

Keep the Door Open for Your Teen

“Dad, aren’t you going to open the door?”

One morning not long ago, I heard that from my fifteen-year-old son, Chance.

We have several routines we go through every morning before he leaves for school. One is sitting together for a few minutes to read some wisdom and maybe talk for a minute. We’ve been doing that probably seven or eight years.

But lately there’s another routine that’s been taking place not long after that, and it’s really no big deal ... or so I thought.

So that morning, we finished reading and then Chance left the room to do whatever else he does to get ready. After a few minutes, I heard him say from the front of the house, “Dad...?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you going to open the door?”

I said, “What’re you talking about?”

And he said again, “Aren’t you going to open the front door?”

I was thinking, You’re almost 16; you’re as tall as I am now. I’m pretty sure you can open your own door!

I’d forgotten about the other part of our morning routine. He leaves pretty early, so I usually turn the light on there by the front door, open it, kiss his forehead, give him a hug, and say something like, “Hey, you’re a winner. And you have a great life and great responsibility ahead of you.” Some word of encouragement that’s on my heart that day.

I guess I flash back to my days playing football, and imagine giving him a positive word before he runs out the tunnel and on the field before a big game. In many ways, we do send our children out to battle every day.

Anyway, he reminded me about that, and it struck me as a sign that he places some value on it. *He wanted his dad to open the door!*

He didn't *need* me to. He could have turned on the light; thank God, the electric bill was paid. And as I said, he could have opened the door ... but he wanted *me* to. For my son, there's something significant about his dad opening the door and sending him out into the world.

Maybe it's a sign that he still needs me and wants me to be part of his life—even as he gets older and more independent. For me, it affirmed my role as a dad.

And often with teenagers we have to grasp for any kind of affirmation we can get. Teens might not say "I love you" or "Thank you" as often. But sometimes they do say, "Hey, Dad, can you help me check the oil in my car?" Or, "Hey, Dad, can you take me to practice?" "Dad, will you open the door for me?"

Maybe they just want some help, but sometimes I believe they also want our presence. They want to be reassured that we're still watching out for them and taking care of them.

Adolescence is often a confusing time for teens *and for their fathers*. Sometimes it seems they don't want to be seen with you or have anything to do with you.

And many times it would be easy to just give up. But don't do it. Right now your teenager needs your love and acceptance—maybe more than ever before. And believe me, you might need a few good times to think back on as you navigate the ups and downs that often come during the teen years.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Find or come up with an encouraging saying or quote or Scripture verse to leave your child with as he or she walks out the door to school each day.
- Want to be closer with your teenager? Flexibility might be a huge factor. You may have to participate in some odd-seeming activities—and maybe at odd hours—to be part of his or her world.
- Really try to *relax* and bring *humor* to the daily interactions and challenges of having a teenager. It will make a difference!
- Also really try to notice and point out the positives in your teen. He/she really needs your validation and encouragement.
- Take the courageous, loving step of apologizing to your child. “Katie, I know I’ve been busy in my own world recently, and I’m sorry.” “Brandon, I know I’ve been under a lot of stress from work, and I’ve been short with you. It’s the wrong approach. Will you forgive me?”

We want to hear from has helped you connect with your teenager? Please join the discussion below or on our Father’s Facebook page.