

‘Don’t Be Your Kid’s Friend’ And Other Bad Parenting Ideas

“I’m not supposed to be my teenagers’ friend. I’m supposed to be their parent.”

We have all heard it’s true. If your main objective as a parent is to be “pals” with your kids, then you’re an idiot.

However, some parents take that premise waaaaaay too far. They actually strive to remain emotionally disconnected from their children. As one father I heard put it: “My goal with my teenagers is to make sure they don’t like me.” He wanted to parent from the position of consistently being the “bad guy.” In my humble (but accurate) opinion, I think he is missing the point. To put it bluntly, he too is an idiot.

The most effective parenting – the kind that truly shapes character and gives your kids a faith that settles deep in their hearts – happens when you and your kids have a powerful heart connection.

Jenifer and I sat in a conference with Stuart and Jill Briscoe a few years ago. This amazing couple, both in their 70’s, had much to say about lessons learned through their years of parenting. I clearly remember Jill casually stressing the importance of the connection between a parent and child: “You want them to like you. If they don’t like you, they won’t listen to you. After all, do you listen to people that you don’t like?”

True that.

The very last verse in the Old Testament is Malachi 4:6. It gives a prophecy about the ministry of a new Elijah who will “turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents...” When all has been

said and done in the old covenant, this is the final word that God gives us.

Then after four hundred years of silence, at the very beginning of the New Testament, we see another reference to this new Elijah (who we learn is John the Baptist). There in Luke 1:17, it similarly says that he will “turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

The Old Testament ends with this theme and the New Testament opens with it. What is evident is that one element critical to the ushering in of the Kingdom of God is the heart connection between parent and child. This love relationship is the primary means by which our faith is passed from one generation to the next. When the love relationship is severed or broken, our ability to influence the next generation is limited. When it is nurtured to be strong, our influence is great.

Sadly, many parents have bought the lie that their influence is minimal when compared with their teen’s peers. So they sit passively by, waiting for their teen to come to them asking for advice or insight. When, in fact, the truth remains that parents are still the most powerful influence on their kids. Furthermore, most kids (including teenagers) desperately want their parents to speak wisdom into their lives.

This all starts and ends with relationship: true, compassionate, tender, patient, open, grace-filled relationship. Sure, your teens will begin to pull away from you, but you can’t stop pursuing them. Or loving them.

Don’t make the mistake of trying to parent your children or teens without placing the highest priority on your relationship with them. You want them to like you. When they do, they will listen to you. Bypass that and all you are is the person who feeds them, clothes them, and grounds them when

they fail their Algebra test.

Your kids need so much more from you than that. Mine do, too. What they need is us. It's about time we started giving them that.

*Adapted from , a ministry founded by **Barrett and Jenifer Johnson**. After serving in the local church for 25 years, Barrett and Jenifer launched INFO for Families as a ministry designed to encourage people through speaking, personal coaching and resource development. Barrett served for 15 years in youth ministry before serving for 8 years as the Family Minister at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta, one of the largest churches in the South. He has degrees from Texas A&M University and Southwestern Seminary, but he and Jenifer have received their best education through the no-holds-barred nature of everyday family life.*