

6 Ways Parents Can Help Their Kids Navigate Sexuality

In a helpful article in *Christianity Today*, Jennifer Parker wrote, “Specific studies of sexual trends among Christian teens have been limited, but all indications are that, on average, there is little difference between their sexual behavior and that of non-Christian youths, other than a tendency to delay their first sexual experience slightly longer.” Did you catch that? There is little difference between Christian kids and non-Christian kids in the sexual choices they make.

On the whole, we have done a poor job of teaching the young people of this generation what it looks like to be in the world but not of it.

As parents, we must wake up to this reality and begin to do something about it. We can start by taking a few clues from a group of guys who are briefly mentioned in the Old Testament. Though they lived thousands of years ago, their example gives us the insight into where to begin.

Second Chronicles 12:32 talks specifically about a key group of men known only as the sons of Issachar. In the midst of a larger list of warriors who were geared for battle in support of David, the Bible describes them specifically as “*men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.*” What characterized these guys should characterize parents today.

Our kids may not know it, but they are in desperate need of parents who understand the times, realities and pressures that they are under and will know what to do.

If we are fighting a spiritual war, then we must get our homes on a war footing. Just as a nation takes key steps to be ready for the challenges of a major military engagement, parents

must be deliberate to see the battle for what it is and get their families positioned to stand strong. There are several places we can start, even if our kids are very young. If they are older, we may need to be more aggressive and intentional in our approach.

1. We must first begin to pray.

Most of the ground battles that the U.S. has won in the past 15 years have first been won in the air. Strategic bombing clears the way for a much easier move into occupied territory. Likewise, asking God to move before we do is always a wise first step. Parents need to pray for insight, wisdom and for God to make our kids open to our influence in this area. In a similar way, many parents may need to start with confession. We may need to confess past sexual sins in our own lives that Satan may use to trip us up as we move forward. We may need to confess our tendency to ignore the responsibility God has given us in addressing these issues with our kids. Whatever the case, a key part of getting on a war footing is to begin with prayer. And to keep praying. Then it probably wouldn't hurt to pray some more.

2. We must understand the times.

The best way to understand the times is to simply open our eyes and to observe what is going on in the world around us. There is much to see. We must do this with a keen awareness of the way God designed things to be. Our tendency to become acclimated to our culture has made most believers calloused to just how far away we have moved from God's will regarding our sexuality. We have embraced the rituals of dating and relationships that are normative in our world without considering their impact on our kids' futures. Even a precursory examination of Scripture makes us aware of how far away we are. Unfortunately, ignoring clear directives found in God's Word has become a normative practice for many believers. Instead of "understanding the times and knowing what to do,"

we tend to ignore the signs and do what everyone else is doing. That's no way to fight a war.

3. We must begin asking questions of our kids.

It's one thing to understand the times. It is something altogether different to understand the specific issues that our kids are currently facing. Depending on a bunch of factors (including, but not limited to, their age, gender, friends, school, media habits, etc.), they may be currently dealing with a number of struggles. Some are already in the throes of relationships that have a sexual dimension. Many are exploring opposite sex relationships but with no guidance or accountability regarding what the relationship should look like. Most have unspoken questions about changes in their bodies and the feelings that accompany them. All of these kids need a parent who will ask questions of them and invite themselves into this aspect of their lives. They may try to push their parents away, but they need deep inside, they know it.

4. We must begin to speak the truth.

If parents remain silent or passive on these issues, a significant fight will be lost and the casualties will be high. We must confidently believe that our kids' future marriages and sex lives are worth fighting for now. Like an advance reconnaissance patrol, parents must identify those things that will bring harm to their kids and be willing to share a different standard. Again, if the world is constantly communicating a (dangerous) perspective and we don't speak out and articulate a better way then we have already lost the war.

5. We must consistently give our kids a healthy perspective about sex.

While many parents fail their kids by allowing them to explore relationships and their sexuality with no parameters, some

parents fail them in another way. These well-meaning parents bombard their teenagers with a variety of messages that all say the same thing: "Sex is bad. Don't do it. It's dangerous. The feelings and desires that you are having are evil, so suppress them at all costs."

This message is both wrong and dangerous. Beyond just about anything else, the most important thing parents can communicate to their kids is that sex is an amazing gift from God; it is beautiful and should be celebrated and honored. Jenifer and I have an unwritten rule that we want to "gross out" our kids at least once a week. While the thought of their parents being intimate may make their stomachs turn, it does affirm for them that intimacy is a highly valued part of the marriage relationship.

6. We must capture and maintain our kids' hearts.

Fighting a war on behalf of our kids can easily turn into a war WITH our kids. The extent to which you stay emotionally connected with them will either make or break this process. Anything you strive to do to guide them through the challenges ahead and to help them experience all that God intended relationally and sexually in their future hinges upon having their hearts. This takes hard work and there are no shortcuts.

If anything, parents must realize that there is, in fact, a war going on and that we have a vital role to play in guarding, leading and teaching our kids. They may not yet realize that they need our help, but we must help them, nonetheless.

So let's get started ...

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