

Leader's Guide to

LESSON 7

THE TEENAGE YEARS: WHO'S IN CONTROL?

NOTE TO NEW LEADERS

You can download the Leader's Guide from the website www.EveryManAWarrior.com to make it easier to follow while leading the lesson.

THE TEENAGE YEARS: WHO'S IN CONTROL?

- ✓ Break into pairs and recite all your verses to each other.
- ✓ Sign off on the *Completion Record*.
- ✓ Ask someone to open the session with prayer.
- ✓ Go around the room, asking each man to share one Quiet Time.
- ★✓ Go around the room asking each man to share how his father-son or father-daughter time went. Ask: "What did you do? Where did you go? What did you talk about?" Use the criteria listed on the right. Ask what he is learning about being a better father. Why?
- ✓ Begin reading the lesson paragraph by paragraph.
- ✓ Pages 95-104: Ask each of the questions on these pages. Depending on time, have two to four people give their answer. Try to include everyone.
- ★✓ Page 100: *Break lesson here*. Remember to review verses, share Quiet Times, and report on your father-son or father-daughter time at the beginning of the second week.

SUCCESSFUL FATHER- CHILD TIME

Did you:

- Make it safe
- Ask questions
- Keep the focus on them
- Listen
- Pray over them
- Speak a "building block of truth" into their lives





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- ✓ Pages 103-104: Have everyone read their *Points to Remember*. Discuss whenever possible. Read the *Assignment*.
- ✓ Page 104: Plan a one-hour outing with one of your children or grandchildren and be prepared to report back to the group.
- ✓ Page 104: Place the verse Proverbs 18:13 in the front pocket of your *EMAW Verse Pack* and memorize it this week.
- ✓ End in group prayer using the *WAR* method. Spend some time praying for your children.

WHO'S IN CONTROL?



I first met Mark and Samantha in their church. Mark was a good leader, but he sometimes gravitated toward control as his leadership style. This was especially apparent when his daughter Lori turned fourteen. In junior high the school had started having dances and Mark made a rule, “No dating until you are sixteen, and that’s final.”

Lori’s friends were having dates but at fourteen none of the kids could drive, so their moms or dads were always around or somehow involved in the event. In high school the pairing off by Lori’s friends was even more intense. Lori was outgoing and liked by most everyone, but with each potential dating opportunity, Mark would overrule and quite forcefully reiterated his “no dating until you are sixteen” rule. Samantha saw Lori’s humiliation at being the only girl among her peers who had never had a date. Unfortunately, neither Mark nor Samantha saw the deep resentment growing inside Lori.

Lori felt the rule was totally unfair. She was embarrassed when her friends asked her why she couldn’t date. It seemed like Dad must not trust her. Each time she tried to discuss with him how she felt, the debate ended in angry words and tears. Mark felt that his leadership was being challenged; after all, he was just trying to protect his daughter. Communication between them stopped completely.

When the big sixteenth birthday came, Mark and Samantha gave Lori a party. There was a sigh of relief since the rule would no longer be in effect. Mark and Samantha hoped that things could go back to the way they were. No more fighting over dating. But little did they know of the problems that were coming.



Lori seemed somewhat happier. Her birthday party was a huge success. A number of young men came that Mark and Samantha had never met. They dressed and looked a little weird, making Lori's parents feel a bit uncomfortable—since the boys obviously had some interest in their daughter.

But the biggest unforeseen surprise came in the following weeks. Lori had a date almost every night. Now that she could drive, the dates took place after school or she and her date met at some other function. Many of the young men were unknown, new names to Mark and Samantha. Lori was almost never home. Her parents could not get a straight answer from her about who she was with or where. They suspected that many times she lied.

When the parents did meet some of her boyfriends, they were really concerned. Most did not seem to be the kind of guys they hoped she would gravitate toward. Now they had fights about curfews and where she went and with whom. She seemed to hate being home and to their dismay and grief, she sometimes stayed out all night.

I watched with deep sorrow the breakdown of communication between Lori and her parents. Unfortunately, Mark was imitating the 1950s style of parenting his father had used. He never looked for or saw other options. Samantha was the first to have suspicions. Lori felt sick and seemed more tired than normal. At 17, Lori was pregnant. When Mark got the news he wept.

- ✓ What thoughts do you have on the above story? List at least three observations.

- ✓ What do you think about Mark's idea that his dating rules would protect his daughter? How did it make Lori feel?

- ✓ Why do you think communication stopped between Lori and her parents?



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✓ Lesson 5 introduced *Three Biblical Principles on Raising Children*. How could these parenting principles have helped Mark? How could he have applied them? Jot down your thoughts below on each.

- ***It is a father's God-given responsibility to train his children.***

—Ephesians 6:4

- ***Children get their self-image from what they believe Dad thinks about them.***

—Proverbs 17:6

- ***The words spoken to a child will determine his or her destiny.***

—Proverbs 18:21

THE RESULT OF CONTROL

Why is control a bad parenting strategy for raising teenagers? Control has to be age-appropriate. When our children are first born, of course we need to control almost every element of their lives to protect them. However, if we want them to mature as teenagers, control can actually be a hindrance for their development into responsible adults.

When my daughters turned thirteen, I had this conversation with them during father-daughter time: “You know, young lady, becoming a teenager means you are moving quickly toward being an adult. So Mom and I are going to begin to make a few less decisions for you, and you will be making more of your own decisions.” At thirteen, we gave them complete control over their annual clothing budget. Each year, we turned something else over to them. We provided a safe, loving environment for them to learn but let them make mistakes and live with the consequences.



We all learn much, much more from our mistakes than our successes. If we don't let our children think, make decisions, or fail they will never learn. We handicap our children in their abilities to reason, weigh different options, and make good decisions.

When a parent has a control strategy for his teenager, it usually has two extremely negative, unforeseen consequences:

- *First, it can overshadow or delete completely the number-one biblical responsibility of parents: the training of their children.*
- *Second, it means the parent is making the decisions instead of the child. It cheats the child out of lessons to be learned by the decision-making process.*

FOCUS ON TRAINING

Instead of focusing on controlling our teenagers, our focus should be on their training, their ability to think, and their capacity to make good decisions without our help. This way over time they gain experience in learning the consequences, both good and bad, of those decisions. This is also the road to becoming a self-sufficient, responsible adult.

When we as parents make control our objective, then every issue becomes about us. We're doing the choosing; we're making the decisions for the teenager. But, when we make their training the issue, every decision focuses on them and the possible consequences they will face. This process should start a few years before they become teenagers.

When my own children were in grade school, I often prayed that if they were making bad decisions they would get caught. I wanted them to learn consequences before the cost of those bad decisions was too high.

In control-oriented families the first really big decisions children start making on their own occur when they are teenagers. At this stage of life, those decisions are most likely made when the parents are not around and they often involve alcohol, sex, or drugs. If our children have not had experience making their own decisions and suffering the consequences, then the cost of bad choices with sex, drugs, and alcohol can be exceedingly high.



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Instead of focusing on controlling our teenagers, our focus should be on their training, their ability to think, and their capacity to make good decisions without our help.

✓ What are your thoughts on the two unforeseen consequences from having a control strategy for parenting teenagers? Jot down at least one thought on each.

- *First, it can overshadow or delete completely the number one biblical responsibility of parents: the training of their children.*

- *Second, it means the parent is making the decisions instead of the child. It cheats the child out of lessons to be learned by the decision-making process.*

When my oldest daughter, Stephanie, turned thirteen, boys started hanging around our house. We took Stephanie and her male friends to the mall, to movies, or to the park. Most of the time we found reasons to stay close or made our basement the place for movies and pizza.

I made it a habit to get a father-daughter time within two to three days of each of these boy-girl outings. I wanted to talk about what she was learning about boys and relationships. Over time, the Lord taught me a very effective teaching method for teenagers: *ask questions, then shut up and listen.*

I remember when she was sixteen. We were at Burger King discussing her most recent and most serious relationship with some young man. The pattern for these talks on dating had been established, and now we had progressed into the real stuff. It was time to ask more serious questions.

I started the discussion with this statement: "Stephanie, you are becoming a beautiful young woman, and some man is going to be so lucky to marry you someday. What things do you like about Johnny?" There was a pause as she blushed and then said, "I don't know, he's cute." We both laughed, and after a few moments I asked a second question: "What kind of



man do you want to marry someday?" There was another pause, but a more serious reply of, "I don't know."

This process of helping our children learn how to think is one of the greatest gifts we can give them.

Over the next few years, I asked many questions. Do you want to marry a man who is spiritual, or is that important to you? What stage of commitment are you at with this guy? Do you feel safe with this guy? What boundaries do you have on the physical aspect of your relationship? How does he treat his mom? How does his dad treat women? (Because if you marry this guy, that's how he will treat you.) Will he earn enough money for you to stay with the children, or do you want to work also after you have children?

These questions were asked over a two-to-three-year period of father-daughter times. The vast majority went unanswered when they were asked. But these became the questions my daughter thought about, wrestled with, and discussed with her circle of girlfriends.

Much of parenting during the teen years is about helping our children learn how to think for themselves. Good questions are an excellent vehicle to accomplish this.

Many times the questions came back to me after my daughters had contemplated them and gotten their friends' thoughts as well. This led to some substantial discussions. It was an opportunity to give examples from my own life on dating, marriage, boundaries, and values. The question sometimes was, "What did you and Mom do?" Within reason, I shared both mistakes and successes. I also shared stories from other couples, their decisions both good and bad, and then the consequences of those decisions. It was a time to let my children learn from our regrets, and perhaps avoid repeating some of them.

I've had dozens of discussions like this with my daughters. We've talked about men, money, relationships, cars, other people's opinions of us, self-worth, their walk with God, wounded people, and handling life's disappointments. We've also just laughed and had fun.

My objective was not to tell them what to do or think. My objective was to plant a seed and develop their ability to think about these questions of life. *This process of helping our children learn how to think is one of the great-*

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est gifts we can give them. But it only happens if we have safe and open communications with them.

Having a strategy of control kills communication and teaches our teenagers to hide things from us. Once that happens, our ability to influence them almost dies completely.

★ **Break here if you are spending two weeks on the lesson.**

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON? FIND OUT BY ASKING QUESTIONS

Asking questions is an important skill to use in discovering what's really going on inside your child. Proverbs 18:13 is one of my key verses on good parenting: *"He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame"* (emphasis added). Speaking too quickly, without really knowing what is going on inside your child, is a big mistake. We end up fighting the wrong issues.

My friend Jake is a good example. Jake and his wife, Candice, have two great kids. Everything was going well until their daughter, Michaela, reached junior high. She began to break all the rules, misbehave, and disobey. She was driving her parents crazy. Jake had to work long hours as an investment banker. After work, he spent time every night coaching his son's baseball team, competing for the regional championship. His son, David, was the pitcher, and when they didn't have a game he practiced with Dad or they went to the batting cages.

Sometimes when Jake arrived home, Candice was in tears from fighting with Michaela. Jake would get angry and have to discipline her. The parents were at their wits' end, so Jake came to see me and related what was happening. As I asked questions, Jake told me one thing that turned on the light. During one conversation when Mom asked, "What's wrong?" Michaela had blurted out these words: "Dad's always mad at me and he spends all his time with David!"

That weekend Jake took Michaela out for dinner and a movie, just the two of them. Afterward, Michaela was almost a perfect angel for the next few weeks.

Speaking too quickly, without really knowing what is going on inside your child, is a big mistake. We end up fighting the wrong issues.

What was really going on? Michaela was feeling left out, that David was more important to Dad, and the only way she got any attention was by misbehaving. This was the real issue. Mom had stumbled onto it by asking questions.

Remember, children get their self-image from what they believe Dad thinks about them. When Dad is absent or uncommunicative, the message is clear: *"I'm not valued, loved, or important to him."* This message is absorbed and becomes what the daughter believes about herself: *I am not valuable, worthy of love, wanted, or special. I do not deserve to be cherished.* When these messages are sent over a long period of time, our teenage daughter will find a place where she does feel loved, wanted, and valued. Unfortunately, that is usually in the arms of a man who takes advantage of the situation.

Asking questions communicates value to your teenager. It says, "I value you, your mind, your ability to think, your opinion." When I don't ask, but just tell or command, control becomes the issue, and once again, we and the child both lose. It forces the teenager into fighting for independence and rebelling against this atmosphere of control.

Make it your objective to always ask at least one question of your child before making a decision. Sometimes the best question is, "What do you think?"

You and I want our teenagers to become independent, responsible adults. But this independence needs to be based on the wisdom and maturity that comes from making decisions and living with the consequences, not from a desire to escape from the smothering control of parents. Changing the way we parent is not an easy task. It takes time, energy, and prayer! Once again, much of our default mode is how we ourselves were parented.

He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.

—Proverbs 18:13

- ✓ Meditate on Proverbs 18:13 using the *Ask Questions* method. Jot down your thoughts. What does it say about a parent who does most of the talking?

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Ask Questions**Is there:**

A command to obey

A promise to claim

A sin to avoid

An application to make

Something new about God

Ask: Who, What, When, Where, Why

Emphasize:

Different words

Rewrite:

In your own words

✓ The verse above uses two strong words—folly and shame—about drawing conclusions without asking questions. What do these words mean to you?

✓ In parenting, what do you think is the purpose of listening?

✓ Rewrite Proverbs 18:13 in your own words.

Parents who make control their objective unknowingly communicate the following messages to their children:

- *You don't know how to think; therefore I must do the thinking for you.*
- *I don't want you to suffer the consequences for your bad decisions. Therefore when I'm in control, I will bail you out of your problems.*
- *I don't believe you have what it takes to make good decisions or be successful.*
- *I don't trust you. You are not responsible. Therefore I need to control you.*

Trying to control our teenagers imprisons them in permanent adolescence, destroys their self-esteem, fosters resentment, and stifles maturity.¹

¹ Adapted from Foster Cline and Jim Fay, *Parenting with Love and Logic* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006).

Parents who make training their children the objective want to:

- **Help their children learn how to think and make decisions.**
- **Help their children learn the consequences of those decisions.**
- **Cause their children to believe they can succeed.**
- **Give their children the freedom to mature.**
- **Keep communication lines open and the focus on the relationship.**

✓ Review the lists above about control versus training. Write a paragraph comparing a control strategy versus a training strategy for raising teenagers.

✓ Review the lesson, organize your thoughts, and jot down the most important points to remember from this lesson. Be prepared to share what you wrote.

Points to Remember

1.

2.

3.

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4.

Points that others shared that I want to remember:



ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

1. ✓ Place Proverbs 18:13 in the front pocket of your *EMAW Verse Pack* and memorize it this week.
 2. Have your Quiet Times on the following passages: Ecclesiastes 11:9–12:14; Proverbs 23:1-28; Proverbs 24:1-34.
 3. Plan a one-hour father-daughter or father-son time with one of your children or grandchildren. Be prepared to report back to the group.
 4. These lessons have more reading. Use a highlighter or underline key parts to facilitate writing your own *Points to Remember*.
 5. It is time to reflect and review. Do the *Proficiency Evaluation* for lessons 1–8. Try to fill in the answers without looking first. Then go back to find and check your answers. Finish any lessons that you have not completed.
- ✓ End in group prayer using the *WAR* method. Spend some time praying for your children.