

Question: when am I done parenting? Isn't most of it done by the time kids reach their teenage years?

In one sense (and you all know this), you're never done being a parent. I called my dad this week (I'm 43, by the way) to get his advice and prayer (or course, he does the same with me now). And parenting teenagers has, in reality, stretched well into a student's 20s in most cases. Adolescence has extended on both ends of its age delineators.

But I have a couple theories I'd like to suggest you consider reality:

First, you should make this assumption – by the time your child is in HS, most of your parenting is done. That's not to say that you still don't have a very important role in her life – you do! But it's normally a bit late to “change course”. Parenting an older teen (or young 20-something) is more about “staying the course”. More about continuing to model what you've already set in place.

You might be thinking: i'm can barely catch my breath, and i'm supposed to start thinking about the high school years? Fair enough. But the reality I just proposed adds significant weight to this next reality:

You're on the last lap. Or, maybe the 2nd-to-last lap.

These tender years of 9 – 11 (pre-teen) and 11 – 14 (young teen) are some of the most formative years of life. Kids are still extremely moldable, changeable, open. But as they settle into their mid-teen identity, change come less and less often. This is why I always joke with middle school ministry workers that we are still in “preventive ministry”, while high school work is often “corrective ministry.”

What does a long-distance runner do in the final lap or two? Think of the finish line. Calibrate what needs to take place in this diminishing space. Then recalibrate. Continue to pace yourself and recalibrate again.

Don't forget these two extremely important facts:

1. You are still the #1 influence in the life of your child at this age. This will begin to shift to their peer group in the older teen years.
2. The almost-absurd amount of change going on in the life of your young teen places them at a small timeframe of massive malleability (yes, I realize it doesn't always seem that way – but it's true).

These two facts combine to make these final laps of the parenting race some of the most important of your God-given role.

So don't throw in the towel. Don't concede. Don't abdicate your role to the church or the culture or their peer group. Let God fill your lungs with a fresh air of strength and courage. And take another step. And another.