



Lost In Translation: Parent Cue

1. Be a Student of What They are Learning

We've all used words while being a little uncertain of the actual meaning. But when it comes to words like "belief," "righteousness" and "salvation," our understanding makes a huge difference in how we live our Christian faith and how we view God. So, we're going to take a look at these commonly used words and figure out not only what they mean today but what they meant to the writers of the Bible thousands of years ago. And, in doing so, our aim is to let these new definitions teach us more about all God has for us and wants for us. In other words, over three weeks we are going to take what may have been lost in translation and recapture and rethink it in a way that could transform us in ways we never imagined.

2. Be a Student of Your Student

In the summer of 2008, Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith conducted a study which interviewed 230 young adults from across America. Columnist David Brooks summarized those findings in a recent article in the New York Times ("If It Feels Right ..." September 12th, 2011). Smith's findings revealed that young people don't have the vocabulary to talk about issues of morality. In other words, when it comes to talking about morality and the meaning of life, young people generally find themselves at a loss for words to describe what they know and how they feel. As Brooks writes in his article, "The interviewers asked open-ended questions about right and wrong, moral dilemmas and the meaning of life. In the rambling answers, which Smith and company recount in a new book, 'Lost in Transition,' you see the young people groping to say anything sensible on these matters. But they just don't have the categories or vocabulary to do so ... It's not so much that these young Americans are living lives of sin and debauchery, at least no more than you'd expect from 18- to 23-year-olds. What's disheartening is how bad they are at thinking and talking about moral issues."

For those of us who are invested in the lives of young people, this information can be a bit unsettling. But, we can also see it as a challenge to help our students by teaching them what the Bible says about who they are and what their lives are purposed for—by giving them the vocabulary to talk about these issues with clarity and thoughtfulness. As Brooks says, "Again, this doesn't mean that America's young people are immoral. Far from it. But, Smith and company emphasize, they have not been given the resources—by schools, institutions and families—to cultivate their moral intuitions, to think more broadly about moral obligations, to check behaviors that may be degrading. In this way, the study says more about adult America than youthful America." And this is where we as parents pick up the challenge to help our students develop a vocabulary for the story of their faith journey.

While many students may not be able at this point to truly deal with the abstract ideas of "belief," "righteousness" and "salvation," there will come a time when they will be able to wrestle with these concepts and really understand their meaning in a way that will impact their understanding of the Christian faith and their lives. So, as you talk to your teen about what they are learning, keep in mind that we are sowing the seeds of a greater understanding of both their faith and who they are created to be.

3. Action Point

Stories are one of the greatest teaching tools we have to reach our students. One of the most powerful ways for us, as parents, to teach our students the power of faith is for us to share our own faith story with them. For some of us, our faith story is filled with lots of drama. For some, our story is one we haven't really spent that much time considering before. For others, our faith story began when we were very young and has been a consistent narrative throughout our lives. Whatever your story, it is important that you share it with your student. Let them peek into your own journey and find some common ground. This may not come naturally or easily, but as you stumble through it together, keep in mind that your vulnerability is one of the most effective tools in furthering your child's personal spiritual journey. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Be sure to do this on your student's timetable so that they are the most willing to listen and take in what your story has to offer.
- Pick your teen up from school for lunch or coffee and make a special date out of telling your story. Your student will enjoy the special attention and the break from their normal routine.
- Find a time when both you and your spouse can share your story in a relaxed environment, such as around the dinner table.
- Above all, remember that no one has more potential to influence your child's relationship with God than you do. Being intentional with your student and making time to talk is a valuable resource in building relational trust and walking with your student through their faith journey.

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