

Where the Battle Is

While my boys were in high school, there were a few occasions when I had to go home in the middle of the day. The road from the church building to my house took me right past their school. I would glance over and wonder . . . what's happening with my kids? Are they struggling through an algebra test? Could Satan be tempting them to copy from someone else's paper? Are they eating lunch with friends right now? Are they struggling with the decision to get up and walk away from an inappropriate conversation? Are they being taught evolution in their science class? Are they wrestling with the decision to defend their faith? Sometimes parents wonder where the battle is for their kids.

Recently I was talking to a group of teenagers about heaven. As we wrapped up our study, I gave each one a card and asked them to answer this question: What is the one thing that might cause you to miss heaven? I want to share some of their answers so we will know where the battle is.

I struggle with lust.

Jesus taught that, if a man lusts for a woman, he has committed adultery with her in his heart (**Matthew 5.28**). Whoever wrote this answer on the card certainly understood this danger. And yet, they also acknowledged that this is a struggle. We live in a sexually charged world. Opportunities to look with lust are everywhere. The Internet offers easy access to an endless supply of corrupt images. Young men can't even walk through the school without seeing things they should not see. It's where the battle is.

If we want our kids to go to heaven, we need to help them push back against this assault by Satan. This will require having some uncomfortable conversations with them. Some parents are reluctant to discuss sexual purity with their children. They fear they will rob them of their innocence. But in our culture, silence is not an option.

Take them to the text and teach what God says. Go to **Genesis** and teach that the desire we feel for each other comes from God (**Genesis 1.27**). Use the **Song of Solomon** to demonstrate the beauty of sexual intimacy in marriage and emphasize the importance of patience until that time (**SOS 2.7**). Show them the Bible warnings about keeping ourselves pure; not just refraining from fornication (**Hebrews 13.4**), but also keeping our thoughts and actions pure (**Galatians 5.19**). Use Bible stories to illustrate the terrible things that can happen when we don't listen to God (**II Samuel 11-12**).

The Bible has a lot to say about sexual purity. When kids hit adolescence, they need to have this information. For many of them, this is where the battle is.

My friends are a bad influence on me.

THE FATHER KNOWS BEST

Of all the answers given by this group of teens, this one appeared far more frequently than any other. For many kids, the battle is with their friends. It is an odd answer. Friends should help us, not hurt us. But remember that there are basically two kinds of people - those who draw me closer to God and those who will pull me away. God warns us about this danger (**Proverbs 1.8-10; I Corinthians 15.33**). Sometimes the people our kids choose as friends are not friends at all. They are harming them in the worst possible way.

If we want our kids to go to heaven, then we must help connect with the right crowd. There are few things a parent does that are more important than this. So, how do we help them without coming off as a controlling dictator trying to run their lives?

Start early. From the time they begin associating with other kids, start talking about good and bad influences.

Get to know the crowd. Let their friends come over and play on the swing set or pile up in the living room and watch a movie. Feed them. Make your house the place to be. But as you do this, watch and listen. Get to know these kids.

Steer them toward healthy relationships. Encourage them to spend time with good influences. Adjust your schedule and change your plans to make it happen. At the same time, make it inconvenient for them to spend time with bad influences.

Be a parent. There may come a time when you must intervene and end a friendship that is damaging your kid. We must do this calmly and clearly express our concerns. But whether our kids understand or not, we must act. We cannot sit back, behave as though we were powerless and allow an evil influence to drag our kids away from the Lord. They may be angry with us, but they will get over it.

This is where the battle is. Our kids see the dangers. We need to see them too.

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