that God would use us to produce teenagers who love and serve God above all else. Our prayer is that there would be a vertical (Godward) focus to everything the teenager says and does. This is the thing that must rule the teenager’s heart if she is ever going to live a godly life in this fallen world. We must hold onto this goal. We cannot settle for anything less.

A heart for God must be distinguished from a Pharisaical performance of external Christian duty. This is more about the praise of people and temporal benefits than it is about pleasing God. No, a heart for God is a deep, sincere, and abid-

ing hunger to know, love, and honor God even at the expense of other desirable things in life. We must not give in to the cynicism that would make us think it is ridiculous to expect this quality to grow in the heart of a teenager.

**Chapter goals** The first goal of this chapter is to help parents consider whether this goal is the fundamental motivator in their relationship with their teenagers. Is this goal more important than other, culturally dictated goals? Have they tended to see this goal as unrealistic? The Bible reminds us that a person who only lives for the physical things of this world is a fool. The second goal is to give parents a functional understanding of what a heart for God looks like. The final goal is to teach parents what they can do to encourage a personal pursuit of God in their children.

**Study Questions**

1. What should we most want for our children?
2. What is one reason this goal may seem unrealistically high for our children?
3. Why is it so common that, although children do not consciously deny God, other things replace his functional rule over their lives?
4. What might parents have to do to create opportunities to communicate redemptive awe to their children?
5. What is the central characteristic of a heart for God?
6. What signs might a parent expect to see in a teen with a heart for God?
7. What practical things can encourage a heart for God in our teens?

**Application Questions**

1. What changes do you need to make in your lifestyle to become a better shepherd and discipler of your children?
2. To what extent do you think you have taken Christ and your relationship with him for granted?
3. When you look at yourself and at your children, do you see signs of a pursuit of God? Use the following scale for evaluation.
  - 1 - Rarely
  - 2 - Occasionally
  - 3 - Regularly/habitually

I spend time reading the Bible.	1 2 3
I spend time praying.	1 2 3
I look forward to attending church.	1 2 3
I seek out instruction.	1 2 3
I choose friends who are known to be wise men and women .	1 2 3
I have cultivated friendships with people who are willing to confront me.	1 2 3
I am open and willing to listen to God’s Word.	1 2 3
I introduce spiritual things into my conversations with others.	1 2 3
I seek biblical direction for my decisions.	1 2 3
I resist making impulsive, emotional decisions.	1 2 3
I ask myself what would please God in the daily situations I face.	1 2 3
4. What practical things do you do to develop a heart for God in your children?
5. Do you have family worship? What do you do to make it engaging?
6. List three ways in which you pointed your teen to God during the last week.
7. Ask your spouse and each of your children to recall the last time you sought forgiveness. Would they say you regularly seek forgiveness when you fail?

8. Do you invite your family members to hold you accountable for change? For what things are they currently holding you accountable?
9. How would you rate the importance of prayer in your family life? Base your rating on what you actually do, not on what you think would be good to do.
10. Do you hunger after God and does your family see it?

## II LEAVING HOME

**Core principle** It has often been said that the goal of parenting is to work yourself out of a job. Although that moment of emancipation is painful for parents and often filled with “Not yet’s” and “I regrets,” it is the goal we have been working toward since the child’s birth. It is also true that one of the great problems of all cultures is that we are sending generations of children out into the world who are essentially unprepared. Our goal is to reach that point of emancipation with children who are mature, and therefore prepared to face life on their own. This means they will be able to deal wisely with the catalog of circumstances, problems, relationships, concerns, and temptations that they will encounter in the world. Our definition of maturity must take progressive sanctification as its model. Our teenagers will not leave our homes as finished products. Our hope is that we will see seeds of maturity that can then continue to grow after the teen has left our home.

**Chapter goal** Four primary goals need to be our focus here:

- To help our teenagers develop a biblical definition of maturity that would become a useful tool of self-evaluation.
- To teach our teenagers how to recognize the fruit of maturity in their lives.
- To be used of God to help them grow in areas where growth is necessary.
- To participate with them in an honest evaluation of their readiness to be emancipated from the home.

### Study Questions

1. According to the author, few teens who want to leave home desire to do so because of the rules. Why do they want to leave?
2. What four verbs can set the agenda for parents who want to model Christ with their teens? Explain.
3. What six characteristics does the author include in his definition of maturity?
4. What does functional godliness mean?
5. Describe the practical fruit of biblical maturity.

### Application Questions

1. How effectively are you modeling Christ? Use the following scale.
 

1 - Rarely	
2 - Occasionally	
3 - Regularly/habitually	
I greet the sin of others with the accepting grace of Christ.	1 2 3
I hold God’s standard high without compromising it.	1 2 3
I refrain from condemning, rejecting, and being judgmental.	1 2 3
I reveal Christ’s love to others.	1 2 3
I reveal Christ’s patience to others.	1 2 3
I reveal Christ’s gentleness to others.	1 2 3
I reveal Christ’s kindness to others.	1 2 3
I reveal Christ’s forgiveness to others.	1 2 3
I identify with those facing harsh realities.	1 2 3
I identify with those facing temptations.	1 2 3
I recognize my vulnerability to the struggles others might have.	1 2 3
I spend as much time asking good questions and listening	

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- as I do speaking. 1 2 3
- I know what situations my family members face every day. 1 2 3
- I know the pressures my family members are facing. 1 2 3
- 2. Evaluate the maturity of your family members using the following scale.
  - 1 -Rarely
  - 2 -Occasionally
  - 3 -Regularly/habitually
  - My family member has a knowledge of God’s will in the varied situations of life. 1 2 3
  - My family member knows how the principles of Scripture apply to everyday life. 1 2 3
  - My family member desires to please the Lord in everything he or she does. 1 2 3
  - My family member is teachable. 1 2 3
  - I see growth in the life of my family member. 1 2 3
  - My family member refrains from giving up, running away, or quitting in the face of trouble. 1 2 3
  - My family member endures. 1 2 3
  - My family member appreciates the great privilege of being born into the family of faith. 1 2 3
  - My family member does not take our spiritual heritage for granted. 1 2 3
  - My family member prizes being an heir of God’s grace. 1 2 3
  - My family member pursues God’s desires rather than his or her own. 1 2 3
- 3. Rate your family members on the fruit of maturity you observe in their lives. Use the following continuum.

My family member accepts and finds satisfaction in his or her responsibilities.	1 2 3 4	My family member acts as if life is supposed to be fun and enjoyable all the time.
My family member has a reputation for being trustworthy.	1 2 3 4	My family member frequently excuses irresponsibility with statements such as, “Oh, I’m sorry, I forgot,” “I didn’t know I was supposed to . . .” or “I guess I misunderstood what you said.”

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My family member acts responsibly even when no one is watching.	1 2 3 4	My family member must be coerced into doing what he or she is supposed to do.
My family member pursues Bible teaching, personal worship, and ministry on his or her own.	1 2 3 4	My family member's communion with the Lord occurs only when it is initiated or controlled by others.
My family member maintains healthy, productive, God-glorifying relationships with others.	1 2 3 4	My family member requires constant intervention from others to maintain relationships.
My family member knows how to solve problems with others.	1 2 3 4	My family member doesn't understand how he or she creates problems with others.
My family member finds joy and meaning in work.	1 2 3 4	My family member considers work a necessary evil and avoids it whenever possible.
Employers and others indicate my family member is a willing worker.	1 2 3 4	My family member grumbles and complains about work.
My family member erects moral boundaries.	1 2 3 4	My family member likes to see how close he or she can come to the edge of the moral cliff.
My family member can be trusted to make good choices even when others aren't watching.	1 2 3 4	My family member is not responsible or trustworthy even for very small things.
My family member is open and transparent.	1 2 3 4	My family member is intolerant of conversations about what he or she is doing.

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My family member seeks out good advice.	1 2 3 4	My family member gets defensive when his or her choices are questioned.
My family member is approachable.	1 2 3 4	I feel like I am walking on eggshells with my family member.
I can lovingly challenge my family member's thinking, choices, and actions.	1 2 3 4	My family member turns even friendly discussions into unfriendly debates.
My family member has a sense of his or her strengths and weaknesses.	1 2 3 4	My family member responds with a "What are you talking about, I never do that!" attitude when I point out weaknesses.
My family member is thankful for what he or she has.	1 2 3 4	My family member is rarely content and constantly wants something new.
My family member reaches out to those who don't have much.	1 2 3 4	My family member judges people by their looks and clothing.
My family member uses money to serve others and the Lord.	1 2 3 4	My family member uses money to buy more stuff.
My family member's goals for life are to please God and serve him.	1 2 3 4	My family member's life goals center around materialistic achievements.

4. We cannot give our teens what we do not have ourselves. How would you rate yourself in the following areas? Use the following scale.

1 -Rarely

2 -Occasionally

3 -Regularly/habitually

I meet the standard of biblical maturity. 1 2 3

I model a winsome, mature godliness before my family. 1 2 3

I live a responsible life. 1 2 3

I am approachable and teachable. 1 2 3

I live with moral boundaries that shape my decisions and actions. 1 2 3

I have an accurate sense of where I am weak and where I am strong. 1 2 3

I am open to help from others. 1 2 3

I hold physical things in proper balance. 1 2 3

## 12 THREE STRATEGIES FOR PARENTING TEENS

**Core principle** God’s redemptive work in us is strategic. He knows exactly what he is trying to produce (conformity to Christ) and exactly how he is going to accomplish it (the means of grace). As parents of teenagers, we are called to mirror the work of our Heavenly Father. We do not want our parenting to be aimless, ineffective, and unproductive. We not only want to parent with a sense of direction, we also want to know practically how to get to the destination. This chapter presents three strategies to get us where we want to go in the hearts and lives of our teenagers.

*Project parenting.* Here we learn to regularly evaluate our teenagers to gain an accurate, current sense of where they are struggling, experiencing temptation, or need to grow. We do this so we can take advantage of the daily opportunities God will give us to go after what is “hot.”

*Constant conversation.* Here we recognize that, like other sinners, our teenagers need daily exhortation, encouragement, and intervention. We also recognize that they probably will not pursue us, so we commit ourselves to seek them out daily, engaging them in conversation, expressing our love, and looking for opportunities to encourage a Godward heart.

*Leading your teenager to repentance.* We do not want to simply constrain behavior. If that is all we have done, there will be nothing within the teenager to keep him moving towards God when he has left home. It is only when the heart turns that the life will turn. We need to regularly call our teenagers to confession and repentance. Our goal is to tell them over and over again that there is nothing in life more important than turning their hearts toward God.

**Chapter goals** The goal of focusing on these three strategies is twofold. First, we need to remind ourselves that God always gives his people a means of accomplishing what he has called them to do. He hasn’t called us to an unrealistic, un-doable life. In his grace he is not only the God of ends, but of means as well. Second, the goal is that in focusing on these strategies, we can function with prepared spontaneity. Although I do not know what a particular day will bring, I am prepared for it and able to spontaneously respond because I have committed myself to concrete goals and to practical strategies for reaching them. So I will regularly be surprised but not caught unprepared.

### Study Questions

1. What does the term “project parenting” imply?
2. What two deficiencies in the heart of the wicked are described in Psalm 36?
3. How might these deficiencies show up in teens?
4. Besides clear goals, what else do parents need to accomplish “project parenting”?

5. What two components of personal insight does the author point out?
6. Why do our teens need constant (daily) conversation?
7. What four steps are involved in turning away from God?
8. What four steps does the author suggest to lead teens to repentance and reconciliation?

### **Application Questions**

1. For each family member, ask yourself, “What important struggles are present in his or her life that we need to pursue?” How does your family member currently view these areas? Where does he or she tend to minimize or rationalize sin?
2. In which of the three strategies presented in this chapter are you strongest? Weakest? What can and will you do to strengthen any weaknesses?

## **13 SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGE**

**Core principle** God’s goals are high. What he wants for us is much grander than anything we would ever want for ourselves. What he calls us to do is higher, better, and more important than what we would have decided to do if left to ourselves. This is true of parenting as well. It would be very easy to get to the end of a book like this and be overwhelmed as you look at the huge mountain of parental responsibility placed before you. But we must remember that our God is a God of little steps. The radical work of change that God works in and through you is rarely accomplished through a single event. It is a process. He calls us to climb mountains with small steps. These steps, although small, are not unimportant. Each little step is significant because it gets us closer to the God-assigned goal.

This chapter is about recognizing the small things that must be done regularly to function as God’s instrument of change in the life of your teenager.

**Chapter goals** The first goal of this chapter is to see that God’s work in our teenagers’ lives is incremental. We do not have to feel pressured to accomplish something in a single encounter when it actually takes years. The second goal is to learn the little things that contribute to big change in a teenager’s life. This chapter offers a list of constructive small steps. The third goal is to determine which of those steps would be particularly helpful for your teenager.

### **Study Questions**

1. List the twenty steps the author suggests to bring about change.

### **Application Questions**

Summarize the things that have been helpful to you from this book.

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