

How to Relate to Your Adult Children and Pass On Your Faith - Part 1

An anguished father prayed: “Lord, keep your mansions — just save my children!” (Richard O’ffill) “A great hemorrhage is taking place in our church — the loss of young adults, 18 to 30 years of age. Thousands are barely clinging to the church.” *How to Teach the Bible With Power*, p. 61. If we would see our children saved, we should understand their needs and help them each step of the way. Provide a Christian education, counsel tactfully as they look for a life companion, and be there to help them over the rough water of marriage adjustment and child-rearing. In other words, our job of parenting never ends. Our children need guidance, but they need freedom, too— roots and wings. Tell them, “We will always be here to help you.”

When my oldest son was struggling to finish his teaching credential, I could see that he desperately needed some financial assistance. So we sent him a monthly check for a few months. He has not forgotten this. It has drawn us closer together. Consider this statement by Ellen White, “You must win their affection if you would impress religious truth upon their heart.” *Child Guidance*, p. 148. It is so easy for parents to lecture or advise their adult children. We read something in the *Adventist Review* that seems to just fit their need. We photocopy it and send it off. But sometimes adult children resent this. Why not ask them first, “Would you like to read something out of the *Adventist Review* that may be very helpful?”

If the discussion with adult children turns to religion, keep it sweet and low and don’t defend the church. Let’s be honest. Our church leaders have made many mistakes. They are human like all of us. We are not called to be God’s defense attorneys, Rather, He wants us to be witnesses. Tactfully share your spiritual journey. Tell stories: “I remember when I was about 18 I got a crush on a certain girl. As I look back on it now, I’m glad she wasn’t interested in me. God had someone better in mind for me — your mother.”

Vocational Guidance: You know your children’s aptitudes. Encourage them to aim high, to keep service as their overall goal. Remind them that “riches . . . sprout wings and fly off to the sky” (Prov. 23:5, NIV). But be careful how you give advice. Make your point by asking questions. Affirm your children’s good choices: “I like what you said to Jenny about teen-age love. I’m proud of you.” These are magic words. Use them often. Positive behavior affirmed is often repeated.

We need to get intentional about family devotions. According to the

Valuegenesis Report on Adventist youth, regular family devotions have life-long benefits. Spend time regularly, as a family, in the Holy Scriptures. Ask each child: “What do you want us to pray about today?” Then list their requests on some nicely decorated cards and post them on the refrigerator. Family devotions can be intensely interesting. Look up “angels” in a concordance, and it will give you lots of Bible passages containing interesting stories. Select a Bible story in which the characters dialog. Assign family members to read the various parts. (Luke 14:15-24; John 11:3-44.) A narrator could read the connecting phrases. The purpose is to create pleasant home memories about spiritual things. Make them short and sweet.

A pastor’s son, 20 years old, moved in with his girlfriend. His parents were devastated. They prayed earnestly for wisdom as to how to respond. They decided that above all things they were going to maintain the warm relationship they had with their son. So they called ahead and asked for permission to drop by for a few minutes. The reception was cool. “John, we know you are expecting a sermon, but there will be none. You know that we love you. And you also know what is right and wrong. If you ever decide to come home, the welcome mat is always out.”

Consider the prodical son. When he left home there is no record of any advice-giving or sermons. During the long years of his absence, the father made no trips to find him or bring him home. What brought him home? Yes, it was hunger and the stench of the pigs. But I’m sure there is more to the story. I believe his greatest motivation for returning home was the memory of a father who loved him unconditionally. If he had memories of a troubled relationship with his father during his teen years or if he had memories of a stern and strict father, he probably would have stayed with the pigs.

When the father saw his son trudging up the road, he *ran* to welcome him home! No lecture! No negotiations! Rather, “Let’s have a party!” The prodical discovered that his father had forgiven him a long time before. The memory of his father’s unconditional love was what brought his son home.

How do we relate to our prodical sons and daughters? What can we do to bring them home? Pray and wait. Love them unconditionally and keep in touch.

If you have children at home, give them good memories to take with them as they go out into the world. “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6, KJV).