

Preparing to Parent Teens

Day One: Introduction

I am often asked by parents of tweens (8-12 year olds), what they should be doing to prepare for the teenage years. Deciding to become an intentional parent doesn't happen overnight. Where do you begin? Well, you begin with yourself! And you begin with a big picture God.

Proverbs 22:6 is probably the all-time most used verse for getting parenting right: "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." Did you know that the root of "train up" is the term for "the palate, the roof of the mouth"? In Solomon's times, midwives dipped their fingers in a date syrup and massaged the gums and palate of the newborn with the juice to stimulate the sensation of sucking. Then the baby would be given to his mother to start breastfeeding. The expression, "train up" means to develop a thirst. What does it look like to create a thirst in our child? I believe it looks like casting a vision for living with and for a big picture God.

This little devotional is meant to be a primer to help you navigate your own heart and prepare you to parent your teen. Let's get started.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of parenting and for the multiple ways you use my children in the redemption of my own story. I am weary and overwhelmed and long for your guidance. My heart's desire is to get it right, so I place myself and my children in your hands. I surrender to you and the story you are telling through us.

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Scripture:

Proverbs 22:6

Luke 2:40

Day Two: Your Story

I went to college in Chicago to get a good degree and make lots of money. I longed for an adventure. God gave it to me, just not as I planned. As I grew in my faith and yielded to Him in prayer, he wrecked me. Isaiah 58:10 tells us that “if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.” This verse became my North Star. A story was birthed in Chicago and it lives on in our family.

The monuments of memory hold so much story. When it comes to preparing to parent teens, naming the life defining moments that have most significantly altered the way you think, play, work, and worship will help you understand the meta narrative you’re parenting under.

Why are you willing to spend more money than usual for this experience, but cringe when your tween wants to spend an equal amount elsewhere? Why are you upset about certain things your kids do or say? Why is your one unbearable feeling triggered so often?

Where was *your* story birthed?

As Curt Thompson writes in *The Soul of Shame*, “of all the variables that encourage the development of secure attachment in a child, the single most powerful one is the degree to which the child’s parent has made coherent sense of his or her own story.”

Reflection: Have you made coherent sense of your story? Are you willing to navigate those waters to firmly ground your teen in your family storyline?

Scripture:

Micah 6:8

Proverbs 21:3

Day Three: Your Passion

I read a book once that said the amount of drama (in a teenager's life) is in direct proportion to the amount of passion they have. Increase passion, decrease drama. It's that simple. I look around at some moms I know and I think it still applies, to grown-ups. Women living for their kids' activities, maneuvering their kids' social lives, and vicariously reenacting their own youth through their teen are living small stories. The drama comes naturally.

Women (and girls) full of passion do not have time for drama. They are living big stories. They have been wrecked by something that Jesus' heart breaks for and are bringing to bear their talents and treasures to that cause. If our kids are to grow up living for a bigger story than the world offers, they need to see their parents' model.

They may not adopt your passion. I never expect my kids to care about human trafficking the way I do. But they need to know that the discovery of their passion is a quest worth starting now.

They need to see our passion and they need to have the freedom to discover their own.

Reflection: Have you asked God to reveal the ways in which your heart breaks for that which breaks his? Ask, seek, knock and discover what he shows you.

Scripture:

Jeremiah 29:13

Ephesians 2:10

Day Four: Your Values

If our passion is the road we travel, our values are the guardrails. They define the way in which the route is traversed. Our values shape the decisions we make as we carry out our passions in life. And it all begins with our story. Donald Miller writes, “A person coming to understand their own core values is critical, I believe, to living a great story.” Do you know your core values?

As you prepare to parent teens, coming to understand your core values will show you why you’re making certain decisions and saying no to others. Better yet, it will explain why you’re inclined to one thing, but your close friend or neighbor is not. Why do you homeschool, but your best friend doesn’t? Why do you allow your tween to read one series but not another?

Romans 14:31 says “So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.”

We started with your story, the place from which you launched. We talked about your passion, the road upon which you’re journeying. And now we’ve covered your values, the guardrails along the road that define the means by which the journey is traversed. And all this is merely to prime the pump as you prepare for a new stage in parenting. Remember, it starts with you.

Reflection: How would you describe your family compared to another family in your church? Could these differences merely be a result of differing values?

Scripture:

Romans 14:3

1 Corinthians 8:9

Day Five: Your Vision

Let's cast a vision to our kids that extends beyond the teen era of delayed responsibilities and thickening drama. Let's wreck our teens the way Jesus wrecks us. For him. Let's weave our own story and passions with our values to hold out a vision of a bigger story. If we're not living a small story, why should our teens?

And you know what? Kids respond so much better to vision than correction! We could focus on too much gossip about a certain friend *or* we could reframe the narrative to be about a kind and caring heart that loves the hard to love. We could easily harp on excessive amounts of screen time *or* we could remind her about her goals and vision and ask if another episode helps her get there.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." You're on the cusp of parenting a teen. Before it's too late, imagine them in 20 years. Imagine the kind of man or woman you want them to be.

My hope is that you dream of more than just a good job, marriage, 2.5 kids, and a house. If you've become a mom who has made coherent sense of her story, named her passion, and defined her values, you're a mom who knows she's been called to a much bigger story.

Reflection: Would you dream this for your child? If so, how are you going to get them there?

Scripture:

Proverbs 8:32

Proverbs 31:25,26

Day Six: Your Kid

I am a confused mom. Are you? I have been studying and reading my children since the day our eyes locked and I am still surprised, still corrected, still taken off guard. Reading our children is an art far more than a science. And in this art of parenting, though I've told you it starts with you, at some point, so much of our focus and attention has to be on them. Or else we'll miss them entirely.

Hagar first names God, El Roi, the God who sees: "She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me" (Genesis 16:13). May we also be parents who see our children.

It's one thing to name the ways in which your story impacts theirs. It's another thing to make it their story too. Our kids need to be firmly rooted in their family narrative because they are writing their own! God has a story he's telling through them. You get to help them discover what it is. Learning to attend to the unique and quirky personalities of your children will help you prepare to parent them as teens.

Reflection: Are you figuring out who your kid is? Have you discovered the places where they diverge from your story, your passion?

Scripture:

Psalm 139:1

Romans 8:27

Day Seven: Conclusion

I believe parenting is the most exhausting thing we do. It requires physical, mental, and emotional energy. It demands our heart be alive and present. When they were little you probably read *What to Expect*. Now that they're about to become a teen, what are you reading? How are you preparing?

In God's great design, I think he gave us the years of adolescence to breathe. Kids can dress and feed and bathe themselves and are typically quite enjoyable. But before you have to intervene on the 3 biggies again (addressing attire, choice of food, and insisting on bathing), now is the time to make coherent sense of your story.

Now is the time to name your passion and values and craft a vision for your child's future.

Now is the time to fiercely learn about this little person you'll be transitioning into an adult.

The Bible may not be a manual on the how to's of parenting in the 21st century, but in it we find a God who models for us how to lead, love, fight, sacrifice, and create. We find a God who loves richly, forgives largely, delights abundantly, and serves humbly. We find a manual for how to navigate this messy, challenging thing called parenting with grace and mercy.

Prayer: God of grace and mercy, of forgiveness and delight, would you lead me into this next season of parenting with wisdom and humility? Bless my relationship with my child and may she receive my intention with every ounce of love in which I offer it. Amen.

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