

Ages and Stages – Adolescence

1/14/24

Daniel 1 and Various Texts

Sunday AM

This week while I was wrestling w/ writer's block, I decided to have some fun on Chat GPT by asking what were some famous quotes on how to parent teens.

FUN – Raising a teenager is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall while riding a rollercoaster – if you stick w/ it long enough, things just might eventually gel.

TRUE – Teenagers are likely the most misunderstood people on earth. They're treated like children when they're no longer children – and treated like adults when they're not yet adults. Anna Quindlin

FAV – When your kids become teenagers, get a dog so that someone in the house will be happy to see you.

I then asked Chat GPT to finish this sentence – **Parenting a teen is like...**

Parenting a teenager is like hosting a reality TV show where you're simultaneously the contestant, judge, and audience. Every day brings a new episode w/ unexpected challenges, dramatic plot twists, and the chance that you're going to get voted off the island.

And of course – by way of Jeff Foxworthy, I had to ask Chat GPT to give me a few – ***You know you're the parent of a teenager when...***

... your laundry pile resembles a science experiment gone wrong.

... you're fluent in eyerolls, heavy sighs – and have the ability to translate monosyllabic grunts/mumbles.

... your grocery list includes an entire aisle of snacks and not a single vegetable.

... you've attended more school events as a chauffeur than as an actual spectator.

Last week, we began a series on parenting entitled – **Ages/Stages** – in which began looking at the key elements needed w/in our homes to love/care for our families thru the various stages of life.

Broadly speaking – I believe the scope of parenting can be summed up in (5) major stages:

Stage 1 – **Forming** Stage – birth to the start of puberty

Stage 2 – **Preparing** Stage – puberty to graduation

Stage 3 – **Releasing** Stage – graduation to off-payroll

Stage 4 – **Partnering** Stage – walking alongside them

Stage 5 – **Caring** Stage – kids start caring for you

To recap last week – the vital lesson we discovered from Proverbs 22:6 is that parent's/GP's are to take responsibility to train their kids uniquely to who they are and how they learn in the ways of God.

Today, I want to talk about the **preparation** stage of the adolescent years. While I might make jokes about parenting teens – truth is, these are truly critical years.

I think of the cocoon stage of a soon-to-be butterfly. While in the cocoon, the caterpillar begins an amazing transformation where it sprouts wings enabling it to soar. But DYK – that if someone came along and cut the cocoon to make it easier for the butterfly to spread its wings – such assistance would actually stunt the butterfly's ability to fly crippling it for life. Why? It's b/c the struggle to get out of the cocoon is what is needed to strengthen the butterfly's wings to enable it to fly. So too is the struggle of adolescence. Teens need to struggle w/in a

controlled environment to prepare them to fly. So, to hold on too long or release them too soon can be devastating to their lives.

To help us, I want to look at the story of (4) teenagers who exemplified the qualities every parent should be seeking to invest in their teens. In Daniel 1, we find the story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (also known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego). These young men exhibited a level of **conviction**, **character**, **courage**, and **civility** every parent should desire for their teens to prepare them for life.

I A Sense of CONVICTION

If you remember, after the Babylonians had conquered the Jews, they took 1,000's of their youth back to Babylon w/ a plan in mind. So, from the start, Daniel and his buddies were plunged into a situation where everything they'd learned/believed having grown up in a Jewish culture was going to be put to the test.

The king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed w/ understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had an ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah, Shadrach, to Mishael, Meshach, and to Azariah, Abednego. Daniel 1: 3-4, 6-7

But this was more than a name change. The king ordered their identities to be swapped from Hebrew names w/ godly meanings to pagan names. He also began to strategically detox them of their Jewish beliefs to indoctrinate them in everything Babylonian. So, for the 1st time in their lives, these guys were going to a school that didn't begin each day w/ prayer or was based on God's Law. The king even went so far as to dictate their diets to thrust them into paganism.

The king appointed a daily ration from his table that included the king's choice food and wine – and declared that these men be educated for 3 years. At the end of this indoctrination, they were then to enter the king's service. 1:5

DYK – the king's meat/wine represented the sinful pleasures of this world. Meaning – the king wanted to introduce these teens into a decadent, worldly lifestyle. **Yet b/c of their convictions** – these young men chose to fear Jehovah more than they feared the Babylonians.

Conviction is that deep-seated belief so strongly rooted in your soul that it marks your character and moves you into action. Even more – a conviction is more than an opinion which is *a belief you hold* – a conviction is *a belief that holds you*.

Conviction is the fuel that empowers ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. Unknown

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself w/ the king's choice food or wine. 1:8

Daniel, and likely the (3) amigos, refused to partake in the king's food b/c most of the food served would've been forbidden by Jewish dietary laws and b/c it had been dedicated to the heathen gods of Babylon. So, in their minds, to partake in these foods would've been tantamount to pledging their allegiance to false gods – ***but Daniel, and likely his buddies, refused to do it.***

Every day, our kids are being courted to compromise their convictions to buy into the ways of the world that are contrary to God's way. Every day, at school, on TV/social media, and in nearly every phase of life, the world is trying to squeeze them into its mold.

SO – having conviction is paramount. But before a person can stand for their convictions, they first have to have a conviction and know why they believe it. **AND** the greatest influence upon their lives to help them form a conviction are parents/GPs who have a God-fearing conviction and who take seriously the call *to train up a child in the way of God*.

This is why Solomon wrote – *My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the rules of your mother – for they will be a graceful ornament on your head and chains about your neck*. Pr. 1:8-9

II A Desire for **CHARACTER**

Character is who you are. It's who you are when no one else is watching. It's how you treat other people who can do nothing for you. It's the length you will go to stand for what is right when things are going wrong.

I'm reminded of the quote by John Wooden – *Be more concerned w/ your character than your reputation b/c your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are*.

DYK that *character is birthed from conviction*. So, as your teen resolves in their hearts about what they value and believe – and why they believe it – it'll begin to impact how they behave and why.

Notice vs. 1:8 – *Daniel resolved in his heart...*

I love this! I love it b/c Daniel, and these (3) guys, b/c of their convictions, made a decision from the heart.

Character is all about the heart. The heart of your character is the character of your heart. You are the person you are today, b/c of the character you became yesterday. The person you will be tomorrow is determined by the character you have today. James Merritt

Don't Miss – it's your character, inspired by your convictions, that drives your choices. Let me put it another way – your choices don't make your character but they do reveal it.

These guys had a hard choice to make. Are we going to fall in line and eat, or stand w/ God? B/c they had character forged from conviction – they chose God.

This is what we're witnesses to thru-out the book of Daniel. These men are continually put in no-win situations, yet b/c of their character – over and over again, they did the right thing even though it had the possibility of costing them everything.

SEE – character is what causes our kids to take responsibility for their actions when they've failed or made a mistake. They don't play the blame game or seek to find a patsy – they own what they've said and done – and are willing to face the consequences of their actions/inactions.

Likewise, character is what causes our kids to take responsibility for their circumstances – no matter how they find themselves in them. Whether by choice or by someone else's actions, b/c they have Godly character, they refuse to play the victim or feel entitled; instead, they own their circumstances too.

III A Strength of **COURAGE**

Look at vs. 8 again – *Daniel resolved in his heart. So, he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself... and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food/drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king.*

B/c of having conviction/character, Daniel also had courage. He had the courage to trust God and to take a stand for God – even though it could've cost him his life. SEE – refusing to eat from the king's table would've been considered an insult to the king – and an act of defiance to a direct order – which carried w/ it the death penalty.

POINT – it takes *conviction, character, and courage* to say – YES to God and NO to the world when everyone else expects or does the opposite. It takes courage to do the right thing when others do the wrong thing. This courage is fortified in the teenage years.

IV A Heart for **CIVILITY**

There's a subtle quality in this text that's easy to miss if you're not looking for it – and that is, *Daniel, while he held to his convictions, was civil w/ the overseer*. He showed the man in authority over him true respect.

Civility is having the ability to show kindness/respect to others even when you don't agree w/ them or see eye to eye w/ them. It's having good manners, courtesy, and a genuine sense of diplomacy.

But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal w/ your servants according to what you see. v.11

Did you see what Daniel did? He didn't stage a sit-in or offer some veiled threat. He graciously offered a reasonable alternative b/c he had a sense of diplomacy built upon a genuine *respect for authority*.

LISTEN – if there's one thing that's been lost over time in our nation – it is a sense of civility and decorum. Yet, there may be no greater quality we can instill in our kids than having genuine respect and kindness for others.

How do we do it? How do teen parents help their kids to have *conviction, character, courage, and civility*? I think we get a clue in Ephesians 6:4 – *Parents, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*.

To **exasperate** is to frustrate or intentionally irritate. It is to drain them rather than inspire them.

So, if we're to inspire our teens rather than exasperate them – then there are (5) keys to not exasperating our teenage kids as we strive to prepare them for life.

1 – **LEARN** them Thoroughly – Know your kid. Make the time to know their *personality, preferences passions, perspectives, and priorities*.

2 – **LISTEN** to them Intently – Hear them. Set your agenda aside, stop what you're doing, and digest the words that come from their lips.

3 – **LEAD** them Boldly – Be a guiding force, not a driving force – by living to inspire your teen to dream, hope, and take calculated risks.

4 – **LIFT** them Frequently – we encourage them. We hold them up and pray for them. We let them know how we are proud of them and for them.

5 – **LOVE** them Unconditionally – Our kids should know there's no end to the depth of our love for them.