

or her that it would be wise for the child to keep the conversations they have with such individuals private — since “the parents beliefs are too old fashioned to understand the content of this deeper more spiritual discussion.” Another tactic is to suggest that times have changed, so parents just aren’t *capable* of understanding what the child is facing. (This may perhaps *all* be *accurate* if the parents have *avoided* impassioned, meaningful discussions with their children). Both of these tactic serve to drive a wedge of distrust between parent and child. Open, no off limits subjects, conversations with children is the *only* sure way to avoid these wedges being used as a possible tool to undermine a parents influence.

Unfortunately in the last twenty or so years, we have observed parents *accepting* the notion that they can *delegate* parental responsibilities without paying a dear price — a price that can lead to their child being lost for eternity. The beautiful thing is that as long as God allows us time on the Earth we can correct errant directions and make amends if possible. So what can parents do? Here is a suggested list of possibilities in no particular order.

- Accept *total* responsibility for rearing your children.
- Determine how to become *active* in the process of developing the eternal being that God has entrusted to you.
- Accept that God will provide you the knowledge and understanding to meet the needs of your children. If you trust Him for your eternal life this should be easy.
- Consider the reality that if *you* choose to *not* step up and train your child on spiritual matters you *have* chosen to delegate it to others.
- Training up a child is a 24/7 responsibility, just as we expect God the Father to be there for us 24/7 we demonstrate the nature of God by providing our children an earthly example of accessibility.
- Be honest, when you don’t know something, *say* so and offer to learn in order to teach the child.
- Provide the freedom for children to make their own choices *while* you still have the ability to give guidance to them.
- Keep communications open by encouraging discussion and avoiding the temptation to skirt subjects that are uncomfortable.
- Understand that the Devil is active and anxious to provide *any* reason for parents to short change their effort.
- Accept that memorization is not the equivalent of knowledge that leads to wisdom. Recalling Scripture is great, *application* of its *principals* is essential.

The bottom line is that we all do everything we believe we can to raise our children in a way that is acceptable to *society*. The *real* test is raising a child who knows what is acceptable to God. *That* should be the mission of every Christian parent.

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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Off Limits Subjects

The free society in which we live is truly a wonderful thing. We have the right to choose for ourselves where we live, work, eat, recreate, as well as with whom we associate. We can — for the most part, do almost anything we wish — even illegal activities if our personal boundaries don’t restrict such activities. So this wonderful freedom that we experience may sometimes even extend to the point of allowing each of us to destroy ourselves — if we elect to do so — by the lifestyle choices we make.

One of the many freedoms we have is the right to choose how and what we worship. This freedom is expressed so vigorously that Americans can openly choose to engage in demon worship, worship of the Earth (thus Earth Day) as well as worship of God in *anyway* we choose, even to refusing guidance from Scripture. Freedom, even to an excess is available in the United States if one chooses to exercise it.

Under the banner of freedom of speech and the demand for tolerance, our children are the targets of numerous well crafted social agendas that run counter to Biblical teaching. They are taught that sexual relations outside of marriage (including same sex relationships) are acceptable and normal as long as protection is used. The assumption is that all children will have sex anyway so the only moral obligation is that it should be made as safe as possible. Under that same banner of freedom, schools and the work place have introduced “required tolerance” of practices and activities clearly condemned by Scripture.

There is little reason to suspect that any relief is in sight for Christians seeking a level playing field in society today. Those who wish to defy God with lifestyles and actions that are clearly against Scripture will not relent soon. In fact it appears that — due to the hold that such people have on the education system from early childhood through college — there is little reason to believe there will be any easing of the pressure to tolerate, accept and endorse certain sinful behavior.

So what can be done besides throwing up our hands and just wishing for better? In an earlier article (October 15, 2008) we ended with the idea that leaving a legacy of obedience to God was a *lasting* legacy for which *any* Christian could strive.

Achieving such a legacy however takes more than just wishing. Families must have a *strategy* to fend off attacks that society deals on a daily basis. To have such a strategy, parents must give a great deal of thought to determining what will and will not be discussed within their family. They must have a “game plan” as to exactly what subjects are off limits in their home as well as to what degree they intend to accept responsibility for the direction their children will eventually take.

We enjoy a variety of sports and spent a fair amount of time going to various games and practices when our boys were young. We observed that many parents during the early childhood years, would spend *large* amounts of time teaching their children the strategy of the game and training them in the finer techniques to use in any given sport — even though it’s a fact that very few children who begin their sports “career” in little league ever end up being pro athletes.

In a similar way, we enjoyed the many academic achievements accomplished by our sons and devoted a great deal of time encouraging them to exceed in those endeavors. There again however, most children will not be notable because of some great discovery or accomplishment due to their mental capabilities.

Backing our children to be all they can be is not only good for parents to do but is a requirement for good parenting. There is however a strange phenomenon that we have noticed throughout our years of parenting. Many of the same parents who feel *completely* capable and *perfectly* comfortable engaging in conversations with their children concerning the finer points of sports or academia, consider conversations that would guide and shape their children to become *Christians* to be “off limits.” This hands off attitude is often disguised as a desire by parents to allow the child to come to his or her *own* decision about religion or God without being “prejudiced” by the beliefs of parents.

In the book *Blue Like Jazz*, (see *Diligence* Sept. 15, 2008 for more discussion of this book) the author recorded (pg. 42) that when he went away to Reed College, he was fascinated with the open dialogue that was available to him there.

“As odd as it sounds, having grown up in the church, I fell in love with the campus. The students were brilliant and engaged. I was fed there, stimulated, and impassioned. ... And what’s more, I had more significant spiritual experiences at Reed College than I ever had at church. ...[A]nytime I stepped on campus I would find a conversation going about issues that mattered to me. Reed students love to dialog.” By his own admission however, much that went on at the College was extremely liberal at best and more often than not, downright sinful. The important point to notice here is that he *had no* open and stimulating conversation *until* he got to college! Tragedy!! This *has* to indicate that *way too many* conversations and/or subjects were off limits with adults that mattered — most especially — his parents!

Unfortunately a subject matter of serious consequence that is often *very subtly* off limits in Christian homes is a *truly open* discussion about Scripture — i.e. allowing children to make *challenges* that might stimulate deeper discussions than some parents are willing to have. So as with the author of *Blue Like Jazz*, the *first* exposure to an *impassioned* discussion happened at college. Colleges are more often than not, staffed by professors who place great pride in allowing *all* ideas to have *equal* validity. When faced with the presumption that *all* ideas are *equal* — Scriptural or unscriptural — children who were reared in Christian families that never engaged in conversations about issues that *mattered*, enter conversations at College unable to defend *why*
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they believe the same as their parents. Why? Because the parents failed to take advantage of *every* opportunity to instill the *reason* for the faith that was within them.

“...*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...*” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

One of the fostering influences we have observed is that many preachers and elders inadvertently make *impassioned* conversations at home off limits by admonishing fellow Christians to avoid having “roast preacher” for lunch. Parents who subscribe to the belief that discussing a disagreement with the content of the morning’s sermon is “roasting” the preacher are left to either say nothing at all or choose to make positive (perhaps even hypocritical) comments to support the preacher *even* if the parents *and* child *both* think he was wrong. Avoiding conversations that expose what is obvious to even our children, creates an environment that suggests “the church” is not open to dialog. Allowing discussion *only* when we *agree* with the sermon lets teaching opportunities slip through the fingers of parents. A *desire* to learn is energized by discussions that result when a subject is presented in a way we believe to be either invalid or even wrong. This perceived weak stance leads children to believe that parents are not *confident* enough of their *own* beliefs to defend them to their offspring.

What does Scripture tell us concerning what we are to teach our children?

Probably the most quoted are Proverbs 22:6 — “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*” and Ephesians 6:4 — “*...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” But what does this involve? We believe it involves the freedom for the child to discuss *all* topics of interest *as* the child can comprehend the topic or has been introduced to it by educators or other associates. Nurture involves *instruction* (and *that* involves conversation) on *any* part of life that children might encounter. Admonition is that process of bringing the actions of the child in line with Scripture. Can you think of any subject then that should be off limits? If a child is exposed to the topic, it is a topic worth having guidance from the parents.

The last part of Proverbs 22:6 is a puzzle to many of us who have been Christians for a long time. “[*W*]hen they are old they will not depart from it” sounds like an absolute, yet life experiences suggest that some children *were* brought up in nurture and admonition, and yet did depart. God alone knows if the parents did their job and if the child will return to the instructed way. But odds are, when parents *focus* on Godly child rearing, the likelihood of them remaining faithful is greatly improved.

While children *are* to respect their parents, that respect is *earned* by the parents just as parents expect their children to earn *their* respect. Parents who avoid discussing difficult subjects place themselves in a position of being disrespected since there are numerous people in the world ready to step up and fill any gaps left by parents. A tactic used by many of those who are more than willing to step up and fill the gap parents might leave, involves a subtle discrediting of parents. This is often accomplished during the highly impressionable teenage or college years when the person who wishes to influence the child suggests to him