

Bridging the Parent-Child Gap

Help parents reach across the culture to their kids

BY BARRY ST. CLAIR

Rain recently caused several bridges to collapse in our area. My wife tried to run a 10-minute errand and returned four hours later. The bridge was out.

The bridge in the relationship between parents and our kids is out as well. Three swollen streams have flooded the family bridge causing severe damage and destruction to our children:

Culture is destroying them. Our kids are awash in the sewage



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water of our culture. Without healthy adult guidance, many are being raised by the culture rather than by their parents.

Parents are abandoning them. Needing love, security and support from their parents, this generation is often isolated from caring adults.

Churches struggle to connect with them. Church-attending teenagers cheat, lie, get drunk and have sex at a similar statistical rate as non-church-attending kids. Often viewed as brief and meaningless “spiritual entertainment,” the modern church has left our teenagers unequipped to handle their world.

Yet spiritual issues capture the interest of the younger generation. Most people embrace Christ before their 18th birthday. Plus, our kids desire a close relationship with their parents. Some 78 percent acknowledge the major impact their parents have on them, according to a recent Barna study. How, then, do parents and churches resist the culture and build a relational bridge to our kids? Visualize the bridge as undergirded by three strong spans.

Span No. 1—Break through your imperfections into God’s resources. Parents are not perfect; they never have been and never will be. Kids aren’t perfect either.

Married 28 years, my first wife, Carol, and I raised four kids, but we had our ups and downs. Then Carol died, and I became the single dad of an 11-year-old. Grief sucked my energy dry. I struggled to make it through a day. Later, I remarried a precious woman. Yet blending a family turned out to be more complex than we ever imagined. Ten years later we still struggle with our family imperfections.

We all share struggles and seriously question our parenting capabilities, living daily in “woulda, coulda, shoulda” mode. But Jesus wants parents to leave behind the guilt and questioning that result from our imperfections (see Rom. 4:25; 5:1-2).

Span No. 2—Focus on God’s parenting purpose. Parents lay a weak span when we ask: “How do I make sure my children turn out right?” This question bases a child’s value on behavior, performance and achievement. A strong span is laid when parents ask: “How do I help my children love Jesus more?” This question bases a child’s self-worth on God’s love. And parents must model God’s love with their words and actions.

Span No. 3—Connect with your kids’ hearts. Ginny, my youngest, had recently turned 11 when her mom died. In the months after the funeral, Ginny cried regularly, but when I asked her how she felt, I got only “fine” in response. One night she decided to put an end to my questioning. “I have my feelings locked in a box. I have the key, and you cannot get in,” she said firmly. In her 16th year, her grief came pouring out. That began a journey into each other’s hearts that continues today.

So how can parents discover our hearts and guide our kids to find theirs? Give time and focused attention to our children and our Lord. Carve out 30 minutes every day for a month to focus on loving God, and take each child on a weekly date for one month. Parents with hearts wide open to God and their kids can drive across the bridge right into their kids’ hearts. ■

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+ Ministry Resource

Today’s children and teenagers often feel isolated and disconnected from caring adults. Barry St. Clair helps bridge the gap between parents and their children. In his book **Parent Fuel**, he teaches parents how to give their kids the security and love they need.

