

PARENTING

A Parent's Guide to

DISCIPLING TEENS

axis



As our post-Christian culture increasingly marginalizes Christianity, it is critical for those of us who care about the next generation not to take a business-as-usual approach to their formation. If we do nothing they will be shaped away from life with God in Christ. We have the opportunity to reimagine what passing on our faith to the next generation looks like in this unique cultural moment. Let's be creative, courageous, and faithful!

—“Jonathan Morrow on Building Lasting Faith in Gen Z”

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The speed of now

Keeping up with the world our kids inhabit has never been harder or more daunting. Back in the “good ol’ days,” things didn’t change at the speed of light, nor were trends and happenings accessible the instant they occurred. “Bingeing” wasn’t a thing, and billions of terabytes of information and images weren’t at the tips of our fingers.

But all that’s changed now, and often our kids know about what’s going on in the world hours, days, weeks, even months before we do. Even if we’ve kept up with technological advancements, it’s impossible to know everything our kids do or are exposed to. And not knowing what they’re going through or dealing with makes it very hard to guide them through those things. But if you’ve read anything we’ve written before, then you know we at Axis don’t advocate sheltering your kids by banning anything and everything that might be questionable. Instead of *being* our children’s consciences for them, we want to *train* their consciences to think deeply about the world around them. Instead of allowing them to piggyback off our faith, we want to help them own their faith for themselves. By doing so, we will better prepare them to be responsible, kind, God-honoring adults who purposefully and happily devote their lives to doing God’s will.

And we do all that through a process we call Culture Translation. It’s biblically based, centered around conversation, and can be used not only by parents, but also by grandparents, teachers, pastors, youth volunteers, administrators—anyone who has influence in teenagers’ lives. This Guide aims to teach you that process so that you can implement it with your teens and pre-teens. We want to give you our “secret sauce” because we believe so strongly in it and the difference it can make.

What is culture translation?

To understand Culture Translation, we first need to define our terms. So what exactly is “culture”? How would you define it?

Honestly, it’s hard to define because it’s so powerful and entrenched in our lives, yet nebulous and immeasurable. Luckily philosopher John F. Kavanaugh sheds some light in his book [Following Christ in a Consumer Society](#). He defines culture as “a cult, a

revelation system” which “quietly converts, elicits commitments, transforms, provides heroics, suggests human fulfillments. Culture is a gospel—a book of revelation—mediating beliefs, revealing us to ourselves.” He goes on to say that “although culture is made by humans, it in a special manner makes us—to some extent in its own image.”

His choice of terms is important; most of us are gleefully unaware of just how much our culture shapes what we think, what we believe, and how we perceive reality. Our cultural context even shapes how we interpret Scripture and our very faith in Christ. In short, we tend to make God in our cultural image even though we often don’t realize it.

Next, we need to understand a more familiar term: Cultural Literacy. Coined by author [E.D. Hirsch](#) in his 1987 book [Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know](#), “cultural literacy” refers to the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture. Just as one can become literate in a language or economics or politics, one can also become literate in one or many cultures.

Culture Translation, then, builds on this concept. We define it as **the ability to understand, participate fluently in, engage, and transform a given culture**. Knowing about a culture enough to participate fluently in it is good, but having the desire and ability to use one’s knowledge of that culture to challenge it and call it to a higher standard is even better. But rather than being about national cultural identities, as Cultural Literacy has come to be, Culture Translation is all about **generational cultures**.

Generational cultures? What do you mean?

Just as someone from China can feel totally lost and confused when visiting Mexico, someone from one generation in a particular country can feel totally lost and confused around someone from another generation in that same country. Their experiences, backgrounds, values, ideals, and even language can be so completely different that it’s hard for them to relate to or understand each other, despite being raised in the same country. Yes, even though people from two generations might speak the same language and therefore *should* be able to understand each other, they often don’t because the ways in which they use their native tongues are totally foreign to each other.

A great example is when 60- or 70-something grandparents visit their teenaged grandkids. The grandkids are talking about V-bucks and emotes, whether they saw someone’s “story,” who’s DMed whom, that crazy “meme,” and so on. Though these terms and ideas are part of the grandkids’ everyday verbiage and experience, the grandparents typically have *no idea* what they’re talking about. And because of this gap of understanding, it’s hard for either generation to communicate—let alone connect—with each other. So much is lost in translation.

So how does culture translation help?

Through studying different generations and their respective cultures, those who engage in Culture Translation not only understand others better, they can also communicate effectively with them about things that matter because they understand what motivates them and how to speak their language.

But even more importantly, it’s a crucial component of faith. When we’ve said that to parents, they usually look at us skeptically. “Hold up,” they’re thinking. “The Gospel is all we need. Why are you trying to add to it?” A valid question.

Our response is that Culture Translation is not changing, adding to, watering down, or ignoring parts of the Gospel; rather, it’s simply changing the ways in which we *communicate* the Gospel and show its relevance to teens’ lives. It’s an awareness of how new generations communicate, what they’re influenced by, and what they like, and that awareness then informs how we communicate the Gospel to them and show how it’s much more fulfilling than anything else they’re into. N.T. Wright sums it up really well in [this video](#) (watch from 0:15 to 1:15).

How did you come up with it?

Actually, we didn’t invent the idea. In fact, we modeled it after what we observed in Scripture. We’ll give you a couple examples.

Jesus

During Jesus’ time, the Jews lamented the pantheistic, [hedonistic](#) Roman culture in

which they lived. They could see how at odds it was with their efforts to follow God and His laws. They longed for the day when their prophesied Messiah would come and restore things to the way they were supposed to be. In the meantime, they had to figure out how to live out their faith in the real world, but just how to do that was another dilemma. In Scripture, we can see three main ways in which devout Jews sought to engage a hostile culture and live out their faith in God in a world that rejected Him. First were the isolationists ([the Essenes](#)) who chose to run away from Roman culture and start their own counterculture, literally out in the desert. Second, we see the violent revolutionaries ([the Sicarii](#)) who took the opposite approach, physically rebelling against Roman rule in their efforts to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Third were those who said, “If you can’t beat Rome, you might as well join ‘em” (the [Sadducees](#) and [Herodians](#)), colluding with their Roman overlords to gain power and prestige.

Enter Jesus. So which approach to culture did He choose when he launched His ministry? His own. Rather than running away from, colluding with, or even waging war against culture, He worked within it to redeem it. He studied it, learned the language, customs, rituals, beliefs, and religions of His day. When He started His ministry, He *didn’t* start an isolated community or a violent rebellion. He didn’t even try to change Roman laws to be more in favor of the Gospel He was teaching. Instead, He gathered 12 men and several women around Him to teach and disciple as He went from place to place, interacting with both Greeks and Jews and offering them a new, alternative way of life within the Roman culture. He talked about a new kingdom, but it wasn’t a kingdom of this world. Ultimately, He chose to be a force of transformation from within by understanding, participating in, and engaging the culture.

Beyond just how Jesus lived His life and conducted His ministry, some really fascinating examples of how He translated culture are the very words He used. When we look at some of the parables He told, He used words that were familiar to His audience, things like “harvest,” “wine skins,” “mustard seed,” “oil lamps,” “fig trees,” “chaff,” and being “fishers of men” (all things that have to be explained to us modern-day readers). In fact, what we know as the parable of the rich man (recorded in [Mark 10:17-31](#); also in [Matthew 19](#) and [Luke 18](#)) includes the statement: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” Jesus didn’t invent that aphorism; it was a well-known phrase [from the Babylonian Talmud](#). However, the original phrase was about an elephant, not a

camel. But Jesus knew that His Palestinian audience had never seen an elephant, so He “translated” the idea by changing it to the biggest creature they knew so that it made more sense to them.

Paul

Paul was also a master translator of culture. As [a Roman citizen](#) and [a Pharisee](#), he expertly understood both Romans and Jews. [Acts 17:16-34](#) gives us a clear example of how he wielded this knowledge to the Gospel’s advantage. For context, Paul had been traveling to different cities and preaching the Gospel in synagogues to Jews. But then, because some of the Jews didn’t like his message, his followers were afraid for his life, so they sent him to Athens. And that’s where we pick up.

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

First, notice that Paul becomes “greatly distressed” because of his observations. He was in a new place, observing a new culture. And because he was paying attention, he noticed the idols. But we love his reaction! Instead of writing them off or going to his followers and telling them how sinful these people were, he engages. He goes to the synagogue, not to yell at them, but to reason with them. Another beautiful thing he does: He engages in the marketplace—where the non-Jews would be—with anyone who’s willing to listen. And by doing that, he’s overheard by the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, two of the predominant schools of thought in Roman culture at the time. He debates with them, too, something he couldn’t have done if he didn’t already have some sort of grasp of what their philosophies were. Let’s keep reading.

Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Because Paul was not only being winsome, but also employing reason and logic,

these pagan believers were so intrigued that wanted to hear more, so they took him to their turf, the Areopagus. Then they let Paul address them:

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

Then he launches into a beautiful explanation of God and who He really is (read it in verses 22-31). But there are two things that are noteworthy about his explanation: 1. Again, he studied their culture and learned it, but instead of being outraged or offended by what he learned, he used it as a way to begin a discussion that would point them back to God; and 2. He knew his God so well that he could talk about Him in a compelling way to both Jews and Athenians. And we know it was compelling because of how the story ends:

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed.

Many wanted to continue the discussion, while others were convinced enough to believe. And of course, there will always be those who refuse to believe. We love this story because it showcases Paul’s ability to study, comprehend, and translate Athenian culture, as well as his ability to speak to them in terms each different type of audience would understand, using symbols they already knew (e.g. statue to an unknown god). And of course, it showcases his depth of knowledge of God, what He has done for us, and how to speak about Him compellingly to a variety of different audiences.

There are many other examples of prophets and Apostles translating culture throughout Scripture, but since we don’t have time to go through them all here, we challenge you to be on the lookout for them as you read God’s Word. What examples can you find of God’s people knowing their culture well enough to engage it in a loving, winsome way, all for the purpose of drawing them into the beautiful culture of the Kingdom of God?

What does culture translation involve?

Before we get into the six steps of Culture Translation, we want to emphasize that **Culture Translation is an art, not a science**. It's *not* a formula that, if you follow it exactly every time, you'll be guaranteed a certain result. Rather, it's an art that can be messy and requires practice, finesse, and the ability to adapt. Why? Because we're dealing with people, and people are different, unpredictable, and ever-changing.

If you're a parent or grandparent, then you already know that doing the exact same thing with all of your (grand)children doesn't work. You have to know their personalities, proclivities, temptations, and insecurities, then customize your strategies to fit each one in order to be effective in your parenting and discipleship. The same goes for Culture Translation. Your kids are unique, so the things they go through and their responses will be unique. Therefore, what might've worked for one child may be totally ineffective for the next.

As we walk through the steps, let's also practice. Head over to [Billboard's Hot 100](#) chart and choose one of the top 10 most popular songs. If possible, choose one that you've heard or that you know your child listens to or by an artist your child likes. Then listen to it and watch its music video if one exists [*but do so at your own risk! Many music videos these days are inappropriate in one or many ways*]. Now analyze it. **Write down** your thoughts and reactions to it. It's important to write them down because we'll come back to them later. Once you've done that, you'll use this same song to walk through the steps below.

The Art of Culture Translation: 6 Steps

1. Pray

This step may be obvious, but it's also really important. As we look into culture, which is often fraught with depravity, it can and will affect us. So we need to ask God to protect our hearts and minds, give us wisdom and discernment, and help us to know what to pursue versus what to let go.

2. Ask Questions

This is how we figure out what to research. We can do this by simply asking general questions—What songs are popular right now? What's trending on social media? What movies are releasing soon? What TV shows are teens watching?—or

even better, by asking our teens themselves. It may seem awkward, but rather than trying to guess what our kids are into, why not just ask them? Make sure to emphasize that you're just curious and want to know, and just as importantly, *don't* offer any reaction, analysis, or judgment. This is simply the fact-finding stage. The rest will come later.

3. **Research**

Now that you have a few cultural artifacts on your radar, it's time to do some research. Find out as much as you can about them. Basically, the goal here is to collect a good amount of information about the artifact in order to better understand it *before* coming to any conclusions or making judgments about it.

- For a **song**, find out where it is (or was) on the charts, how much money it's made, how many streams it has, look up its lyrics on [genius.com](https://www.genius.com) (we recommend this website because of the annotations that elucidate meaning), Google it and see what comes up, read any reviews of it, etc. Then actually listen to it and watch the music video.
- For a **film or TV show**, look up its popularity, its social media accounts, how much money it's made, the actors in it, any reviews, etc. If possible, watch an episode or the film itself.
- For a **celebrity, influencer, or YouTube star**, look them up on social media and note the number of followers, look at some of their posts, watch some of their videos, Google them, etc.
- For an **app**, do the background research, but then ***also download the app and use it a bit.***

Notice that we recommended to actually watch, listen to, and/or use an artifact. Often, the temptation is to read one Christian review, then base all our conclusions on that, without ever experiencing the artifact ourselves. But this isn't fair and often misses many other valid viewpoints. Also, be purposeful in choosing reviews from both Christian and non-Christian sources, as well as from older writers and younger ones. If we never read what Millennials and Gen Zers think of something (regardless of how wrong they might be), we're missing the point of understanding why our kids like that thing. Or if we never actually listen to a song or try an app ourselves, how can we really understand its appeal?

As a final step in the fact-finding phase, **compare notes** with other parents or

teachers or pastors! Your child is not the only one who likes this artifact, so it's important to ask other trusted adults what they noticed or discovered about it. Often, they'll find things that you might not have even thought of looking for.

4. Analyze

Once you've done all the information gathering, it's finally time for some analysis!

- Start on the **surface**: What was the visceral response you got from it? What did it look or sound like? What do you feel? See? Think? Want? How does it influence or move you?

This is where we really have to put ourselves in our kids' shoes and imagine how they experience the artifact in question. Sure, when we experience something, we may have strong filters in place that help us recognize lies or get us to question the motive behind it or help us to see how it's affecting us negatively. But our teens may not yet have those filters in place. They may simply allow whatever it is to flow over them and experience it exactly how it is, without ever taking the time to ask good questions about it or analyze it at all. They may just experience it and feel what the artist wants them to feel. So, just for a moment, experience it the way they do.

- Now we go **deeper** and start noticing the things that are more subliminal or less obvious. We use 5 questions to help with this process, and their order does matter:
 - What's good?
It's important to start by noticing the good in something, even if it's overwhelmed by bad. This could be something as simple as "it's catchy" or "it's well filmed" or "the colors are fun." But when we start with the good, we give our kids the benefit of the doubt and (eventually) break down their walls.
 - What's wrong?
Now we can point out what's straight up wrong in the artifact.
 - What's missing?
Sometimes, something isn't inherently *wrong*, but it may exclude something important.
 - What's confused?
Again, something may not be outright wrong, but it may twist or distort

something. If that's the case, it's important to point out what it gets right, then show how it just misses the mark.

- What does Scripture say?

The best part! Though it can be a hard step. The Bible doesn't talk specifically about *Fortnite* or Snapchat or the latest meme, so how does it apply? We need to look at underlying ideas and principles, then see how the Bible speaks to those.

For example, social media is, of course, not mentioned in the Bible. But it does speak to our need for validation, community, and connection, as well as offer us a way to define our identity. So what does God's Word say about those things?

5. **Discuss**

We now get to take what we've learned and talk about it with our kids. But it's very important that we don't just lecture them or show off how much we know or come down on them with the hammer of truth! Instead, it's important to **focus on conversations, rather than monologues**. We can do this by utilizing the [Socratic Method](#) for fostering critical thinking. In it, the focus is on giving teenagers *questions*, not answers, and thereby allowing them to think logically and critically of the cultural artifact in question and come to a balanced conclusion. You could even use the questions we listed above to get them thinking. Remember, the goal is to train their consciences, not be their conscience for them. **So it's often more powerful to simply guide them to the truth, rather than spoon feed it to them.**

6. **Pray**

We close with prayer, just as we open with it, because we need Christ now more than ever! Thank Him for the opportunity to engage in your kids' world, for giving you wisdom and words, and for the knowledge that He is bigger than culture. Ask again for His protection over your heart and mind, as well as over your kids' hearts and minds, and pray for His will to be done in your life and your kids'. Ask that He keep giving you opportunities to talk about what matters to and influences your kids.

Now let's go back to the song you chose earlier. If you haven't done so already, apply

the six steps to the track, writing down your answers to the five questions.

What did you discover about it? How was the analysis using the six steps of Culture Translation different from your prior analysis? What did you learn?

Note: We purposefully had you choose a song to analyze as practice because it's the easiest cultural artifact to examine. But remember that you can apply this method to any cultural artifact: music, artists, celebrities, video games, social media influencers, movies, TV shows, sports, awards shows, apps, slang, memes, devices, social media....If it's part of culture, it can (and should) be analyzed.

Anything else to know about the process?

For Culture Translation to be effective, **it's important to keep a humble, kind, curious, safe, and guiding posture.** If we come across as arrogant, judgmental, or all-knowing, our teenagers will close off. In addition, if we treat it like it's a win-or-lose situation or that it's us vs. them, they're never going to trust us because they'll sense that we're not on their side. Instead, if we remember that we're all on the same side and that when our kids win, we win, too, we're much more likely to succeed in our discipleship efforts.

And, surprisingly, it's important to remain somewhat apathetic. Yep, you read that right. When it comes to our kids, we care. A LOT. And that's a good thing. But as they get older and become more autonomous and responsible, it's important that we restrain our care just a bit. Because even though it comes from our deep love for them, it can also lead us to try to control them or get angry when they make poor choices or restrict them from doing any of the things they like. Which can in turn make them want to rebel or hide things or do exactly the opposite of what we hope for them. But if we remain a bit more apathetic, it shows them that they're responsible for their own lives and choices and that we want them to think for themselves. In addition, it reminds us to rely on the Holy Spirit to work in our kids' lives *in His omniscient timing.*

A good way to sum this up is to think of yourself not like professor, but more like a bartender. Think about the two stereotypes for a second. A bartender sits and listens, asking questions but never getting too emotionally involved. In fact, some have found

that having a listening ear is so helpful that they talk their way through their problems without the bartender having to utter a word. On the other hand, stereotypical professors are arrogant, standing above their intellectual inferiors as they impart their immense wisdom and knowledge. Questions are a nuisance, and their students need to just shut up and listen, even if what they're talking about is irrelevant or useless to them. It's obvious which of these would be most inviting and helpful to our kids. Do your best to create an inviting, comfortable environment (and even take it a step further: have delicious, teen-friendly beverages and snacks!). Then listen, ask questions, and encourage them as they work through ideas and problems.

What about when culture is really depraved?

As you begin utilizing this process, you will confront depravity head on. It will be discouraging, frustrating, confounding, and disheartening. Trust us, we get it. As an organization, we've been closely studying teen and American culture for over 10 years, so we stare depravity and hopelessness in the face day in and day out. The phrase "ignorance is bliss" has come to carry new meaning for us.

But ignorance on our part may very well mean that more and more teenagers continue to walk away from God and their faith, not seeing how it's relevant or fulfilling. So what are you supposed to say to your teens who are definitely partaking in and enjoying the depravity? Should you just flat out tell them it's terrible and that they shouldn't partake? This is when you need our secret sauce. We've been giving you our recipe this whole time, but that recipe is nothing if you don't have the secret sauce. **This is the most important part of Culture Translation, and this will be the most important part of implementing it in your home.** So what is it?

One word: *Beauty*.

As Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote in [The Idiot](#), "Beauty will save the world." As far back as Plato, beauty was understood not merely as an adornment or something in the eye of the beholder, but as a value judgment—a value just as important as truth and goodness. In many ways, beauty functions sacramentally: It bears the divine through the ordinary. When we encounter something beautiful, it should feel transcendent. We should feel like we've just experienced a taste of God.

However, the modern world has severed the relationship between beauty and the divine. And in so doing, anything can pass as “beautiful.” When we turn our back on beauty, the result is that we are increasingly surrounded by ugliness. Beauty is replaced with banality, and truth is replaced with sensationalism. In pop culture, the question is no longer, “Is this beautiful?” but rather “Will it make money?”

Our culture is becoming more and more bereft of beauty. We now live in an age of pragmatism and utilitarianism, where the values of cost and function trump the value of beauty. This is particularly evident in our architecture. At one time, architecture was to help beautify shared spaces, but now we build buildings as cheaply as possible simply to fulfill a utilitarian role. Think about your home or your neighborhood. Is it truly beautiful? Or is it solely functional?

Is it possible that Christianity can be communicated through beauty? In his book [*Beauty Will Save the World: Rediscovering the Allure & Mystery of Christianity*](#), Brian Zahnd writes:

In a postmodern, skeptical world, we generally defend Christianity in terms of truth or apologetics, but beauty also belongs to the Christian faith. Beauty has a way of sneaking past defenses and speaking in unique ways about truth, goodness, and God. To a generation suspicious of truth claims and unconvinced by moral or ethical assertions, beauty has a surprising and disarming allure. A Christianity that is deeply enchanted by beauty has the opportunity to offer a skeptical world an aspect of truth that has been long forgotten. Where truth and goodness might fail to win the audience, beauty may once again captivate the soul.

Our task is not to protest culture and coerce culture into moral conformity, but to attract the world to the saving beauty of Christ. We do this best by embodying a beautiful presence in the world. As radical as it may sound to those of us who have grown up in the sterile world of late modernity, asking the question, “Is this cultural artifact beautiful?” is a valid and viable way to evaluate what we believe and what we consume. Is this music video, video game, etc. beautiful, and why?

Because just as all truth is God’s truth, so is all beauty God’s beauty—no matter where it’s found. God is the author and creator of both truth and beauty, so anywhere we find truth or beauty, no matter how surrounded by falsehood and/or ugliness, it’s still God’s truth and God’s beauty. And beauty is part of the argument, part of what makes something compelling. Even though most artifacts in pop culture are full of terrible

ideas, they're often very well made and beautiful—which is why so many teenagers continue to engage with them, regardless of how else they're being impacted by them.

Think about this: If all we ever do is point out what's wrong with culture and what's bad about what teens are immersed in, what will they think? They'll begin to think that God is only *against* things. But what if we instead started pointing out the good things? What if we started pointing out the beauty and truth, using it as a way to point to God and as a platform for *eventually* talking about what's bad? Then students would know better what God is for, rather than just what He's against. It's more powerful to use the positive to point to God than to just always use the negative to point to Him.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and your teens:

- Why will certain forms of art stand the test of time while others will not?
- How am I cultivating beauty in my home?
- What is the standard of beauty? How do you know if and when something is beautiful?
- How do I teach my kids to discern beauty from banality?

The story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is not only the greatest story ever told, it's also the most *beautiful* story ever told. Beauty is graceful and has a way of sneaking past our defenses. It's hard to argue with beauty. And it's powerful, much more powerful than sin and depravity and hopelessness, just as Anne Frank wrote in [*The Diary of a Young Girl*](#): "I don't think of all the misery, but of all the beauty that remains."

Conclusion

Perhaps one of the most important points Jonathan Morrow makes in his interview with Barna from the beginning of this Guide is this: "You can't mass-produce transformation." Helping our teenagers grow is a long-term endeavor: "In addition to the work of God's Spirit and our response to His grace, this process takes time, intentionality, honest conversation, and mentors." The best thing we can do when discipling Generation Z (or any generation thereafter) is to take the long view. Think about what will be most effective in the long-term, rather than getting bogged down in low-hanging fruit that will only distract (and possibly detract) from our long-term goal of hearts that are willingly dedicated to following Christ in all areas of their lives. What will make the

biggest difference—reacting negatively because there was a swear word? Or allowing that to spark a discussion of the power of words and relating it to the idea that Jesus was the Word made flesh?

Discipleship is not easy, nor is it for the faint of heart. But take courage in the fact that you are not alone. Besides the myriad other parents who are faithfully working toward the same goals, the God of the entire universe is tirelessly and relentlessly pursuing your child, a notion captured beautifully by this poem written in memory of Christian martyr Archbishop Oscar Romero:

“A Future Not Our Own” by Bishop Ken Untener

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view.

*The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.*

*We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of
saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession
brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church’s mission.
No set of goals and objectives include everything.*

*This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one
day will grow. We water the seeds already planted
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.*

*We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of
liberation in realizing this.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s*

grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a **free** weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [A Parent's Guide to Generation Z](#)
- Check out axis.org for even more resources!
- If you'd like access to all of our digital resources, both current and yet to come, for one low yearly or monthly fee, check out the [All Axis Pass!](#)

Additional Resources

- [The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society](#) by Lesslie Newbigin
- [Beauty Will Save the World](#) by Brian Zahnd
- [Desiring the Kingdom](#) by James K. A. Smith
- [To Change the World](#) by James Davison Hunter
- [Faithful Presence](#) by David Fitch
- [Liturgy of the Ordinary](#) by Tish Harrison Warren

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A Parent's Guide to **DISCIPLING TEENS**

Recap

- Just as different countries have different cultures, so do different generations have different cultures. To understand the culture of other generations, we need culture translation.
- Culture translation is the ability to understand, participate fluently in, engage, and transform a given culture.
- Patterned off of how Jesus, Paul, and others conducted ministry, culture translation helps us know how to speak our teens' language and communicate the Gospel and other timeless truths in ways that connect with their hearts.
- Remember that culture translation is an art, not an exact science. It can and should be used to analyze all aspects of culture, but it requires patience and intentionality to do well.
- The six steps are: 1. Pray; 2. Ask questions; 3. Research; 4. Analyze (What's good? What's wrong? What's missing? What's confused? What does Scripture say?); 5. Discuss; and 6. Pray.
- When staring culture's depravity in the face, there is always hope. That hope is beauty—the saving beauty of Christ.
- Our God is bigger than culture and is fighting for our teens' hearts. Remember to take the long view and keep the long-term goal (hearts that willingly follow Christ in all areas of life) in mind.

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!

A Parent's Guide to **DISCIPLING TEENS**

Discussion Questions

- What's something you and your friends are into these days? Why do you like it? Can you show it to me?
- How do you think it impacts you positively? Negatively?
- What's good about this thing? What's wrong about it? What's missing? What's confused? What does God's Word say about it? (If not mentioned directly, what are some principles that can be applied?)
- Does doing/watching/listening to this thing help you love God and others better? If so, how? If not, why do you think that is?
- What boundaries can be placed on this thing so that it doesn't become an unhealthy/sinful thing for you?
- How can I help you as you try to keep it in a healthy place?
- How would you know if it has become unhealthy for you?
- Why will certain forms of art stand the test of time while others will not?
- What is the standard of beauty? How do you know if and when something is beautiful?
- How can you and better celebrate and cultivate true beauty in our lives?

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!