

G THE WEIGHT & WONDER OF PARENTING TEENS

Dear Loving Parent/Guardian,

Parenting a teen is holy, sanctifying, hard work. You are stewarding an eternal soul, created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), yet fallen and in need of a Savior (Romans 3:23). You don't need to have all the answers or get everything right. What your kids need most is to see you lean on Jesus—through victories and failures alike—and to hear you say with Paul, *"Follow me as I follow Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Throughout my years of discipling teens, I've wrestled often with two big questions:

1. *What do teens really want and need?*
2. *How can parents live out their role as the main spiritual influence in their kids' lives?*

Now, as my wife and I begin raising our own children, those questions carry even more weight. I don't claim to have all the answers, but through many years of walking with Jesus alongside students, parents, and leaders, God has taught me a few things I pray will encourage and strengthen your discipleship at home.

What teens really want and need

Again and again, I've had parents come to me feeling anxious and defeated—worried that their teens are slipping away, that nothing they've tried to teach is sticking, and that their influence is vanishing. I've heard the heart-cry in their questions: *"Why is this happening?" "What am I doing wrong?" "Can you help?"*

Here's what I've found to be the top three things teens truly want and need in order to thrive spiritually and emotionally: **guidance**, **sympathy**, and **encouragement**. When these three flow out of you into your teen, they open space for connection, trust, and discipleship.

1. Guidance

Your teens really do want your advice, but that doesn't mean overwhelming them with your opinions or quick fixes. It begins with a listening ear. James 1:19 urges us, *"Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."* Teens may stress over things that seem small to you, but those struggles feel enormous to them. Gentle, humble guidance—rooted in listening—is what opens their hearts to wisdom.

2. Sympathy

It has always been difficult to be a teenager, especially today. Your child needs to know you see and understand their struggles. Romans 12:15 calls us to *"weep with those who weep."* Don't minimize their pain; walk with them in it. Your presence in their hardest moments may do more for their spiritual growth than any lecture could.

3. Encouragement

Your words have power to build up or tear down (Proverbs 18:21). Small acts—like a note on their door, a text in the middle of the day, or reading a verse over them before school—can anchor their confidence both in you and in God. Hebrews 3:13 reminds us, *"Encourage one another daily... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."* Encouragement also means giving them opportunities to step up. Ask their input, assign meaningful tasks, and celebrate their growth. When you affirm their effort and character—not just results—you show them that God is shaping them into something greater.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 reminds us, *"Two are better than one... if either of them falls down, one can help the other up."* That's what your teens need from you—someone steady to help them up, to point them back to Christ.

How you can live out your role

Much of what will stick with your teen(s) isn't what they *hear* you say, but what they *see* you do. As the saying goes, "More is caught than taught." I want to encourage you to build a vibrant family of faith—and live it out in front of them. Here are a few simple, practical ways:

Build A Vibrant Family of Faith

1. Share intentional meals together

Mealtimes are one of the best discipleship settings. Read a Psalm, a Proverb, or a few pages from a book like *Pilgrim's Progress* and then pray for each other. It doesn't have to be extravagant—just intentional, consistent, and real. *"These words that I command you today*

shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children... when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

2. Practice spiritual conversations

Lean into everyday moments that point to Christ and His redeeming work. Talk about faith naturally as it connects to school, sports, friendships, or work. Share about your own spiritual journey and what Christ has done for you. This is what it looks like to obey Paul's command: *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom"* (Colossians 3:16).

3. Pray and study Scripture together

When I reached middle school, I began to excel in basketball, waking up at 4:30 every morning to get in the gym before school. Every time I stepped out of my room, there was my dad—already dressed for his job as a mechanic—with two plates of breakfast and his Bible open. We read and prayed together before I set off for school. I will never forget those mornings, or the way his quiet faith shaped mine during our 1-to-1 Bible reading. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Psalm 119:105).

4. Enjoy time and laughter together

Don't underestimate the power of simply having fun. Laughter, games, adventures, and shared hobbies build bonds that make discipleship conversations more natural and effective. *"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones"* (Proverbs 17:22).

5. Practice hospitality.

Show your teen that faith is bigger than your own household. Invite both believers and nonbelievers into your home. Be generous, be kind—and involve your kids. Have them help prepare or even plan the meal. You'll be surprised how seriously they take it when you set the tone. *"Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality"* (Romans 12:13).

6. Don't do it alone.

Please, don't do this alone. Satan loves to isolate parents and whisper lies of inadequacy. But God places us in a family of faith for a reason (Hebrews 10:24–25). Surround yourself and your kids with believers who will walk with you, encourage you, and remind you of God's grace. Recruit a mentor who will faithfully walk with you and help guide you through this season.

Own Your Role as a Disciple

I want to conclude with this exhortation, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* (James 1:22) Far and above your role as a parent is your role as a disciple of Christ. For *you* have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus, that you may proclaim His glory to all the earth, including your kids. The greatest thing you can do to influence their faith is to own yours. Nothing is more sour to a teen than un-authenticity in the faith. Seek to humbly model what dependence on Christ looks like. Be in his Word daily, pray daily, prioritize being at Sunday morning worship and labor to know Christ more each day.

It's true, Parenting is holy, sanctifying, hard work... With Christ's help, you've got this. You are probably aware of your faults now more than ever, take heart, for Christ promises, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). As you disciple your teen, rest in the truth that you are being discipled by Christ Himself and that He loves your teen far more than you could ever even imagine. We are here for you and are cheering you on in this incredible journey.