

Parenting Wisdom

FROM SURPRISING SOURCES

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It’s amazing where wisdom will sometimes choose to surface. Consider the following statement:

“Studies have shown that parents are the primary influence on their children’s choices and decisions... and that is why we’re proud to offer help to parents. Recognizing that parents have the greatest influence on their children’s decisions, the Family Talk program helps... by encouraging open, honest communication between parents and children.”¹

Makes perfect sense, right? Here’s another:

“Nearly three out of four parents believe their children’s friends and classmates have the most influence... Yet contrary to what parents think, kids say mom and dad have the biggest impact on the choices they make.”²

How about this one:

“So you’re between the ages of 13 and 24. What makes you happy? A worried, weary parent might imagine the answer to sound

something like this: Sex, drugs, and a little rock ‘n’ roll. Maybe some cash, or at least the car keys. Turns out the real answer is quite different. Spending time with family was the top answer to that open-ended question... Parents are seen as an overwhelmingly positive influence in the lives of most young people. Remarkably, nearly half of teens mention at least one of their parents as a hero.”³

At this point you may be wondering where I found these quotes. Focus on the Family? American Family Research Council, maybe? How about the National Network of Youth Ministers? If you guessed any of those three you would be wrong. The first quote is from an Anheuser-Busch publication found on www.familytalkonline.com. The second is from www.MVParents.com, a website of the Coors Brewing Company. The third is from a study conducted by MTV and the Associated Press. Whether it’s a Christian organization or a secular one, all the research points to the

fact that parents are the primary influence of their children.

Josh McDowell says it best,

“Parents... carry more weight—for good or bad—than they give themselves credit for. How a child thinks and acts is still molded by his or her home life, which means the crumbling foundations of the faith among this generation is as much a parental problem as a church problem, if not more so. If we’re going to reclaim the next generation, then the home and the church must join forces together like never before.”⁴

Josh McDowell also reveals how the typical church young person would answer the following question:

“As a teenager, who or what is molding and shaping your attitudes and actions?” Seventy-eight percent of them say: ‘It’s my parents.’ Studies show that their parents have three times the influence over them than their pastor or youth group leader. Church is seventh on their list, carrying just as much influence as does their music.”⁵

An extensive study of 272,400 teenagers conducted by USA Today Weekend Magazine found that 70 percent of teens identified their parents as the most important influence in their lives. 21 percent said that about their friends (peers), and

only 8 percent named the media (TV shows). This study obviously contradicts cultural misconceptions that peers and media are the primary driving force for teens. Today's research supports what the Bible has said for thousands of years: parents have the most important place in their child's development.

After the most in-depth research ever conducted on the spirituality of American teens, Christian Smith concluded in his book, *Soul Searching*,

"The best way to get most youth more involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities. For decades in many religious traditions, the prevailing model of youth ministry has relied on pulling teens away from their parents. In some cases, youth ministers have come to see parents as adversaries. There is no doubt a time and place for unique teen settings and activities; still, our findings suggest that overall youth ministry would probably best be pursued in larger context of family ministry, that parents should be viewed as indispensable partners in the religious formation of youth."⁶

In Altemeyer and Hunsberger's book *Amazing Conversions*, we are told the stories of forty-six college freshmen they call the "Amazing Apostates." These students were identified in a survey of more than 2,000 college freshmen as being among those who were raised in

church-going, Christian families but had abandoned their faith by the time they reached college. Here are a few excerpts from their extensive secular research:

- "All of the different approaches to studying parental influences in the religious socialization process converge on a single conclusion: Parents play an extremely important role in the developing religious attitudes and practices of their offspring. In fact, few researchers would quarrel with the conclusion that parents are the most important influence in this regard."⁷
- "We acquire our religion from our parents almost as certainly as we inherit the color of our eyes."⁸
- "You can make a pretty good

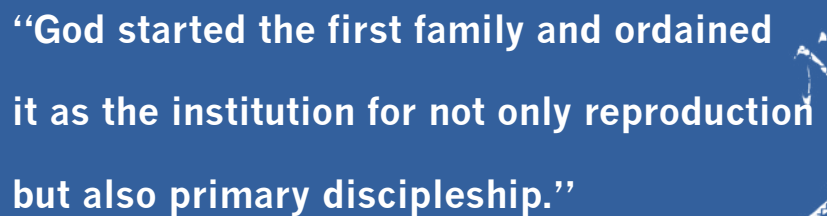
prediction of how a university student, raised as a Christian, will still accept Christianity if you know how much the family religion was emphasized while he was growing up."⁹

- "Parents of those who 'kept the faith' emphasized religion twice as much as the parents of those who became apostates."¹⁰
- "If today's young people seem less religious than their parents, it may be traced to their parents' neglecting to pass on the grand-

parents training."¹¹

- During the authors' research they asked these freshmen to identify whom they most turned to when they experienced doubts or questions specifically in regards to religion and their faith. The responses were, in order:
 - Talking with parents
 - Reading the Bible
 - Talking with friends
 - Spending time in prayer
 - Talking to a minister or religious leader
 - Going to a camp or retreat to renew their faith.¹²

God started the first family and ordained it as the institution for not only reproduction but also for primary discipleship. Think of Deuteronomy 6:4-9:



"God started the first family and ordained it as the institution for not only reproduction but also primary discipleship."

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon 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. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write

them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

The practice of Orthodox Jews, who recite the Shema twice a day, magnifies the importance of this passage. Of all the great Old Testament passages concerning creation, faith, God’s provisions, the coming Messiah, commandments, repentance and forgiveness, I am amazed that this was the passage that God impressed on them to repeat daily. In case we missed the importance the first time, the Lord repeated these same instructions to parents in Deuteronomy 11. All this repeti-

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Steve Farrar talks about the mandate in Deuteronomy 6 and other passages, saying,

“There is no ‘new and improved’ version to these commands. They have not been upgraded. They were perfect when they were given and they will be perfect for as long as men walk the earth...The job description is timeless.”¹³

George Barna summarizes well a

biblical understanding of parenting well, saying:

“The responsibility for raising spiritual champions, according to the Bible, belongs to the parents. The spiritual nurture of children is supposed to take place in the home. Organizations and people from outside the home might support those efforts, but the responsibility is squarely laid at the feet of the family. This is not a job for specialists. It is a job for parents.”¹⁴

Ross Campbell correctly says:

“While organized religious in-

struction and activities in churches, Christian camps, and special youth clubs are extremely important to your developing child, nothing influences him more than his training at home. Parents cannot afford to leave spiritual training to other people.”¹⁵

Whether it is the media, a beer company or secular researchers, it is impossible to deny the truth which was first in the Bible: parents are the primary influencers of their children. The scriptures are very pointed and very clear. There is no escape clause for parents. Biblical obedience requires our best effort because we as parents are the daily

mentors that God intended our children to have. I hope the following scriptures inspire you as they have Tina and me.

- Psalm 78:1-7: “My people, hear my instruction; listen to what I say. I will declare wise sayings; I will speak mysteries from the past—things we have heard and known and that our fathers have passed down to us. We must not hide them from our children, but must tell a future generation the praises of the Lord, His might, and the wonderful works He has performed. He established a testimony in Jacob and set up a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to teach to their children so that a future generation—children yet to be born—might know. They were to rise and tell their children so that they might put their confidence in God and not forget God’s works, but keep His commands.”

- Ephesians 6:4: “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

- Proverbs 1:8-9: “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction, and don’t reject your mother’s teaching, for they will be a garland of grace on your head and a chain around your neck.”

- Malachi 4:6: “And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.”

- Luke 1:17: “And he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children.”

- Proverbs 22:6: “Teach a youth about the way he should go; even

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when he is old he will not depart from it.”

• Psalm 127:1-4: “Unless the Lord builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain; unless the Lord watches over a city, the watchman stays alert in vain. In vain you get up early and stay up late, eating food earned by hard work; certainly He gives sleep to the one He loves. Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, children, a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one’s youth.”

• Proverbs 4:1-11: “Listen, my sons, to a father’s discipline, and pay attention so that you may gain understanding, for I am giving you good instruction. Don’t abandon my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender and precious to my mother, he taught me...”

• Colossians 3:20-21: “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing in the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so they won’t become discouraged.”

• 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12: “As you know, like a father with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

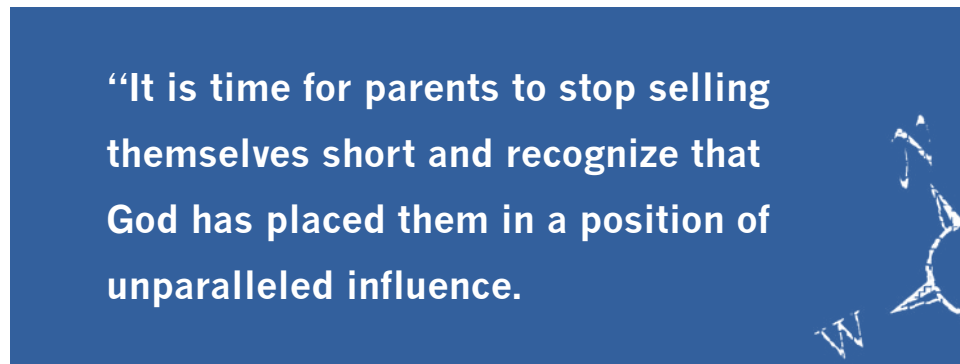
In his sermon “The Estate of Marriage,” Martin Luther reflected his convictions about the role of father and mother in these words:

“Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted

with the Gospel. In short there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.”¹⁶

The Bible says it, research confirms it, and the media agrees: parents are primary. It seems that everyone understands that, everyone but parents. It is time for parents to stop selling themselves short and recognize that God has placed them in a position of unparalleled influence. It is time for parents to open up the Bible at home, pray with their children, talk about the faith, refuse to settle for distant relationships, and influence their children like no one else can. Our children are waiting.

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This article is an excerpt from the book entitled *reThink*. You can purchase this book by visiting www.inquest.org or calling 1-800-776-1893.

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1 Taken from: www.familytalkonline.com/docs/AboutUs.htm

2 Taken from www.MVParents.com

3 Information taken from an article entitled “MTV and The Associated Press Release Landmark Study of Young People and Happiness” found at www.mtv.com/thinkmtv/research/

4 Josh McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation*, (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006), pp.59-60.

5 Wayne Rice and David Veerman, *Understanding Your Teenager*, (Lakeside, CA, Understanding Your Teenager Books) p.118.

6 Christian Smith, *Soul Searching*, (Oxford University Press, 2005) p.267.

7 Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, *Amazing Conversions*, (Prometheus Books, 1997) p.226.

8 Ibid., p.10.

9 Ibid., p.11.

10 Ibid., p.11.

11 Ibid., p.11.

12 Ibid., p.18.

13 Farrar, Steve. *King Me: What Every Son Wants and Needs From His Father*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers. 2005.) pp.20-21.

14 George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*. (Carol Stream, Tyndale House Publishers. 2007) p.11-12.

15 Campbell, Ross. *Relational Parenting*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000.) pp.136-137.

16 Strommen, Merton P. *Passing on the Faith: A Radical new Model for Youth and Family Ministry*. (Winona: Saint Mary’s Press. 2000.) p.28.