

FAMILY TREE

This year our Birthday Faith Experience is all about rooting our families together as we reflect, not only on our family trees, but on our relationships with each other.

Your influence lasts three to four generations.

That means you are a spiritual patriarch or matriarch all the way down to your great-great-grandchildren.

That means that what you do today as a parent matters. It also means that you have a responsibility to your teenager to help them understand where they come from.

The story of our family is the story of us. It is what we belong to, and it has a say in who we are. One of the best ways you can help your seventeen year-old discover their identity is to lead them to discover their family heritage.

Whether the story of your family is a page-turning novel or a comedy sketch or even if it reads like a police report, your teenager needs to hear the good, the bad, and the ugly of your family.

As parents in your home, you also develop the mission statement for your family. Does your teenager know the mission of your family? Do you know it? How does faith fit into that mission? What a great time to write the mission and story of your family and teach it to your teenager!

This year, plan a Family Tree Dinner. Prior to the dinner, give your student the Family Interview Questions below. Send them out like a reporter from a newspaper. Challenge them to contact at least three family members outside of your immediate family. Their mission should be to learn the heart of their family members and sharing their story with the rest of the family.

TIPS TO HELP YOU PLAN A WONDERFUL FAMILY TREE DINNER WITH YOUR FAMILY:

Prior to the Family Tree Dinner, sit down with your teenager and let them share with you what they learned in their family member interviews. Help them “edit” their interviews so that they can be shared publicly in front of other family members. They may have learned some things that would not be healthy to share in that environment.

During the time prior to the Family Tree Dinner, when it is just you and your teenager, you can discuss with them any negative things they might have discovered. You also might take advantage of this time to talk to them about “family secrets” or stuff from the past that you have been waiting for them to be old enough to understand before you shared the information with them. That is not fun, but it is a part of them learning the story of their family.



IT'S JUST A PHASE

Invite family members to join you for this dinner, where your seventeen year-old can share what they have learned in the interviews with family members.

If you have family members that live out of town, consider using videoconference technology or, at least, let them listen via speaker phone. Just be sure to give them the opportunity to be a part of the gathering, if they would like.

Another idea for out-of-town family members is to record the event with a video camera and send a copy of it to them.

Finally, invite out-of-town family members to write a note that can be read at the dinner, so that they can participate in sharing with your teenager the story of their family tree.

You can begin the Family Tree Dinner by giving your very own “State of the Family Address,” where you remind your family of who they are and what their mission is. If you aren’t comfortable speaking in front of people, just write it down and then read it out loud.

Another element to the evening is to let your teenager share the results of their family interviews.

Please work with your teenager to ensure that what they share at the Family Tree Dinner is positive and that they avoid sharing embarrassing information that they have learned.

After your teenager shares what they learned in the interviews, you can open the floor to other family members to share their own memories, encourage your teen, or simply share their heart. This has the potential to be a powerful moment in the life of your family and in the life of your seventeen year-old.

Take time to present to your teenager a family heirloom. This may be something significant that was passed down to you from your ancestors. However, if you do not have a family heirloom that was given to you, then you have a great opportunity to start this tradition in your family.

If you are looking for ideas for a family heirloom to pass down, it might help to answer these questions: What do I own that has special meaning to me? What can I give that is durable enough to last for many years? What would be a great symbol for the mission of our family? What symbol can I give that would demonstrate my family’s emphasis on faith? What budget do I have for a family heirloom?

You might want to go to your older family members and ask them for ideas concerning the family heirloom. They might surprise you with something that you didn’t even know existed.

Consider closing the Family Tree Dinner with a prayer time.




Family Interview Questions for your Seventeen Year-Old

Parents – hand this section off to your teenager.

Your mission is to choose at least 3 family members outside of your immediate family and ask them these questions. You will write down their answers and share what you find out at your Family Tree Dinner that your parents are planning for you.

You might be excited about this, or you might think it is lame. Either way, you have a chance to learn about your family. The story of your family is a huge part of your story. In a short period of time, you will be an adult, and as you build your family, you will be thankful you took the time to learn where you came from.

Enjoy this experience and be grateful you have parents that desire to teach you where you come from and what your family is all about. Feel free to ask whatever questions you would like in your interview, but here are some suggestions to get you started:

- What is the greatest thing that you have ever learned in life?
 - What has been the greatest influence in your life?
 - Do you have a favorite Scripture? If so, what is it?
 - What are your beliefs about God?
 - Tell me about your parents and your relationship with them?
 - One day I might be a parent. What advice would you have for me as a parent?
 - If you are married, tell me the story of how you met your spouse and fell in love.
 - Based on your experience in marriage, what advice would you give me about love and marriage?
 - Tell me about your career. How did you choose and get into your career?
 - What advice would you give me about work that you have learned in your career?
 - What significant historical event do you remember the most that happened in your lifetime?
 - If you could do your life all over again, what would you do differently?
 - What is the coolest place you have ever traveled to?
 - What is the greatest movie you have ever seen?
 - How do you want people to remember you?
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WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY SEVENTEEN YEAR-OLD?

By the time your teenager is seventeen, they are living like a mini-adult. But they still need your guidance. To help you with that, here is a look at what is happening in the world of your seventeen year-old.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Boys and girls have fully developed physically into their adult bodies.
- Sexual desire is awakened, and the temptation to be sexually active is common.
- Stress is a very real physical struggle as they work, perform in school, and prepare for the future.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Your seventeen year-old may:

- Begin to be very sentimental as they anticipate life change
- Experience calmer moods than in previous years
- Have a desire for more control over aspects of their life
- Exhibit impulsive behavior with friends and peers
- Not respond to adult lectures, feeling they know better what is going on than the adult does
- Be more capable of taking care of others

RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Integrating both physical and emotional intimacy into relationships begins.
- Friends that share beliefs, values, and interests are sought.
- Less time may be spent with family, while more time may be spent with peers.
- Peers influence them to try risky behaviors, such as experimenting with alcohol, tobacco, etc.
- The relationship with parents is more of a support system.
- They begin to feel freedom to express themselves as individuals.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

- In regards to faith, they value the annual traditions of their student ministry, church, and family.
- They can handle the responsibility of most service positions in the church.
- They have a greater interest in serving others and in making a difference in the world.
- There is more planning and preparation for the future.
- Role models are developed that inspire them either toward or away from faith.
- Their capacity for self-discipline increases.
- They begin to imagine what life would be like as an adult away from their parents, and they begin deciding whether or not their faith will be a part of that.
- There is a temptation to "have their fun now" and be responsible later.

