

Making a Spiritual Impact on Your Teenager

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“Making a spiritual impact on teenagers is the parents’ role not youth ministers’.” To accept this idea, I took the same class, Ministry with the Families of Teenagers, three times to understand fully, to make it mine and to apply the principles to the actual ministry field while I was serving the Korean church in Fort Worth. Three years later, I cannot stop talking about the importance of family ministry, especially the parents’ spiritual impact on their children.

Relationships

“Most parents not only want their children to have a belief in God, but also a relationship with God, yet many parents are failing to make the introduction.”¹ Churches must prove they are ready to help parents make this connection. Parents might pour the biblical truths into their kids, but how about the relationship? Josh McDowell said “Truth without relationship leads to rejection. We are losing our kids not because they do not hear the truth, but because the people speaking the truth have not spent the time to build relationships with them.”

Teenagers tend to reject the truth when it comes from someone who they have a cold relationship with. For such reasons, youth ministers have to help parents to build deep relationships with their children. Relationships are the key of making spiritual impact on teenagers.

Heart Connections

A heart connection is the “pipeline” that connects the hearts between parents and children. Through this pipeline, spiritual impact flows from generation to generation. Teenagers’ spiritual and emotional tank should be filled with unending love, significance and security from their parents.

When this tank is empty, teenagers feel pain, so then they try to fill it up by themselves in their own ways. They seek someone or something to be filled with. In order to make the pain stop, teenagers also push their parents away because of the wounds from their parents’ yelling, screaming or anger. However, only parents can fill the tank completely. This is the way God created the relationship between parents and children. Ministers, mentors or friends cannot overfill it even though they may pour the needs into the tank. Teenagers also give pains to their parents through disobedience and rebellion. They can cause pain by ruining their moral purity and the parents’ hopes and dreams.

Communication is one of the best ways to build relationship. The book *30 Days: Turning the Hearts of Parents and Teenagers Toward Each other (LifeWay)* helps families to build and restore the heart connections. For 30days every

¹ Scott McConnell, “The parent Adventure: Preparing Your Children For a Lifetime With God,” quoted by Mark Kelly, *Fact & Trends*, Summer 2009, p.7

evening a parent and a child have approximately 10 minutes of focused communication based on the questions on labeled cards. The most common feedbacks after experiencing the 30 Days is this: "We became closer and know each other much better" and "I did not know how much my mother (father) loves me." Youth ministers and leaders should partner with parents in order to encourage and equip them as the most powerful influence on youths' spiritual growth.

Broken Relationship

This is what some experts say about broken relationships between parents and their children.

"We can't pass on our faith or protect our kids from the culture unless we make that relational connection, that loving bond, that intimate attachment our children so desperately need and want."² (Josh McDowell)

"Injured relationships are the major, hidden force that drive our children away from (godly) living, and sometimes from the faith altogether."³ (Bruce Wilkinson)

"For most parents, it is not a matter of sincerity but rather lack of information on how to communicate love effectively on an emotional level."⁴ (Gary Chapman)

". . . children cannot follow their parents in the journey of faith, belief, and moral integrity unless they personally identify with the parents. Nor can they identify with the parents unless the parents meet their emotional needs."⁵ (Ross Campbell)

"Crowded lives produce fatigue, fatigue produces irritability, and irritability produces indifference. Indifference can be interpreted by the child as a lack of genuine affection and personal esteem."⁶ (James Dobson)

Relationships and Spiritual Impact⁷

Most children become young adults with a faith similar to their parents. Dr. Richard Ross indicates teenagers' tendencies of embracing their parents' faith.

1. Teenagers tend to embrace the faith of parents who have heart connections with their offspring. Parents who keep the heart connection warm and strong usually see visible evidence that their faith and values are passing to their children.

2. Teenagers tend to embrace the faith of parents who spend focused time with them. Many parents who were actively involved in their children's life during the early years withdraw when their children become teenagers.

² Josh McDowell, *The Disconnected Generation* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), back cover.

³ Bruce Wilkinson, *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1999), p.225.

⁴ Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2000), p. 13.

⁵ Ross Campbell, *Relational Parenting* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), p.30.

⁶ James Dobson, *The New Hide or Seek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), p.81.

⁷ Richard Ross, "Ministry with the Families of Teenagers" Classroom lecture notes, STMIN 4333A, Fall 2006.

3. Teenagers tend to embrace the faith of parents who show them unfailing love in ways they can understand. Teenagers who genuinely feel loved by their parents are far more likely to respond to the deep longings for community, to welcome structure, to respond positively to guidelines, and to find purpose and meaning in life.

4. Teenagers tend to embrace the faith of parents who surround them with emotional security. Believing the marriage of parents will be source of that emotional security.

Youth ministers should not neglect the parents' influence on teenagers. The primary role of youth ministers is to equip and encourage parents to impact children's spiritual growth. Helping parents to build and restore the relationships with their children is the key of youth ministry.

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