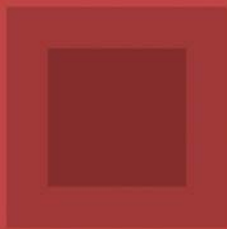


A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

TALKING ABOUT DEATH



Connecting Parents, Teens & Jesus
in a Disconnected World

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A PARENT'S GUIDE TO TALKING ABOUT DEATH

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Most of us spend much time and energy trying to avoid the reality that we and those we love will die. But in facing the reality of death, we learn how to live rightly. We learn how to live in light of our limits and the brevity of our lives. And we learn to live in the hope of the resurrection.

**LITURGY OF THE ORDINARY BY TISH
HARRISON WARREN**

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A LETTER FROM AXIS

Dear Reader,

We're Axis, and since 2007, we've been creating resources to help connect parents, teens, and Jesus in a disconnected world. We're a group of gospel-minded researchers, speakers, and content creators, and we're excited to bring you the best of what we've learned about making meaningful connections with the teens in your life.

This parent's guide is designed to help start a conversation. Our goal is to give you enough knowledge that you're able to ask your teen informed questions about their world. For each guide, we spend weeks reading, researching, and interviewing parents and teens in order to distill everything you need to know about the topic at hand. We encourage you to read the whole thing and then to use the questions we include to get the conversation going with your teen—and then to follow the conversation wherever it leads.

As Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen point out in their book *Difficult Conversations*, “Changes in attitudes and behavior rarely come about because of arguments, facts, and attempts to persuade. How often do *you* change your values and beliefs—or whom you love or what you want in life—based on something someone tells you? And how likely are you to do so when the person who is trying to change you doesn’t seem fully aware of the reasons you see things differently in the first place?”¹ For whatever reason, when we believe that others are trying to understand *our* point of view, our defenses usually go down, and we’re more willing to listen to *their* point of view. The rising generation is no exception.

So we encourage you to ask questions, to listen, and then to share your heart with your teen. As we often say at Axis, discipleship happens where conversation happens.

Sincerely,
Your friends at Axis

¹ Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 137.

**WHY SHOULD
WE TALK ABOUT
DEATH?**

KNOWING HOW HEAVY and personal the topic of death can be, we want to start by saying thank you. Thank you for opening this guide. Thank you for choosing to walk with your teen, helping them process or prepare for their own encounters with death. Thank you for showing up for them, even as you might feel like you're breaking apart. We pray that the Father would meet you here, in this moment in time, in these pages—wherever you're coming from, whatever emotional state you find yourself in. We trust that He will give us what we need and be with us. Because of Jesus' righteousness, we can enter into God's loving presence.

Death has been called the ultimate statistic: ten out of every ten people will die. And although some professions come face-to-face with this reality on a more regular basis (doctors, nurses, police

officers, military personnel), this conversation can be difficult to begin because much of American society is structured to keep the rest of us from thinking about death.

Since the 1800s, American culture has tried to “sanitize” death.¹ Bodies are embalmed to look more lifelike at funerals; loved ones often die in hospitals, not at home. When we do encounter death, our experience is often mediated by news outlets and screens.

The dead often come to us by photograph—in our morning newspapers, in our social-media feeds, on our computer screens next to advertisements for diamond watches or cruises or yoga pants. And many of us fear that we don’t know how to

look at them, or what to do in response to what we see. We feel helpless. Useless. And then we feel ashamed. Better not to look at all. Better to avoid images of the dead.²

And then there's imaginary death. Think about the body count in Marvel movies like *Avengers: Endgame*. A building burns on screen as we sip a Coke; the camera pans to a bloody fistfight as we munch on a fistful of popcorn. Through modern entertainment, we can witness more tragedy in an hour than most people experience in a lifetime, but we're detached from it. Witnessing a bomb detonate in real life might give people PTSD. Seeing the same thing on screen may make us tear up for a moment, but when the movie ends, we move on with our day, unfazed.

So how do we respond when death comes crashing back into our awareness? How will your teen handle news of school shootings, virus outbreaks, and opioid overdoses? This is the world your teen is navigating, and they need your guidance. When you and your teen courageously face the reality of death, you accept the invitation to focus on what really matters in life.

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