


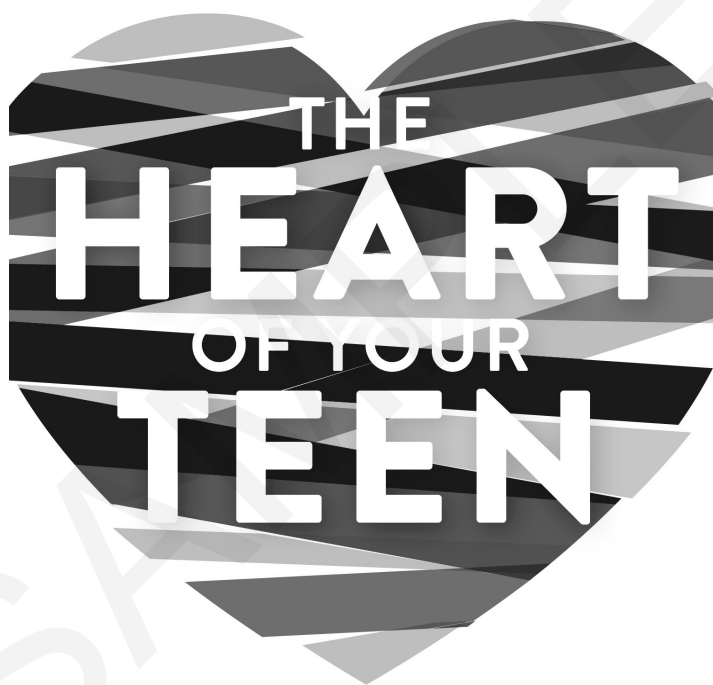
LISSY RIENOW



THE
HEART
OF YOUR
TEEN

*AN INSIDER LOOK AT THE
PARENT-TEEN RELATIONSHIP*

LISSY RIENOW



*AN INSIDER LOOK AT THE
PARENT-TEEN RELATIONSHIP*

© 2019 by Lissy Rienow

Published by Randall House Publications
114 Bush Road
Nashville, TN 37217

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other means—except for brief quotation in critical reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Inc. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture marked (ESV) are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®) Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. Scripture marked (HCSB) are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® Copyright © 2003, 2002, 2000, 1999 by Holman Bible Publishers. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Printed in the United States of America

13-ISBN 9781614840978

To Mom and Dad

Thank you for your relentless pursuit of my heart.
I love you.

Table of Contents

Introduction	vii
Chapter 1	
Seeking Relationship Before Discipleship	1
Chapter 2	
Encouraging Spiritual Growth	13
Chapter 3	
Building Honor in the Home	25
Chapter 4	
Fostering Sibling Relationships.....	37
Chapter 5	
Untangling Tech and Social Media	47
Chapter 6	
Navigating the World of Dating	59
Chapter 7	
Preparing to Launch	69
Conclusion	83

Introduction

Do you ever wish you could understand what is going on in the mind of your teenager? From hormonal imbalances, mood swings, and social changes—your son or daughter is going through massive fluctuations. Your relationship with them during the teen years will likely be an emotional roller coaster ride. There are many books written to parents about raising adolescents. This one is different. In the pages ahead, my goal is to share with you the teenage point of view! I believe the better parents and teens understand one another, the stronger their relationships will become.

I understand that it is unusual for a teenager to be writing a book to encourage parents, so allow me to share some background with you. I am 19 years old, and the second of seven children in my family. My parents have been involved in family ministry since I was a child. As long as I can remember, I have heard my mom and dad encouraging parents to turn their hearts to their children and to be intentional about helping them know and follow God. This “family discipleship” movement has been growing

around the country, and even around the world. One of the foundational Scriptures for the movement is from Malachi 4:5-6: "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

Through God's work in and through this family discipleship movement, many parents are turning their hearts toward their kids. But I began to ask a question. What is being done in our homes and in our churches to help kids turn *their* hearts to their parents? The Scripture from Malachi is a two-way street. For the parent-teen relationship to work, both the parent and teenager need to turn their hearts toward each other.

I remember hearing chapel services at my school and never once did I hear a message on what it meant to honor my parents, love my siblings, or lead as a servant in my home. Family relationships are hard for all of us! The way we handle our relationships as teenagers is a way of preparing us for our future families. As a result, I have spent many hours during this past year speaking to Christian schools and youth groups on how to live for Christ at home and build Christ-centered family relationships.

A few months ago, my mom and I were on a speaking tour with the D6 Conference in North Carolina. I was honored to share Scriptures that had challenged me as a teenager, as well as personal stories from my family. After

the tour, leaders from Randall House encouraged me to consider writing a book for parents on how to build better relationships with their teens. When the idea was proposed I was quite skeptical. After all, I am not a parent. I am not an expert on parenting. I wouldn't even know where to begin! However, as I began to pray about it, I became increasingly excited about how parents could benefit from the perspectives and experiences of their teens.

My first step was to begin interviewing 20 Christian teenagers from around the world, asking two key questions; "What did your parents do well while you were in high school?" and "What is something you wish they had done differently?" I was absolutely blown away by several of the responses I received.

This book will walk through some of the toughest issues that parents and teens are dealing with today. From dating relationships to social media and technology, we will discuss topics that often generate tension and conflict in our relationships. Again, I am not here to provide any expert opinions on parenting. However, I am honored to share with you several biblical principles that have helped me relate to my parents and siblings—learning from the ups and downs of my teen years—as well as insightful perspectives from teenagers around the world. My prayer is that God will use this book to encourage, inspire, and equip you to build a life-long, Christ-centered relationship with your teenager.



Chapter 1

Seeking Relationship Before Discipleship

A phrase that is used a lot in our home is “relationship has to come before discipleship.” I am blessed to have Christian parents, and I know they want to help me follow God. But before my parents could have a “discipleship relationship” with me, they needed to put the time into building a personal relationship with me.

This might seem straightforward, but we are currently living in a relationally deprived culture. As technology and social media have taken root, young people are increasingly struggling to build real-life relationships. This is an epidemic in non-Christian and Christian homes alike. One teen shared this about her relationship with her dad:

I got super annoyed when my Dad tried to disciple me spiritually because it didn't feel like there was love in our relationship. Whenever he told me about biblical things, it just made me mad and I would tell him I didn't want to hear it. The weird part was that when reading them on my own, they were actually meaningful to me. The state of my relationship with

The Heart of Your Teen

my dad made it really hard for me to accept anything he had to say even if it was actually helpful."

I have heard this kind of story again and again through interviewing my peers. In my experience through high school, I witnessed many Christian parents trying to spiritually shepherd their teen, but the relationship was in pieces, riddled with bitterness and anger. Building a relationship of openness, honesty, and trust is a first step to helping any child grow in faith. In our family, we call this "heart connection."

One of the most important pieces for me in my relationship with my parents was building this heart connection during the teen years. A verse that was foundational for us was Proverbs 23:26 which says, "My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways." The context for this passage is that Solomon was writing to his son about the sensitive issues of alcohol abuse and sexual sin. Solomon wanted his son to be open and honest with him. He wanted to have a personal relationship with his son, not just give him information or tell him what to do.

A Pit in My Stomach

My parents worked hard at building heart connection with me while I was in high school. However, even in a home with two intentional Christian parents, the spiritual attack on our relationship was extremely difficult at times. It wasn't enough that my parents had given their hearts to

me, I had to make an intentional effort during the middle school and high school years to give my heart to them.

God began this process in me when I was in 8th grade while on a conference trip to West Virginia with my dad. I was feeling convicted that I had to share certain parts of my life with him, especially when it came to relationships with boys. I didn't have a boyfriend, and I wasn't really interested in anyone, but I felt like the Holy Spirit was telling me that I needed to share my thoughts and feelings with my dad about this delicate subject. I remember it clearly, because as I was getting ready during the weekend to have this discussion, I had this pit in my stomach. It was the last thing that I wanted to do. But I pushed through the awkwardness and had that conversation with him. The feeling of warmth, trust, and honesty that I had with my dad after that conversation was better than I could ever imagine. I left that weekend so encouraged and thankful for our relationship.

Fast forward to a month later. I was kind of interested in a boy and it was time to have one of those conversations again. I had that same gut feeling and was thinking, "I don't want to do this. My dad is the last person I want to talk to about boys! I want to talk to anyone else other than him." It took me a while to realize these thoughts and feelings were actually spiritual attacks coming against our relationship. Satan did not want me to give my heart to my father.

The Heart of Your Teen

I observe many people with the attitude that it is normal for teens and parents to be disconnected from each other. It is almost an expectation that kids will think their parents are stupid, and parents will keep their heads down and allow their teen to experience independence. These mindsets may actually be the enemy at work—doing everything he can to keep the hearts of parents and teens far from each other.

My parents and I had to get into the habit of praying very specifically against spiritual attack in our relationship.

It was a significant moment for me when I realized that spiritual forces were working against both my parents and me at the same time. Why would Satan and the demons care about breaking the heart connection between me and my parents? Because they know that God has called my parents to encourage me to follow Him, and God has called me to open my heart to their love and discipleship. My parents and I had to get into the habit of praying very specifically against spiritual attack in our relationship.

Persistent Questions

Something my parents did that was helpful in pushing back against those spiritual attacks and helping to ease the awkward conversations was to ask me intentional questions throughout the week. As a teen, I did not want to feel like I always had to be the initiator of conversations.

Occasionally, my dad would take me to breakfast on a Saturday morning and purposefully ask me questions such as: "Lissy, how is it going at school? How are you feeling about boys? How are you feeling about church? How is it going with your siblings?" His persistence in asking questions took the pressure off me and opened the door so I could share my heart with him. Also, if my parents asked me a question, but I was having a rough day or was not in the mood to talk, they wouldn't pressure me into a conversation. Sometimes I just needed some space, and when my parents gave that to me, it made me more comfortable to come and talk to them when I was ready.

The hardest conversations were when I had to share a personal struggle or sin with my parents. Often, I would feel embarrassed or ashamed and I was afraid of what their reaction might be. It was hard to press through and "give my heart" to them when the things in my heart were not good. I began to learn that God loved me no matter what, and that while my parents were far from perfect, they loved me that way as well. I slowly became confident that no matter what I had to say, my parents would listen with a loving heart (despite how much they might have been freaking out internally). My mom would often say to me, "Lissy, we are the safest people in the world to talk to. No matter what you have done, or need to say, we are committed to you."

When I shared difficult things with my parents, it meant a lot to me when they tried to affirm me for be-

ing honest, instead of just reacting quickly to what I had shared. It helped me be more open and honest if they responded with, "Thank you so much for telling me that. It means so much that you would be honest with me; I appreciate that you were willing to share that." Every step your son or daughter makes to be honest with you about their struggles is a victory for the relationship.

Here is something you may find surprising from my interviews with teens. Every one of them has expressed thoughts such as, *I wish my parents would ask me more intentional questions about my life, or I wish they would ask me how I am doing in my faith.* They repeatedly said they want to talk with their parents, but it is hard for them to initiate those conversations. They wish their parents would ask them more questions.

Every step your son or daughter makes to be honest with you about their struggles is a victory for the relationship.

My encouragement to you is to start asking! Even if you get shot down a few times, keep trying! Sometimes, starting small can be the best way to begin if you haven't been in the practice of having intentional conversations. Ask your daughter about her friends at school or maybe ask your son how his sports are going. The goal is not pulling out a confessional, rather it is simply knowing what is going on in the life and heart of your child. What is he or she excited, stressed, happy, or sad about? The more you

can help them open up to you, the more effective your parenting will be.

Powerful Words

With six siblings, I know that every child in a family is different. Some of us feel loved when we get gifts. Others feel loved when we are verbally encouraged. Others like to be hugged. What forms of affirmation work for your teenager? When I was in middle school my mom and I had recently gotten into a conflict. I was really emotional and she asked me, "Lissy do you know that I love you?" I answered, "Well, of course I know you love me." She followed up by asking, "Do you know that I'm proud of you?" The honest answer was no, I didn't know that she was proud of me. When my parents discovered this was a vital thing I needed to hear, they worked on frequently saying both of those phrases to me. Other helpful words my parents would say were, "Lissy, we take joy in the fact that you are our daughter," and "Lissy, we are proud that you are our daughter." This was like therapy for my heart because it was amazing to hear from my parents that they were proud of me, and took joy in me, even in the midst of hard situations of conflict or discipline.

Some of the teens I interviewed expressed that their parents did a better job speaking words of affirmation when they were little, but that it was less frequent when they got older. They also said they wanted and needed to hear their parents' verbal encouragement now just as

much as when they were younger. With the busyness of teen life, it is easy for a high percentage of conversations to be correction and confrontation. This pattern slowly erodes a healthy heart connection.

The Truth Is Hard

When I was in high school, I was frequently told at school and at church what a “good kid” I was. Teachers and friends would comment on my maturity. Attendees at our ministry conferences would affirm me. But at home sometimes it was another story.

As I just mentioned, my parents were encouraging to me but they were also saying things such as, “Ok Lissy, you need to work on this...you need to work on that...you need to do better in this.” There were times I felt like all the positive feedback was coming from outside my home and all the negative feedback was coming from the inside. During this time, I simply did not want to be at home! This is something my parents and I definitely had to work through.

The teens I talked with shared similar feelings. They would receive encouragement and even praise from coaches, teachers, youth pastors, and friends. But at home they felt it was mostly criticism. Teenagers can easily start to think, why be at home if everything there is negative?

Looking back, there were several immaturities in me that my parents were able to see and I simply could not. God began humbling me and softening my heart toward

my parents so that I began to see the areas in which I needed to mature and grow. Both my parents and I had to change for us to work toward creating an encouraging environment while still facing difficult discipleship conversations.

What Speaks Love To Your Teen?

In addition to speaking words of affirmation, which I believe all teenagers need, every child is going to be different in what communicates love to them. For me, I loved when my mom would pick me up after school and we would go get Starbucks® together or go shopping. Those were such special times. For my 16-year-old brother, what communicates love to him is going to Steak 'n Shake® at 10 PM to get a double cheeseburger and large milkshake! When parents engage with things we enjoy, it helps build the relationship.

I am a social person. However, in high school my parents would set aside time when I couldn't go out with friends or do anything socially just so I could spend some quality fun time with my family. We would watch my favorite movie or go to my sibling's favorite restaurant, taking time to do what each of us loved. So much of my relationship with my parents has been built on those positive times together.

The Heart of Your Teen

I was talking to one of my friends from school and asked what her parents did when she was in high school that helped build their relationship. I loved her response:

I'm a dancer and had many performances and recitals throughout the year. My dad didn't know anything about dance but he really made an effort to learn about it. He would watch videos and send them to me along with questions. He came to all of my performances. Knowing my dad loved me and that he also wanted to love what I loved made such an impact for me in building our relationship.

As I thought about my friend's story, I realized that was also true in my experience. Having my parents make an effort to enjoy the things that I enjoyed, even if it wasn't interesting to them, meant a lot. They showed their love for me by taking an interest in the things that I loved.

Tough Love and Real Consequences

With any parent-child relationship, there will be discipline situations. Loving parents discipline their kids. However, my conversations with other teens have revealed an unhealthy pattern. Teens reported that when they were younger, their parents responded to their mistakes and poor choices with consequences rather than angry lectures. Now, as teenagers, the consequences have been

replaced with angry lectures or long, drawn-out conversations. In fact, it seems like the lecture is the consequence.

When I felt like my parents were in “lecture mode” it just made me want to shut down and pull away from them. However, when they gave me fair, direct consequences I was better able to learn lessons and my relationship with my parents did not suffer. That is not to say I was happy with my consequences! Sometimes those penalties were hard. But if my parents gave me a direct outcome and then followed it up with a calm conversation saying, “Here is what we need you to work on,” or “Here is why you got this consequence,” it went a long way to maintaining our heart connection, and helping me learn needed lessons.

Don't Give Up!

I experienced numerous ups and downs in my family relationships during the teen years. There were lots of good times and lots of hard times, all filled with learning and growth. Through it all, God helped my parents and me prioritize our heart connection. If I felt like my parents were not listening to me or I was being treated unfairly, God gave me the courage to express that to them. The Lord helped my parents wrap their concerns—about choices I was making or my attitude around home—in a spirit of grace. I remember them asking me during a difficult time, “Is there something we are doing that is hurtful to you or that makes it hard for you to talk to us?” My parents had to ask the Lord for His help to turn their hearts to me, and

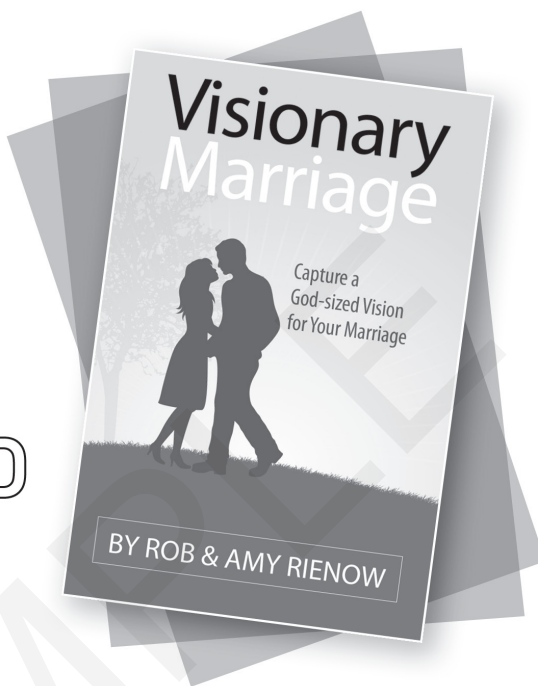
The Heart of Your Teen

I had to ask for His help to turn my heart to them. This was especially true when we were in times of conflict.

Don't let resistance and conflict keep you from pursuing a close relationship with your teenager.

The teens I spoke with made it clear to me that they did not want their parents to give up on them. They did not want their parents to stop reaching out to them. Don't let resistance and conflict keep you from pursuing a close relationship with your teenager. If God has called you as a parent to be the spiritual leader for your children—which He has—then He will fully equip you to face the attacks and struggles that will come against you. Ask the Lord to help you continue to ask intentional questions, speak words of affirmation, and have fun with your teen! Seek relationship before discipleship.

**GOD HAS AN
AMAZING
MISSION
FOR YOU AS
HUSBAND
& WIFE.**



VISIONARY MARRIAGE
Capture a God-sized Vision for Your Marriage
by Rob and Amy Rienow

After years of counseling engaged and married couples, the Rienows realized that most Christian couples did not have a biblical mission and purpose for their family. *Visionary Marriage* will reveal that God does have a plan and a purpose for marriage and family in the Bible. The focus is on the big-picture purpose for marriage and the goal of being successful once understanding the purpose.

**AVAILABLE NOW AT
D6FAMILY.COM**



ARE YOU ON THE EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER RIDE OF PARENTING A TEEN?

Do you want to better understand what your teen is thinking and feeling? Lissy Rienow shares with parents the teenage point of view about the toughest issues families face today. Her heart for families shines through as she encourages parents to fight for a stronger connection with their teen. For the parent-teen relationship to work, both the parents and teenager need to turn their hearts toward each other. Discover what is involved in building this heart-connection that brings families together.



LISSY RIENOW is 19 years old. With one older brother and five younger siblings she has a passion for helping teens live for Christ in their family relationships. Every family struggles and we all need biblical encouragement. She is a student at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee. Serving with Visionary Family Ministries, she speaks at youth and family ministry events around the country and internationally, including Scotland, France, Singapore, and Bolivia. Her desire is to see families build healthy, Christ-centered relationships with one another. If you are interested in having Lissy speak to students or parents in your community, you can contact her through www.VisionaryFam.com.



randall house
randallhouse.com

RELIGION/Christian Living/Parenting
ISBN 13: 9781614840978
PRICE: \$12.99



9 781614 840978