

# Discipleship: Moving Toward A Resilient Faith

By Dave Morrow

The teenage years can be an exciting time in the discipleship of our children. It is a time of tremendous growth and change as young people begin to solidify their life goals, as well as the beliefs and convictions that will guide their adult course of life. It is a time of developing maturity – physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. One of the main discipleship goals during this time of life is to see our children’s faith develop from a compliant faith to a more resilient faith. By a compliant faith, I mean one in which the initiative comes from others, typically parents. For example, the child is involved in church activities because the parents take the child to church and are involved themselves. The child prays because the parents pray with the child. Bible stories are read to the child and the basic tenets of right and wrong are taught directly to the child by others. The child’s faith depends on other people to structure, direct and maintain it. The early stages of a child’s faith development are vitally important, and home schooling provides a wonderful setting for this foundation to be laid. Strong, positive relationships with children can be cultivated and their faith can be nurtured in a supportive atmosphere without facing the sustained attacks of a hostile culture.

A resilient faith has a number of distinguishing qualities. It is a faith that has been internalized and claimed as one’s own, as reflected in Paul’s conviction, “I know whom I have believed, and [I] am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” (2 Timothy 1:12). It is a faith that has been studied and thought through, one seen in a person who has been “rooted and built up in Christ, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.” (Colossians 2:7). It is a faith prepared to survive the attacks of the world, whether they come from peers who ridicule living a godly life, neighbors who insist that the tragedies in their lives prove God is not loving, or professors who openly mock as ignorant those who believe in God at all. It is a faith able to endure difficult circumstances and personal disappointments, able to say with Paul, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). It is a faith that, as is described in 1 Peter 1:6-9, is proven to be authentic by emerging from the flames of adversity as a purified treasure that will result in glory, praise and honor when Jesus is revealed.

The journey to an increasingly resilient faith is one that will last throughout a person’s life, yet there is much we can do to encourage this development in our children’s lives before they leave home, especially during the teenage years. Again, home schooling provides a wonderful framework for working on this area of transition and growth. Below are listed twelve goals to work toward in nurturing a resilient faith in our young people. These goals will be explored in greater details in future articles, but we will start with a general overview.

Cultivate a parent/teen relationship of mutual respect that encourages the discussion of ideas and questions in a non-critical atmosphere.

Encourage them to study the Bible systematically in order to gain broad knowledge of the Scriptures and develop the skills of biblical exposition and interpretation.

Encourage their development of a love of Christian books, music and fellowship.

Pray consistently for their spiritual growth.

Help them identify opportunities for participation in Christian ministry and service.

Demonstrate to them an authentic faith by the way we ourselves live.

Direct their study of the ways in which the great Christians of the past have defended the faith against attacks throughout history, including persecution.

Encourage the development and practice of the basic disciplines of Christian discipleship in their personal lives – prayer, Bible study & memorization, worship, etc.

Have them study the areas of hostility against the Christian faith in our contemporary culture, as well as the defenses given by prominent Christians.

Encourage the continued development of Christian character in preparation for fulfilling adult roles in life and leadership in the Christian community.

Encourage the development of friendships with other believers who are serious about their Christian faith.

Have them study and discuss systematic theology, which will help them develop a framework for understanding their faith.

An initial reaction to this list of goals might be, “This would really take a lot of time and energy!” This is true, and points to one of the great potential advantages of home schooling. It is possible to schedule study time and activities focused on Christian discipleship as a significant and regular part of the school day to a much greater extent than is typically possible when young people attend school outside the home. Seeing our young people develop a strong, resilient faith is worth the time and effort.

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# Discipleship, Part II

By Dave Morrow

For Christian parents, one of the greatest joys in life is seeing our children come to faith in Jesus Christ and continue to grow spiritually, living their lives in a way that brings glory and honor to God. The Bible says in Malachi 2:15 that God's desire for the marriage union is godly offspring. Discipleship of our children is one of our highest callings in life, and it is the foundational reason many families choose to home school their children. Home education is ideally suited for nurturing the spiritual growth of our children.

God designed the parent-child relationship to enable parents to teach their children about life. The stronger and more positive the relationship, the more a child will desire to spend time with and imitate the parent. Small children, who crave their parents' attention and involvement, seek to imitate the basic activities of life such as eating, dressing, etc. As this bond is nurtured and strengthened by parents, the foundation is laid for the girl or boy to acquire the full range of information and skills necessary for life, including their spiritual life. Small children can be surprisingly persistent in seeking out their parents' involvement despite little encouragement and even harsh treatment. It appears that God has placed a powerful drive in children to form a strong attachment. Nevertheless, as children become older they will eventually seek this attachment from other sources if their parents are consistently unavailable or hostile.

Discipleship is, at its core, about relationships. It is someone choosing to follow and be influenced by another person. Why did the twelve disciples accompany Jesus year after year? Certainly he did not use his great power to coerce them nor his vast knowledge of human nature to manipulate them. Rather, they responded to his unconditional love, his authoritative teaching and the power of his daily life lived out before them.

Some parents mistakenly believe that power is the most important tool they can wield to influence their children. It is true that power can shape the behavior of small children. Not only is it necessary and helpful for small children to learn obedience for their own safety and well-being, but clear boundaries are important for them to feel secure. However, power is a tool of diminishing returns which, when used exclusively over time, may conform behavior temporarily, but at the cost of distancing the relationship. This can particularly be true during adolescence, when young people desire growth and independence. Parents can find themselves in a situation similar to that described by God in Isaiah: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." It is the positive quality of the relationship, not the degree of power exerted, that causes children to want to embrace with their hearts the way of life we embody.

Children will ultimately choose for themselves those whom they seek to imitate in thought and behavior. Typically, the individuals with whom they have the most satisfying relationships will gain the greatest influence. Home schooling provides the opportunity to cultivate good relationships with our children. There are many aspects involved in building these strong, positive relationships. Let's focus on three of the most important: unconditional love, focused attention, and respect.

**Unconditional love.** Such love is at the heart of our Christian faith and needs to be at the heart of our relationship with our children. When we were lost in sin and rebellion, the Lord demonstrated the greatest love possible, pouring out himself to forgive us, rescue us from the power of sin and restore us to the closest possible fellowship with him. The most effective way to communicate the reality of our faith and its essential meaning is to exhibit grace in our relationships with our children. Because God's love has its source within himself, not in our behavior, he sacrificed himself for us while we were still his enemies (Romans 5:8). As parents we should likewise strive to root our love for our children within our commitments to them, rather than allowing it to fluctuate with their behavior.

The reality is that our children will struggle with sin in their lives, just as we do. How we respond to that struggle is important both to the development of their faith and the quality of our relationship. The guidelines given in Galatians provide excellent advice for dealing with our children: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." There is still a place for limits and consequences. The goal is restoration, not allowing the person to run wild in sin. But we are wise to restore our children gently, with an eye to our own struggles with sin. Experiencing grace from us as parents can have a profound impact on young people.

**Focused Attention.** This involves giving another person our full interest and attention for a period of time. Undistracted time, one of the most precious gifts we give our children at any age, is often difficult to accomplish during our children's adolescent years. At this stage of life our children are often very busy themselves, with more challenging academic work, extracurricular activities such as sports, music, dance and drama, besides additional social activities with friends and groups. The parents of adolescents may have many demands as well, including increased care of aging parents, high levels of responsibility at work, in the church, and with civic groups -- including home schooling groups! Therefore, to carve out unhurried and focused times with our teenaged children requires intentional planning and effort. It may involve a special activity together or simply planned time at home without interruption. If you are alert, there may be spontaneous opportunities. However, scheduling is a good idea because we are usually too busy to respond on the spur of the moment.

Few people give us the gift of truly listening to us, seeking to understand our thoughts, feelings and conflicts. This type of listening, which involves turning off the running commentary in our minds about our own preoccupations in order to focus on another, seeks first and foremost to understand. Not infrequently, the first inclination of

parents is to give advice and seek to control or “fix” the situation rather than hear what our children are really saying. Yet if we reflect on our own experiences, we realize that the unsolicited advice of others is quickly brushed aside, while the rare instances of being heard and understood make deep impressions on us. For many adults, their worst nightmare would be to return to 7th grade and relive their teenage years from that point. Even so, it would be valuable to recall that time in your life – the insecurities, the questioning, the embarrassment over social blunders, the uncertainties about career and marriage. Reliving such times in your mind can give you more compassion for your children and provides incentive to give them the gift of focused attention.

Respect. Positive relationships are characterized by a strong mutual respect. Crucial to showing respect to our children is recognizing that each one is created by God to be a unique individual for whom we are given a stewardship for a season. We do not own our children – they belong to God. They are not ours to attempt to create in our own image, forced into a mold for our benefit or convenience. Rather, they are created by God to fulfill his special calling on their lives, using the gifts and abilities he has provided. Our role is to nurture and encourage their discovery of who God intends them to be. We show respect by recognizing they have their own thoughts, feelings, questions and opinions, and by seeking to understand their perspectives. As children move into adolescence, discussion becomes far more preferable to lecturing when we want young people to seriously consider our views. Such courtesy and consideration will help our young people be more willing to communicate with us about significant matters.

Another essential facet of respect for our children is to recognize that God intends that they grow into mature, responsible adults, rather than forever remaining dependent on us for provision, care and direction. Our relationships with our adolescent children can remain more positive if we embrace this goal together and work for its accomplishment. Much goodwill is squandered by parents when they fight against their children’s desire to grow and mature. Young people, who often define growth solely in terms of independence, must come to learn that independence and responsibility have to be combined in order to attain maturity. By offering support and encouragement as our young people take on greater responsibilities, develop further skills and function more independently with age, we honor what God intends our children to become and resist the tendency to control them for our own convenience.

All of life is an opportunity to teach, train, learn and grow. Home schooling makes it possible for parents and children to share more of their lives together than is usually the case in our culture today. This, in turn, makes it easier to share our faith with our children as described in Deuteronomy 6:6-7: “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Our daily interactions with our children, as mundane and commonplace as they may seem, are all opportunities to nurture precious lifelong relationships. As we seek to love and honor one another and strengthen our mutual faith, we prepare the soil of their hearts, and ours, for the exciting task of discipleship.

Let us love our children as we have been loved by God – unconditionally. Let us seek first to understand, listening with our hearts. Let us demonstrate respect for the unique giftings and callings God has given our children. Let the Word of God bear fruit in the receptive hearts of our children.

## Discipleship, Part III

### Authors as Spiritual Mentors

By Dave Morrow

Christians today have a wealth of wonderful books available to support Biblical study and devotional life. These books can be great resources to draw from in the discipleship of our children. Through books, we and our young people can be influenced by people of great spiritual maturity. We can learn how some of the greatest Christian minds have countered the arguments put forth against our faith. We can be encouraged to live our lives for Christ with the boldness and zeal of spiritual giants of previous generations.

During the past couple of years we have designated one of our daughter's classes as a Christian Literature class. We have defined literature broadly, as all categories of books written by Christians – not just fiction. Time is set aside each week for Christian literature, just as it is for math and science, and specific reading assignments are given. This has enabled us to make time in a busy schedule for reading and discussing some great Christian books. Besides being a practical way to cultivate our daughter's spiritual growth, we have enjoyed the depth of discussions the readings have sparked.

Our Christian literature reading list includes some of our favorite Christian books, particularly those special books that had a significant impact on our lives. Reading such books creates an avenue to discuss with our children what it was about the book that had such an impact on us – specific insights, the example of the author, how Scripture was opened up to us, or how we lived our lives differently because of the book. Sharing personally models to our young people how Christian books have been, and hopefully continue to be, an important help to our own growth. It also facilitates opportunities to share the reality of personal struggles and Christ's victories in our lives over the years, which hopefully will encourage our children as they walk through the ups and downs of spiritual maturity in their own lives through the years.

Books can also be chosen for a reading list that we have not read but which we have reason to believe would be helpful, either because of the author's reputation or someone's recommendation. The young person can share with us some of the main ideas in the book, as well as what he or she thinks was of particular benefit. Teens enjoy being in the

role of teacher. There will often be good opportunities for discussion when the young person is encouraged to share thoughts about the points the author made. It is also a valuable exercise for young people to read, summarize and evaluate what they read.

Another idea is to have the young person choose favorite books from those read and purchase them their own copy to keep. If this is done throughout the high school years, the young person will be able to leave home with the foundation of an excellent personal library of Christian books.

Reading broadly of Christian authors allows one to discover favorite authors. This is important, as authors are often like mentors, with their books being a source of comfort, direction and challenge throughout a person's lifetime. Authors, and the Holy Spirit, can be there for our children when we cannot.

Finding the time to read good books becomes increasingly difficult as one enters the world of adult responsibilities. The teen years are a wonderful time of opportunity to read a significant number of books that might take decades to complete once one has the daily commitments of work and family.

Such books allow our young people to consider the ideas and insights of Christians with greater spiritual maturity than we as parents presently possess. Authors with special insights on particular issues can help our children reason through issues that we have not studied at this point in life. Some authors have had special life experiences, educational opportunities, or giftings from God that enable them to have important messages to pass on. Reading such books together as parent and child can provide the opportunity for both to grow in Christ and see His Holy Spirit at work through the application of God's word to various areas of our lives.

The book which has the most potential for transforming us into the image of Christ is the Bible. Let us not neglect the reading and studying of scripture together. There is great literature available from the Western great books tradition which can give us insight into the character and history of man, as well as insight into God's creation. There is also the writing of spiritual giants throughout the ages who have verbalized the wondrous character and works of God in their lives and experience. Let's consider using these resources as well in our children's education and discipleship

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# Discipleship Part IV: Grappling with the Great Doctrines of our Faith

By Dave Morrow  
Executive Director, CHEWV

One of the great advantages of home schooling is the opportunity to devote high quality times of the school day to activities designed to strengthen the faith of our children. One such activity during the high school years is the study of systematic theology. People's initial reaction is often, "That sounds too technical or too boring for me." Actually systematic theology is neither of these. It is simply studying what the Bible says as a whole about a particular topic. For example one would study about the meaning of Christ's death for us, or the atonement, by studying all the verses relevant to this topic and developing explanations that accurately summarize what Scripture teaches about the atonement. There are a number of excellent systematic theology texts available (some are listed below), written by mature Christians who have studied Scripture deeply for years and who offer great understanding into the teachings of the Bible. A systematic theology text will cover many important topics including the attributes of God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, redemption, prayer, Christian living, and numerous others.

There are a number of benefits to this type of study. It helps to conform our thinking to the teaching of Scripture by integrating what different books of the Bible have to say on a given subject. Without structured study in the home, a young person can easily emerge with a hodge-podge of Bible stories, a knowledge of a scattering of Scripture verses and little coherent understanding of how it all fits together. A weak understanding of theology leaves one more susceptible to having one's faith torn down by people well-schooled in other systems of thought or belief. Our faith is stronger when our beliefs are well-rooted in the Scriptures as a whole, are deeply thought through, and integrated with each other.

This type of study helps to guard our young people against distortions and misunderstandings of Scripture that result from taking just one or two verses on a subject and building a doctrine, while ignoring the broad scope of biblical teaching. Studying systematic theology can connect young people with their church's understandings of Scripture throughout its history. It also aids in the accurate application of the scripture to young people's lives as they study the connections between doctrine and the Christian life.

Studying a theology text is best done in small sections. A typical systematic theology can be spread out over several years of high school. Some texts, such as Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem, have questions at the end of the chapters focusing both on discussion of the material and application to one's life. Answering these questions can serve to practice writing skills, leading the young person to grapple more

deeply with the topic in order to write about it. One of the most valuable uses of this material is to discuss it together as a family. This provides opportunities for parents to give their understanding of various doctrines and share how they have applied these teachings in their own lives. Meal times are often great settings in which to encourage this kind of discussion.

You can check with your pastor or local Christian bookstore for some suggestions of systematic theology texts. Some examples of works from different dominational perspectives are:

Baptist: Christian Theology by Millard Erikson

Reformed: Systematic Theology by Louis Berkhof

Foundations of the Christian Faith by James Montgomery Boice

Dispensational: Basic Theology by Charles Ryrie

Renewal/Pentecostal: Renewal Theology by J. Rodman Williams

Methodist/Arminian: Exploring Our Christian Faith by W.T. Purkiser

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## Teen Discipleship Part V: Living Example

~ by Dave Morrow,  
CHEWV Executive Director

### **Live out the truth you know**

In the last issue of the Banner we looked at the importance of studying the framework of what we believe through systematic theology. However, as vital as it is to understand and believe the truth, it is just as crucial to live out the truth we know. As James writes, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” (James 3:13). The way we live our lives reveals the extent to which we understand the truth of God. The doctrines of the faith are best grasped when they are lived out in daily life by the people around us.

Our own life constitutes one of the most powerful tools in discipling others, especially our children. For example, in His earthly ministry Jesus taught His disciples

about the meaning of love through His sermons, parables and discussions. He also demonstrated this love to them through His life of daily servanthood, and His sacrifice on the cross. By seeing love lived out in His life, Jesus' teaching on love was clarified and its power increased.

When God established His Covenant with Abraham, one of His identified purposes was for Abraham to direct his children in the way of the Lord. (Gen. 18:19) God's plan is for parents to not only lay a strong Biblical foundation in the home, but to be a living example which our daughters and sons would be wise to emulate. To be a learner, a follower, an imitator, is in fact the very essence of what it means to be a disciple.

Adolescents are keen observers of other people and are particularly sensitive to the gaps between what people say they believe and how they actually live. "Do what I say, not what I do" -- never a persuasive stance to take with anyone -- is particularly ineffective with adolescents. Like the child in the story of "The Emperor's New Clothes," teens often delight in pointing out the false games and pretensions of the adult world. Since they often do so without great tact, their observations are not always appreciated by the adults around them. Yet, this time of life when young people are focused on sorting out what is genuine in action, versus what is merely talk in the lives of other people, offers a great opportunity for us to share the realities of the Christian faith that are at work in our own lives. "Let us not love [merely] in theory or in speech but in deed and in truth (in practice and in sincerity)," as the Apostle John exhorts us. (I John 3:18)

### **Are you willing to pay the price?**

One thing that gets the attention of a young person is the extent to which we do what is difficult or pay price in order to live out the convictions of our faith. A faith that is simply an easy and convenient gloss on our lives will neither greatly impact nor gain much respect from young people. I once read an article about a teenager who was resistant to embracing the Christian faith of her family. The turning point for her was when her parents felt led of the Lord to take in a needy person from their community to stay with them. Living out this commitment was a challenge for the whole family and taxed their patience and compassion. Although she was not initially excited about her parents' decision, over time this young person was greatly influenced by the sacrifice her parents made in response to their faith and eventually made her own commitment to Christ.

In an effort to assess what we actually believe to be important, our children will scrutinize our lives more than our words. An example comes to mind when our own daughter was about five years old. If you had asked me at that time to list the main priorities in my life, I would not have listed watching television as one of them. Yet my daughter knew better. One day she drew a picture of our family: she and my wife were playing outdoors while I was inside in front of the television. That drawing caused me to reexamine what I was doing and led me to admit that watching televised sports was one of my main activities away from work, despite what I might say was important to me. I realized I would even have sports events on with the sound muted when I was playing

games or reading with my daughter. I decided that I did not want to teach her that watching TV should be a major priority in life, and for me the easiest way to do that was to get rid of the cable altogether.

### **“More caught than taught”**

May God help us to see that those things to which we give our time, energy and focus will be what our children perceive to be of real value in our lives.

Since we want our sons and daughters to follow Jesus, let us seize this precious opportunity to set the example and live as committed disciples of Christ ourselves. Let us aim to be like the Apostle Paul who said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1) When our lives reflect the importance of our own relationship with the Lord, our children will be able to witness first-hand our day-to-day choices which flow out of a desire to further His kingdom wherever we are, whatever we’re doing. We can also look for natural and creative means to engage our children in the realities of our faith. Worshiping together as a family in the home, praying with our young people, working on Scripture memory together, and including them in community outreaches and other ministry activities are all ways to help our children develop spiritually by sharing our lives with them.

“Discipleship,” I once read, “is more caught than taught.” As we’ve seen, although it is vital to systematically teach our children what we believe and why, we need to provide the demonstration of our faith in daily life, so our children can clearly see the reality of what we believe and take its message to heart. As home schooling parents, we have a wonderful opportunity to live out our Christian lives with our children and so encourage their own discipleship in Christ. It is a sure way to encourage them to come to know the Lord personally. By setting an example that is consistent with our instruction, we open wide a door for the Father to draw our children into a lifelong, life-giving relationship with Him.

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## Teen Discipleship Part VI: Friendships

~ by Dave Morrow,  
CHEWV Executive Director

Influence through relationships is at the heart of discipleship. In this series of articles on discipleship during the teen years we have focused on the parent-child relationship, and the influence of that relationship in leading the child to a relationship

with Jesus Christ. Another important set of relationships to evaluate are those the young person forms outside the home, particularly friendships.

The topic of teen friendships is an important and often controversial one in our culture. The life direction of a young person can often be accurately predicted by the values, lifestyles and aspirations of his or her close friends, a revealing statement about the power of friendship in the life of an adolescent. It is a common expectation in our culture that adolescents will pull away from their parents, and align themselves with their friends. This does not have to occur, but we, as parents, must be pro-active, since adolescents are maturing in their need to discuss and apply ideas and issues, as well as developing in their interpersonal interactions.

Friendships are vitally important relationships in a young person's life, be they friendships outside the home or with family members such as siblings or cousins. Through friendships, young people learn to share their hearts and minds with another person, while also learning to take seriously that person's thoughts and feelings. They learn the joy of sharing common goals, interests and activities. Through close friendships, they learn to develop the qualities of loyalty and commitment. These benefits of friendship are foundational to the development of strong, stable adult relationships. One or two close friends tend to encourage a healthy development of these qualities more than many casual acquaintances or being popular within a large circle of superficial relationships.

Friendships can encourage the process of discipleship. Close friends who share the same Christian worldview and goals can greatly strengthen one another in their Christian growth. It is difficult for a young person to truly stand alone. But even one or two good friends can greatly strengthen a person's capacity to resist the pressures of the surrounding culture. Ecclesiastes 4:10, 12 says, "If one falls down, his friend can help him up...A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." This is a very important principal for our young people, for, as homeschoolers we are taking a course very different from those around us. In the teen years the pull is great to join the teen culture—to embrace that dreadful state of being "cool". This strong influence includes the pressure to cultivate a negative, indifferent attitude toward adults and toward life in general, to adopt a style of clothing identifying one as belonging to the teen culture, and to join the teenage dating routine with its cycle of promiscuous emotional, and often physical, attachments." But when teens have one or two friends pursuing a different course from the culture along with them, they feel much less alone. The camaraderie of "us against the world" among a small group of like-minded people can take away the sense of isolation and discouragement that can accompany rejection by the general peer group.

Scripture points out the strength of friendships for good and for evil. Proverbs 13:20 instructs us that, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." We should never underestimate the capacity of evil associations to corrupt good intentions. It is very difficult even for adults to truly stand alone against the social pressure of a group. Being the lone object of ridicule by a group of peers is a

devastating experience, and no teen will resist for long without support. Our children need to be taught how to be a good friend, as well as characteristics to look for in a friend.

Another important principle in youth friendships is that influence flows almost exclusively from the older to the younger. Expecting younger teens to resist the influence of older teens in close friendships is similar to expecting an ice cube to resist heat in a frying pan. Despite the best intentions the ice cube may have, it isn't likely to happen. Parents are wise to encourage friendships with children older than their own children only if they are convinced that those older children will be a good influence. If you are uncertain about the influence of the older child, you should discourage the friendship from developing. Encouraging friendships between your children and others slightly younger than them can provide them with the opportunity of being a positive influence on others.

People may raise the objection that young people need to reach out to other young people of all ages with their Christian witness. Witnessing is a broad endeavor which includes one's moral life, the verbal message of salvation and responding to the material needs of others. Friendship, on the other hand, is a very specific and special relationship involving like-mindedness and a common purpose in life. Friendship needs to be carefully guarded and protected. It is a grave error to confuse friendship with ministry, especially during the teen years. We are called to reach out to others with the message and ministry of the gospel, but we cannot have close fellowship with evil. When we study the life of Jesus, we find that while he had contact with those living in sin in order to share the message of salvation or to minister to them, he did not "hang out" with them or join in with them while they pursued evil. Also, Jesus was a mature and well-grounded adult when he was engaged in this ministry of association – not a still-developing teenager. If teens are to be involved in ministry to young people, then it should be to those younger than themselves under the supervision of adults who can teach and encourage them in their ministry.

One unfortunate effect of the traditional classroom model of education is that young people are trained to want to associate only with those their own age or older. Forming close relationships with those younger is considered "uncool" and threatens one's status within the peer group. Homeschooling offers a framework in which it is much easier to encourage older children to reach out in an attempt to encourage those who are younger and experience the joys of caring for others in the effort to be a good influence.

Friendships cannot be forced, but they can be encouraged. How can we encourage the development of positive friendships in our children's lives? The groundwork is easiest to establish when the children are young. Invite the family of like-minded friends to spend time with your family on a regular basis. Look for opportunities for the potential friend to be involved with your family in work or play. Facilitate an activity that appeals to both children. When our daughter was young we had a number of simple parties to provide opportunities to get together with like-minded friends. Games would often

revolve around books the girls had been reading. For several years we had a book discussion group of mothers and daughters which allowed the friends to talk about important issues under the guidance of parents, so as to model positive communication between friends, as well as commitment to one another. We eventually developed a time when our daughter would spend time with her best friend weekly. As our daughter has grown older, we have facilitated one or two classes a year with a few close friends, sometimes a year long class, and sometimes a six week class such as speech or drama. We have found it helpful to have a “kindred spirit friend” along when our daughter must interact with groups of public schooled children. It is easier to be different when you not all alone.

Our Father God knows the needs and hearts of our children far better than we know our children. And amazingly, He loves our children more than we love them. He certainly knows more clearly what is best for them. He tells us that when we lack wisdom we should ask him. Let’s not forget to ask God for wisdom as we encourage our children to develop godly friendships and to flee those friendships that would ensnare them, as well as pray that our children will seek God’s wisdom in the area of friendships.

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