



Merging Into Traffic

Traffic is something that can frustrate a lot of people. When people don't know how to merge properly into traffic it slows the whole process of down. There are many reasons why people don't merge properly. They may be afraid and fear keeps them from merging into the crowded lanes. There could be a lack of confidence in their ability to move at the same pace the other cars are moving. Whatever the reason it's something we all have to learn how to do if we are going to get along with the busy highways of life

Parents have to realize that their teens are needing to learn how to properly merge into the traffic of life. To help our teens to have the confidence to merge into society properly we need to understand a couple of very important things. Confidence and fear are removed when a parent leads their teen into a state of maturity by setting an example on how to deal with people. Remember, our teens are struggling with their identity and want to desperately know who they are and what will they become. Hopefully, the parent by now has a firm grasp of who they are and how they are developing as a person. Their character has been established and the parent should desire to make sure their teen is building upon that character. Many teens, however, struggle with building a character that will last a lifetime. The proper type of character will determine whether our teen merges properly into society with Godly instincts or worldly instincts. Depending on how your teen chooses to merge will determine if they can make an impact on people. It's critical to help our teens understand they are not on this planet to selfishly take from people but instead to impact other lives for Christ. So how do we set the example for our teens so they learn how to merge and communicate with people in the right way? There is a great passage in Romans 12:9-16 that can help us in this area.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited” Romans 12:9-16

If you are going to set the bar for your teen’s character and teach them how to merge in life properly it starts with how to treat people. Let’s look at this verse closely to see just how we are to do that.

First, when dealing with your teen you have to be sincere or what I call genuine/real. As we discussed in the “parking section” about being “real”, being a genuine person is someone people can learn how to trust. The Bible says that love must be sincere. You can't be a phony in life when it comes to caring about people. Hypocrites are not allowed and neither is an insincere person. Notice how the Apostle Paul finishes this thought. He not only says that love (the way we care about our kids) needs to be sincere but he tells us to dislike the things that are evil (bad) and cling to what is good. In a nutshell, he is telling us if we are going to put any effort into a relationship make sure you cling to good things within the relationship and not the bad things. Don't always harp on what's wrong with the child but spend a good deal of time finding out what's right and good about the teen. After all, your teen is fearfully and wonderfully made by God so appreciate the gift he has given you. I know there are times when our teens don't look too pretty and it's hard to see them as a gift. Try to think during those moments what your life would be like if they were gone? **Cling to what is good the scripture says. How do you cling to good things for our teens so their character will be built? This passage gives us a dozen things we need to cling to teach a merging quality of character.**

#1-Devotion motivated by love. (*“Be devoted to one another in love.”*)

What are some of the things you are devoted to? The definition of devotion says that it something where a “profound dedication and earnest attachment to a cause is involved.” Think about that for a moment. Have you dedicated your life to make sure you make a difference in your child? What's your cause when it comes to your teen? What are those things you hold dear to you that you want to pass on to your teen? When you cling to something good you will want to make sure you devote all your energy and time to helping that teen learn how to love. There is a reason why Paul said “brotherly love”. The word love here implies one who cares for a close friend. When teaching clinging to a Godly character, a parent must learn to love in a friendly manner. What do I mean by that? Most parents don't have a problem with agape love or what's known as unconditional love. They know deep in their heart no matter what their child does they will always love them. However, on the day to day things of life sometimes their love for their child gets skewed by improper actions toward their teen. That's why Paul emphasizes love as a brother or friend. When there is disagreement in life with a friend we usually will use more tact and are pretty careful that we don't hurt their feelings. A great merging character in life is a person who can deal with people in a loving manner where respect and tact are used lovingly.

#2-Treat people in a way that puts them above you.

Treating people with honor above you is not that well received in this world and is a very difficult thing to teach a teen. The world's attitude is to go for the gusto and if you have to run over people to get there then do so. God's Word says for us to “honor people above ourselves.” How do we do that? How do you treat your teen in a way you place them above yourself? It starts with humility. This character quality is something that is missing sorely in this world. It's becoming a lost art. You honor your teen when you find a way to boost their ego. Teens are always searching for acceptance within their identity and a parent would be wise to "genuinely" learn how to let their teen know how great they are. Make sure your child knows by your actions that you honor them. Take them out for a celebration dinner. Don't take them

out because they made the team or won the game. Let them know you are taking them out for this special occasion because of who they are and not what they are. You can honor your teen by showing a level of trust they so dearly want by extending a curfew or letting them go somewhere that you normally don't let them go. You can honor you, child, above yourself by swallowing your pride and admitting your wrong (when you are). Teens know when you screw up so you might as well fess up. By showing them humility, you love them sincerely in a real way.

#3-Serve God with enthusiasm.

How does your teen see you serve God? When you go to worship what type of attitude do you have? When you eat dinner after church what does your teen hear? Do you bring up anything about what you learned that day? How about the rest of the week? Do they see you serve the Lord with zeal by how you treat your fellow man? Do they see you make sacrifices for people in need? When things get tough many times parents will put God on the back burner. Teens are very observant, and they will notice how “real” your relationship with God is when things are not going so well. A parent who can teach and pass along the heritage of zeal for the Lord will help their teen merge into a society that doesn't know how to handle conflict.

#4- Figure out a way to get joy in your life

Joy does not mean that you are always happy and laughing. Joy is knowing you have a deep-seated pleasure internally that everything is going to be alright. Why can everything be alright? Because you have confidence that God is in control and nothing is allowed in your life that God won't allow. If He is allowing it then we can rest assured that it will turn out for our good. (Rom. 8:28). We should teach our teens how to have a deep-seated heartfelt knowledge to have pleasure internally and God has great intentions for them.

Notice Paul says, *“Be joyful in hope”*. The joy is not found in tangible things but intangible. A teen places value in the latest and greatest while thinking these things will bring them joy and happiness. Their joy only lasts as long as the item is current. Once it becomes obsolete they lose their contentment. It's the same way in relationships they develop. You'll find your teen will often express joy while their current boyfriend or girlfriend is treating them the way they need to be treated. Once that relationship breaks up you'll often find the teen losing all sense of joy and won't emotionally respond with joy until the next boyfriend or girlfriend shows up. The parent who can teach their teen how to grasp hold the great future God has in store for them will find a teen that has a sense of deep-seated joy.

Here's an example of helping a teen through a tough break up with their boyfriend or girlfriend while applying the verse “with a hope”. Your teen doesn't want a lecture at this moment and they don't want to hear things will get better and time will heal all wounds. However, you can as the scripture admonishes us to “be sincere in your love” by letting your teen know that breaks ups are hard, and life sometimes stinks. You might resonate with them by letting them know how much you hated life when you broke up with your sweetheart when you were a teen. You might let them know how devastated you were and you didn't want to hear anyone say how it's going to get better. Then you might say “I know you don't want me to

say don't worry things will get better, so I won't. All I'll say to you is take a look at your mother. She's the best thing that ever happened to me and I thank God He brought her to me and got me through the times that I felt lost. This may sound kind of corny but every time you see your mom maybe you can realize that God will have something great in store for you as well and I'll pray that someday you'll see how much you are loved."

#5-Learn to be patient when life throws a curveball.

Paul says to be "patient in affliction". Well, that's a pretty hard thing to do and it's certainly a hard thing to teach a teen. When teens are going through tough times they don't want to hear "just be patient". Parents must shoot straight with their teens and let them know that life isn't fair sometimes and it's not a bed of roses all the time. Words, however, won't do it for a teen. They have to witness this and learn from seeing how a person can be patient when affliction hits. This is a life skill that is taught by doing. This takes a God-breathed infusion of the Holy Spirit within us. When things are not going well, we must drop to our knees and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us in such a way that we exhibit Godly patience.

In our society, today patience is not a virtue that is taught nor is it something that is given a place of respect. Everything in our society today is a microwavable response. We must have it now as fast as we can. Food must be prepared in half the time it took 5 years ago. We must be able to get information as quickly as the computer can process it. If we have to search on the internet and it takes more than a few seconds to download we get impatient. We hate waiting at the stoplight and fast food is getting to slow. I believe that a person who can exhibit Godly patience in our society today will stand out among others as a great person who knows how to respond properly in every situation. They will be respected and given a place of honor among their peers. It's so rare in our society today that a person who can show patience when things are not going so well will stand out and more than likely will become a leader. Let your teen see you live through affliction in a Godly way. You'll teach them a great character quality that will help them merge in life.

#6-Get after prayer daily.

This one is pretty obvious what we are to do. We are to "pray faithfully". James 5:16 says, "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective". Prayer is asking God to impact your life and others so that He may be glorified. God doesn't mess around when we ask Him to move among His creation. Prayer is a ballistic missile aimed at its target. If you don't pray except over the dinner meal and that's the only time you're kids see you pray then you are missing an opportunity to transfer a life skill that will make a huge difference in their life when they leave your home. Find time to pray with your teen when life gives you're an opportunity to do so. Make it a habit to let your teen see and hear you pray about life's everyday events. Cling to this important part of your life and watch God move in a mighty way with your teen.

#7- Give until it hurts

The scripture says for us to "share with God's people who are in need." Too many times our teens never get to see or experience the blessing of sharing among those who have a need.

Teens are selfish and it's all about them. Teaching them to share with those who have a need is a very important lesson in life. Suppose someone in your life group just had surgery and you are going to go over and mow their yard for them because they are in need. Take your teen along with you and have them help mow. They may complain about having to help someone they don't even know but it will plant seeds that will grow when they are older. Suppose mom is going to buy groceries for a friend who has a need and cook dinner for them. Take your daughter along and have her help plan the meal. Have her help cook and take the meal over so she can experience what it's like to sacrifice financially by buying something for someone else with a need and physically delivering the dinner by your own hands. Once again your teenage daughter may complain but don't let her weasel out of this activity. This activity will plant seeds of service in her life when she gets older. Remember the great Proverb 22:6 tells us to ***“Teach our children the ways of God and when they are old they will not depart from it”***.

#8- Share what you got- (Practice hospitality)

Would you say you are a hospitable person? Do they see you open up your home frequently to entertain and make a difference in someone's life? Do they see you share what you have to make an impact on their life? Teaching our teens to share what they have so others will be blessed is a great character quality. A hospitable person is one who opens up their life in a generous way so that others will be blessed. Set an example to your teens so they will, in turn, learn to be hospitable to their friends.

#9- Bless instead of making a mess of a relationship

The Bible says “Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse.” The world's way is to get even when someone messes with you. Teens especially are capable of being quite cruel to one another when they hurt someone. The idea of this verse I believe is supported by Proverbs 16:24 which says, ***“Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”*** Showing teens how to turn the other cheek and respond in a kind manner is a great gift. Of course, the challenge is that we have to respond in kind as well. When our teens respond to us in an unacceptable behavior we cannot respond in kind. We must learn to control our temper and watch how we say things. According to scripture when we learn to use gracious words then it will help heal the situation.

#10- Empathize not criticize

Verse 15 states, ***“Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn”***. There are times when we as parents just need to sit down and listen without giving any kind of response. We need to be careful and not always lecture when our teens go through something. Learning to laugh when they are happy and cry with them when they are sad is a much-needed character quality. Our teens need to learn how to empathize with those who hurt. Sometimes the best thing we can do for our teens is to just say nothing. We need to make sure that they have a shoulder to lean on. Remember verse 9 tells us we need to "cling" to these types of characteristics. Holding on tight with the quality of empathy is a message God wants us to get across to our teens. The next time your teen is hurting go up to them and say how sorry you are

that they hurt so much and hold them for a few seconds without saying anything. They will thank you for it in the future.

#11- Harmony is beautiful

This passage tells us to “live in harmony”. The definition for this word is to live in agreement or one accord. The Greek word for harmony has the idea of wholeness, to join, to tie together as a whole. The picture is when you tie a knot everything works together for it to be stronger. Learning to communicate harmoniously with our teens will make the relationship stronger. How do you communicate harmoniously? It starts with learning to be an active listener. We can't go into our conversations with our teens with pre-conceived thoughts all the time. We need to make sure our teens know that we are listening and want to understand their position. They may not have the right position but at least we honor them by respecting what they say. Harmony has a desire for peace. If you want a harmonious relationship with your teen you should have a goal of making sure after each major conversation you both walk away winners. They win because they know you have heard them and you win. After all, you believe they understand your position. You want to walk away from the table with a stronger relationship than you did before you started the conversation.

#12- Don't look down on them

Just because you are the parent doesn't mean you are superior. You may be more mature and know more but scripture makes it clear we are not to be conceited. Have an attitude of a servant. Don't take the attitude of know it all. Your teen often will not communicate to you because they feel it's hopeless. No matter what you are going to be right and say "I told you so". If you work hard treating them as an equal (brother or sister in Christ) then they will be more willing to open up to you and share what's on their mind.

There are God's 12 ways to cling to character qualities that will make your love genuine. Read over and over these 12 qualities and see how you can creatively instill them in your teens. The more of these they can get into their lives the better they will be able to merge into the lanes of life.