

Fostering Healthy Relationships

A Youth Discipleship Seminar for Parents

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children."

— Deuteronomy 6:6

You are still the most powerful influence in your teenager's life.

More than peers

More than media

More than youth leaders

— Christian Smith, University of Notre Dame

The Relational Crisis Facing Teenagers Today

1 in 5

teenagers report experiencing loneliness —
higher than any other age group

WHO Commission on Social Connection, 2025

~40%

of adolescents report persistent sadness or
hopelessness, with loneliness as a major factor

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2023

"It is not good for man to be alone." — Genesis 2:18

SECTION I

The Foundation: Parental Influence

Deuteronomy 6:5–7

*"Love the LORD your God with all your heart... These commandments are to be on your hearts. **Impress them on your children.** Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*

— Deuteronomy 6:5–7

The Sequence

Parents' own love for God comes first — overflow, not performance

The Locations

Kitchen. Car. Bedtime. This is a posture, not a curriculum

The Glass Ceiling of Faith

"Parents, for better or worse, are actually the most influential pastors of their children.

Parents set a kind of glass ceiling of religious commitment, above which their children rarely rise."

— Christian Smith, *Handing Down the Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2021)

What matters MOST

Parents talking with their children about faith during the week

More than

Youth group, Sunday school, mission trips, or sermons combined

The ceiling

Where parents are with Christ is where their children will likely be

SECTION II

The Home as a Discipleship Environment

Modeling · Hospitality · Rhythm

THREE PILLARS OF A DISCIPLESHIP HOME

01 Modeling

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." — 1 Cor 11:1

More is caught than taught. Your marriage, friendships, and forgiveness are curriculum.

02 Hospitality

"Seek to show hospitality." — Romans 12:13

The parent who opens their home gains a window into their teenager's world no lecture can replicate.

03 Rhythm

"When you sit at home, walk along the road..." — Deut 6:7

The dinner table. The car. The bedtime routine. Ordinary moments stacked with intentional presence.

SECTION III

Friendships: From Playdates to Roommates

Proverbs 13:20 · Proverbs 27:17 · 1 Corinthians 15:33

What God-Glorifying Friendship Looks Like

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

Proverbs 27:17

"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble."

Proverbs 13:20

"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Proverbs 18:24

The Gold Standard: David & Jonathan

Their souls were knit together — transcending status, age difference, and political threat. A friendship that sharpened both men toward God. This is the vision to give your teenagers.

Quality Over Quantity

The question worth asking is not: "Is my teenager popular?"

The question worth asking is: "Does my teenager have one or two deeply loyal, character-building friendships?"

Early social acceptance

Broad peer acceptance in early adolescence → lower anxiety, less aggression, better health as adults

Close friendship quality

Predicts better adult relationships, job satisfaction, and stable romantic partnerships
— University of Virginia

The inverse is true

Teenagers who lacked quality friendships were more likely to experience depression and poor work performance in mid-twenties

Recognizing Counterfeit Community

What counterfeit community offers:

- A sense of belonging
- Acceptance without judgment
- Identity and structure
- Something that feels like family
- "They love me better than the church does"

The antidote is not restriction — it's:

- Genuine belonging at home
- Real friendship in the church community
- Being deeply known, not just tolerated
- Making the true community so alive the counterfeit loses its appeal

SECTION IV

Dating & Romantic Relationships

Vision, not control

What Scripture Says About Romantic Relationships

Key Principle: Commitment precedes intimacy. The world reverses this order — and the heart pays the price.

1 Thess 4:3–4

Abstain from sexual immorality; control your own body in holiness and honor.

1 Cor 6:18–20

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You were bought at a price. Glorify God.

2 Cor 6:14

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Avoiding the Twin Ditches

PERMISSIVENESS

The hands-off parent

Believes backing off preserves the relationship.

Actually leaves the teenager relationally unsupported at the moment they most need wisdom. They absorb it from culture and peers instead.

CONTROL

The fortress parent

Believes tight restrictions prevent harm.

What tight restrictions often produce is secrecy — teenagers learn to manage their relational lives underground, away from the parent's influence entirely.

The path between them: Transition consciously from gatekeeper to guide — giving vision, not verdicts.

SECTION V

Navigating Culture

Set apart, not sealed off · Romans 12:2 · John 17:15–16

Set Apart — Not Sealed Off

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." — John 17:15–16

For parents, this means two things simultaneously:

- Teenagers need a deep, rooted, positive identity in Christ — not merely a list of prohibitions
- That identity is meant to be lived in the world, among friends who don't share it — not preserved in a bubble
- The parent focused only on restriction gives their teenager half the equation

Truth and Grace Together

"The homosexuality question is first and foremost about beautiful people loved by God... truthfully loving and lovingly truthful."

— Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*

Hold the biblical witness

God created human beings male and female. Marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman. This is not peripheral — it is rooted in creation.

Hold the relationship

Research is clear: rejection raises risk of serious harm. Stay in the conversation. Keep the door open. Unconditional love is not the same as unconditional affirmation.

Hold both together

The first response when a child discloses struggle is: "I am not going anywhere. Nothing you tell me changes that." Love leads; truth follows in its wake.

SECTION VI

Practical Application

Strategic Questions · Recommended Resources · Prayer

The Strategic Question

Teenagers who feel genuinely asked open up. Teenagers who feel taught at disengage.

On Friendships

"Is there someone who makes you want to be a better person?"

"Is there a friendship that's been draining lately?"

On Dating

"What would be a dealbreaker in someone you were dating?"

"What do you want the story of how you found your person to look like?"

On Faith

"Is there anything about following Jesus that feels hard right now?"

"If you could change one thing about our family's spiritual life, what would it be?"

For Your Continued Journey

Handing Down the Faith

Christian Smith & Amy Adamczyk

The definitive research on how parents pass faith to the next generation. Every parent in this room would benefit.

Not Yet Married

Marshall Segal

A gospel-rich framework for navigating singleness and dating. Give it to your teenager — and read it yourself first.

People to Be Loved

Preston Sprinkle

The most pastorally wise resource for parents navigating questions of sexual identity. Truth and love in the same hand.

Making Room

Christine Pohl

A rich theological account of Christian hospitality. Essential reading for parents who want to understand why the open home matters.

The Power of Intentional Prayer

"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." — James 5:16

Pray the Bible over them

Take Paul's intercessory prayers — Ephesians 1:17–19, Ephesians 3:16–19, Colossians 1:9–12 — and pray them by name over your child. These prayers ask for wisdom, rootedness in love, and the knowledge of God's will.

Pray with them, not just for them

The parent who prays out loud with their teenager — even briefly, even imperfectly — is showing that prayer is not a performance but a conversation. They are inviting their child into the most important relationship in their own life.

The Closing Challenge

**You came here because you care.
That already puts you ahead.**

Now take one thing — just one — and do it this week.

- Ask one strategic question
- Open your home to one friend
- Pray one prayer out loud with your teenager

Small things, done consistently, in the power of the Spirit, are how God builds people.

Screenshots of Seminar Handout

Fostering Healthy Relationships

A Take-Home Guide for Parents

“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children.”

— Deuteronomy 6:6–7

The Big Idea

Parents have more influence than they realize. Faith and relational formation happen most powerfully through intentional presence, not perfection.

1. Your Influence Matters

- Faith formation begins with your own walk with God.
- Discipleship happens in ordinary moments (meals, car rides, bedtime).
- Research shows the most influential factor in a teenager’s faith is parents talking about faith during the week.
- How you talk matters more than having perfect answers.

Remember: *You don’t have to be perfect. You have to be present.*

2. Building a Discipleship Home

MODEL

- Your teenager learns relationships by watching you.
- How you speak, apologize, forgive, and love is shaping them.

HOSPITALITY

- A welcoming home gives you insight into your teenager’s world.
- Say yes to friends being over.

NOTES:

- Be present without hovering.
- #### RHYTHM
- Consistent, ordinary moments matter.
 - Family meals are most powerful when relationships are warm and connected.
 - The relationship—not the routine—is the key.

3. Guiding Friendships

- Friendship is formative—it shapes who we become.
- Encourage fewer, deeper friendships, not popularity.
- Ask:
 - *Does my teenager have one or two friends who build character?*

Counterfeit Community

- The desire to belong is God-given.
- Teenagers are less vulnerable to unhealthy communities when they feel known and loved at home.

4. Dating & Romantic Relationships

Biblical Principle

- Commitment comes before intimacy.
- Intimacy binds hearts, whether commitment exists or not.

Avoid Two Extremes

- Permissive: backing away leaves teens shaped by culture.
- Controlling: tight rules often lead to secrecy.

Better Path

- Move from gatekeeper to guide.
- Offer vision, not just rules.

NOTES:

5. Navigating Culture with Truth & Grace

- Being set apart does not mean being sealed off.
- Teenagers need a positive identity in Christ, not just restrictions.
- Hold both:
 - Biblical truth
 - Relational connection

Key Reminder

- Unconditional love is not unconditional affirmation.
- Staying in relationship matters deeply.

6. Better Questions to Ask

(Use *what* and *how*—not *why*)

Friendships

- “Is there someone who makes you want to be a better person?”
- “Is there a friendship that’s been draining lately?”

Dating

- “What would be a dealbreaker for you?”
- “What kind of story do you want to tell about meeting your future spouse?”

Faith

- “Is anything about following Jesus hard right now?”
- “If we could change one thing about our family’s spiritual life, what would it be?”

7. The Power of Prayer

- Pray Scripture over your teenager:
 - Ephesians 1:17–19
 - Ephesians 3:16–19
 - Colossians 1:9–12
 - Philippians 1:9–11
- Pray with your teenager—even briefly.

One Simple Challenge

Choose **one** thing this week:

- Ask one intentional question
- Open your home once
- Pray one prayer out loud with your teenager

Small things, done consistently, in the power of the Spirit, shape lives.

God is not waiting for you to be perfect.

He is inviting you to be present.

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