



OUR TEENS:

Tuned Too Much To Public Pressure

Our children ages 13-19 undergo tough tests every day. Obviously, we say. For the bulk of that time they populate classrooms, laboratories and workshops. They take multiple quizzes and exams.

But these are not the assessments which primarily concern us as Christian parents. Yes, we encourage our teens to get the best class grades they can. However, as Jeffrey Dean reminds us, we want them to focus on appraisals of deeper significance and with eternal consequences.

Dean is an author and workshop leader at conferences and retreats. According to **OneNewsNow.com**, he senses that young Christians are being tested and confused by alluring messages in the country's media.

For example, Dean hopes that more teenagers will consider "how God sees them." He believes that authentic manhood and womanhood have nothing to do with the unregenerate world's standards. He cautions Christians that human life is not about body measurements, muscular makeup, hair style or color, a person's fitness or hipness, appearance in a swim suit or who gets an invitation to the prom.

Rather, Dean insists to teens that "God created you for a purpose." He invites young Christians to trust that they "were created in God's image" (Genesis 1:27) and that their paramount calling is "to be the mirror of God" to all whom they meet. "That's something beautiful," he says.

When we ask our teenagers whether they believe that God anointed them in their baptism to mirror Him to others,

they will often say, "Yes, we got that message. We have heard that." But, then they admit that they just can't do it. They have too many shortcomings and lapses in behavior. They know they have failed God and can't make it up to Him. Maybe they are supposed to be mirrors. But, if they are, they are smudged, blemished, stained and cracked. They feel they can only distort God's image, not faithfully portray Him.

How do we parents respond when these perceptions surface? We get help from the prophet Isaiah. When the people of Israel were disconsolate because of their failures to worship and serve God they heard these words, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and say to her that her warfare is over, and her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1-2).





Helicopter Dads and Moms— Nurturing? or Meddling?

Time and again our teens hunger for that good news. And it is indeed intended for them. Our Lord offers to them a double portion of His grace and all His good things for them. Especially, He gives the assurance that in spite of their weaknesses, by repentance and faith in Christ's absolution, they are still His agents, representing Him to other sinners who are also forgiven. He will yet accomplish His purpose through them as they reflect to others the pardon they have first received from Him. That's the true charm and attractiveness of the manhood and womanhood into which they are maturing by God's grace. Nothing can match that elegant winsomeness.

Jeffrey Dean also notes the blessings God gives teens through "a daily quiet time with God." He regrets that many youth do not take such a time.

Will they learn this habit with us parents in our homes? Are we quieting ourselves privately and individually to hear God speak to us in His Word? Do we gather family members for moments together for Bible reading and an exchange of ideas on how to apply what we read to our prayers, thoughts, every day speech and activities? Families who stay with God's message of grace in Christ will not stray from Him. They will continue to hold to Him who is their only legitimate hope.

Our teens, learning with us at home to stay tuned to God's grace will much more effectively resist and overcome misguided and counterfeit public pressures.

This month many of us are hugging our university sons and daughters off to school again after the Christmas break. Over the coming weeks, they will see much more of their classmates and professors than they do of us.

Some of us may wonder what our children reveal about us in their multiple contacts on campus. For example, are they helping folks to tag us as "helicopter dads and moms?"

Linda Bavolek, writing for the daily *Southeast Missourian*, notes that, nationwide, university officials say parents are more involved in their children's higher education than ever before. But, she reports that they are sometimes "meddling in their children's scheduling of classes, calling their university on their children's behalf and demanding documents the university cannot legally give because of privacy laws, such as student grades." Bavolek learned that such guilty guardians are labeled "helicopter" because they "hover over their children and influence their decisions."

The College Board, an association of institutions and organizations, posts on its Web site that "in recent years colleges have reported that helicopter parents are making their presence felt on campus. They are intervening in roommate disputes, registering their children for classes and questioning professors' grades," Bavolek reports.

Chris McGowan, dean of the college of science and mathematics at Southeast Missouri State University,



observes that in his first 20 years of education he received a call from one parent. Now, in his 30th year, and in the last 10, he says he talks to two or three a year and more, Bavolek discloses. McGowan believes that the increase, in part, is because more students "have college educated parents. Having been to college they may feel more comfortable calling the university and asking questions in the student's behalf."

"But a willingness to help can actually harm students in the long run, the College Board reports, saying students in return lack personal responsibility," Bavolek notes.

Fred Janzow, vice-provost and graduate school dean at Southeast Missouri State, is quoted by Bavolek as saying that "parents of course want to be involved. It's their student and they are paying the cost of college in most cases. . . . Entering college is often one of the first milestones in a person's life on the path to becoming independent. While the university appreciates supportive parents, it still aims for parents not to be so directly influential."

Theresa Haug-Belvin, new student program coordinator at Southeast Missouri, proposes that "the student be the one with the initial interaction with an [academic] advisor because it is going to be the student in future semesters who has to deal with it."

She says that "helicopter parenting" is often portrayed negatively, but she doesn't necessarily see it that way. "We're interested in being partners with parents when it involves their student's success."

So, how can we be Christian moms and dads who nurture our university sons and daughters and do not distractingly meddle in their young adult lives.



One approach is to imitate the apostle Paul as he worked with the believers in Colossae. He committed himself to their full growth and coming-of-age in Christ. He counseled them, "I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me" (Colossians 1:25-29).

By His word and sacraments our Lord Jesus also works energetically within us Christian fathers and mothers. We struggle to be the parents He intends us to be—stewards of the children that are His gracious gift to us. And we mature together when we teach and model for our children at each age level a rich confidence that by baptism, Christ, the world's only Savior and Lord, lives in us. Our task is to make the word of God more fully known to our children, alerting them to dangers and encouraging them to make their own God's wisdom of salvation in Christ. Then we can also learn to express that wisdom in the choices we make in daily living. Only when we faithfully feed on God's Word can we mature together in obeying what Jesus teaches us.

Following this pattern we need not endlessly pry, snoop, or intrude into the budding careers and personal ministries of our offspring at the university. Instead, we trust that as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, so our heavenly Father gathers, hovers over and surrounds with His love those whom we entrust to His compassion. We can do nothing better than that.

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TEN Signals that Our Aging Parents May Need Help

When our fathers and mothers, especially as they grow older, live several hours travel time away from us, we may miss the warning signals that trouble is edging closer.

So, we engage in more than empty small talk when we ask our Christian friends, "How are your folks?" That encourages us to think more frequently about how well our aging parents are able to care for themselves spiritually and maintain their independent lifestyle.

Obviously, our concern is characteristically Christian, rooted in such Old Testament instructions as "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear the Lord your God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:32).

Furthermore, from Paul's mid-first-century pastoral letter to Titus we learn to bolster our older parents' pursuit of God's plan for them. "Older men are to be sober minded, dignified, self controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness," the apostle writes. "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled" (Titus 2:2-5).

In our next contact with older parents, in person or on the phone, it should be no problem to explore with them five issues in their spiritual life:

***1. Are our aging parents refraining from the corporate worship of God, Father, and Holy Spirit and from the personal reading of the Scripture and prayers at their family altar?**

God unites us intimately with Himself and bonds us with fellow Christians of all ages when He gathers people around His word and sacraments in Sunday and weekday public praise and instruction from His message of life in Christ. We all need that connection. Without it, our trust in God's mercy fades. Our unique hope in the salvation He provides in Christ withers and dies. If opportunities for public worship are not within walking distance, or Bible reading and personal devotional aids are not handy,

what assistance can a local congregation give?

***2. Are our aging parents spurning the offer of God's forgiveness, peace and joy in Holy Communion?**

Every Christian congregation eagerly seeks openings for celebrating the Lord's Supper in the rooms, apartments and homes of Christians who are unable to come to church. With the help of people on the scene, we can cultivate our parents' desire to take advantage of this readiness and thus be healed of their reluctance.

***3. Are our aging parents hurting from a lack of interaction with believers in a teaching/learning environment or a small care-and-share group where they can exchange their experiences, dreams and fears?**

When our older folks are nurtured by caring people in warm and open Christian relationships they are built up in the confidence that God treasures them. They then become better equipped to minister even more effectively with and to those who are in similar life circumstances.

***4. Are our aging parents becoming insensitive and unresponsive to the physical, mental, emotional and social difficulties of those who look to them to be neighborly?**

God sustains His love in our aging parents so that in spite of their own limitations they can still



encourage and support those with even great needs than their own. Skills of conversation, reading, cooking and doing minor repairs are among the gifts God grants so that we can invest them in our fellow human beings.

***5. Are our aging parents losing their sense of mission?**

In some communities more older people than any other age group live without the trust that God loves them and daily blesses them with His protective presence. How will they learn of His compassion and safekeeping unless someone tells them how God's grace assures their security? That's our mission until God withdraws us from it into the fullness of His splendor.

With reference to our aging parents' physical health the Mayo Clinic Staff proposes five additional questions with comments on its **MayoClinic.com** Web site:

#1. Do our aging parents continue to lose weight?

Sometimes weight loss is a serious matter. It can evidence cancer, dementia, depression, heart failure, or malnutrition. Talking with our parents can help determine whether a doctor's examination is required or whether we need to create ways to make food more appetizing or cooking easier for them.

#2. Are our aging parents safe in their living quarters?

Do light bulbs and switches work? Are the heating and air conditioning units properly maintained? Are lawns uncluttered and shrubs trimmed? Are soiled dishes in the sink? Are old newspapers and magazines piling up? Will extension cords trip people? All could indicate a marked deterioration in the ability to hear, see, grab utensils, or navigate steps and hallways. We should suggest plans to correct the hazards.

#3. Are our aging parents maintaining their appearance?

Are they following good hygiene routines, such as bathing, teeth brushing, wearing clean clothes, sleeping on fresh linens? Is it time to discuss with them moving into assisted living facilities?

#4. How are our aging parents feeling? What are their moods?

An obvious change in outlook can be a sign of depression or other physical concern. If they appear to be withdrawing or feeling down they may profit from an honest talk with their doctor.

#5. Are our aging parents experiencing limited ability?

If they are unsteady on their feet, hesitant to walk normal distances, frequently aware of muscular weakness or joint pain, they may be at risk of falling. We need to discuss with them ways to make getting around easier and therefore safer.



Our parents may not be willing to listen to our worries about them. They may think our fears are unfounded. Mayo Clinic staff members suggest that we still let them know we care about them. We can also contact the pastor who serves them, their doctor, the parish nurse or chairman of the local congregation's human care committee, or a social worker from a county agency.

When we can demonstrate that our conversations with the doctor are in our parents' best interest the doctor may provide us a form stating that we are free to discuss our parents' medical information with him or his staff.

The Mayo Clinic advises that "in the United States, patient privacy is governed by rules often referred to as HIPAA, or the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. . . . HIPAA does not prevent a doctor, nurse or health plan employee from discussing your parents' care with you, if it's in the best interest of your parent."

For us Christians one overpowering incentive motivates us to watch intently for the ten signals that our aging parents may need help. Paul describes it well: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one died for all, therefore, all have died, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sins died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5).

F.L.A.G.

Family Life Action Group



Our congregation may need new inspiration this month to dare what is difficult. For example, is it time to probe seriously our ministry with families?

As God's people, we are entrusted with God's plans for current and future generations. But, sometimes we disregard the means and methods by which he works through us to fulfill those designs.

We, together with our pastor and church council, partner with God in the fullest sense when we help parents and children address their tensions and troubles and by his Spirit celebrate his solutions.

One way to take a run at the task is to revitalize our congregation's F-L-A-G. That's our Family Life Action Group, consisting of from three to five aggressive supporters of Christian family relationships.

Here are some tip-offs on what our Family Life Action Group might do this initial month of 2008:

1. Affirm that our parish ministry with families is Christ-centered, fueled by the good news of his forgiveness of sins and managed according to his pattern. He came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for every person in each family, regardless of ethnic heritage, social standing, educational achievement, economic status, or family structure.
2. Identify three needs of families on which we will focus in 2008. For example:
 - a. The need for each of our families to authenticate that our family is the single most important influence in training each member to live out the fullness of our forgiven new life in Christ.
 - b. The need of our family to be fortified to resist the cultural temptations of misleading generic religions, greedy self-interest, guzzling consumerism and cancerous bigotry. To yield to them is to cut ourselves off from God and from one another.
 - c. The need of each family member for quality

skills in reading, interpreting and applying Holy Scripture to daily life and for drawing from our baptism and participation in the holy supper of our Lord His power for a life of peace, joy and sacrifice.

3. Begin our plans for Christian Family Week, opening or concluding on May 11, Mother's Day, or on another Sunday in May, Christian Family Month. Include special church services with appropriate hymns, litanies and sermon meditations on how God blesses families and equips them to be his agents of reconciliation. Put the spotlight on seminars, lectures, videos and films for young married, engaged or dating persons and men's, women's and couples' organizations. Arrange for conferences of parents with their children's Sunday school teachers or youth leaders.

Our congregation's Family Life Action Group is a key leadership team for sparking new interest in working with families in our Christian fellowship. They will also help us reach out to those in our community who as yet have no clue about how our Lord Jesus coheres and makes fruitful the parent/child relationships at their house.



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