

Ten Hints
on
Keeping
Your
Young Daughter's Heart



By Miiko Gibson

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Introduction

When I was newly-wed, and living in a new city, my new church had a weekly Ladies' Bible Study which I attended. After one particular class, when prayer requests were shared, one mother started weeping. She said her daughter had grown apart from her and that she didn't know what to do. They used to be so close, she wailed. Many mothers commiserated with her and assured her that at her daughter's age (she was maybe 10), friends were more important than her parents. "We just have to live with that," they said. "In fact," they added sadly, "things might just get worse." Being the only one without any children, I just nodded my head sympathetically, wondering what was in store for me should the Lord bless me with children.

Fast forward.

I have a daughter who is nearly 10. And oh, what a joy and gem she is. Very few things in life are as precious as our close mother-and-daughter relationship. And I pray that as she grows older we will become special friends to each other too. It's too bad I didn't have the insights I now have when I attended that Ladies' Bible class more than a decade ago. I might have then been able to share the following hints on keeping our young daughter's heart with my heartbroken friend.

1) Be Real

When I mess up, I let my daughter know that I have erred and that I need her and God's forgiveness. I'm so thankful my daughter is one of the most forgiving girls I've met. She bears no grudges and she tells her brother she forgives him even before he apologizes to her. She is also quick to ask for forgiveness when she acts inappropriately. I think her responsive nature is in

part due to our openness. She knows her parents love the Lord, but they are also weak vessels who need the Lord daily. By our refusal to hide behind a veneer of “perfection”, she will not grow up thinking that her parents are hypocrites. Teenagers can smell hypocrisy a mile away, and before our daughters reach their teens, you want them to believe in you and to respect your honesty.

Do you hold your daughter to a standard you yourself cannot attain?

2) Stay on Your Knees

We partner with God when we raise our children for Him. We need His daily guidance. His daily grace. When things look discouraging, talk to the Lord. He gives wisdom most liberally and His yoke is light. He loves your daughter more than you ever can. He will grant you the desires of your heart even as You seek His face for your precious daughter.

Have you prayed for, over and about your daughter today?

3) Understand their Love Language

The book *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman was a fun read that helped me understand better my parents, husband, other family members and friends. It also sure helped me listen and respond better to my daughter. At this stage, it seems my daughter speaks all five love languages, but I know one “language” that she really appreciates is that of hugs and kisses. She will drop everything and anything just for a hug from her parents.

What is your daughter's love language?

4) Let Your Hair Down

Have fun with your daughter. Dress up with her if that's what she likes. Dance in the rain with her if that's what she enjoys. My daughter loves having midnight feasts and not long ago when she was having a hard time sleeping, I whispered something into her ear. Oh, she was so thrilled when we pretended to be mice and crept quietly downstairs into the kitchen and ate ice-cream sandwiches and a couple of cookies. Then we snuggled, read a few paragraphs from her favorite book, ate a couple more cookies, brushed our teeth and then went to bed. She slept pretty soundly the moment she touched the pillow and I knew too that we created more than a memory – we further strengthened our closeness during that 20 minutes of special togetherness.

Have you done anything fun or plain silly with your daughter lately?

5) Listen

My daughter really loves this one. She wants to talk about her “problems” . And all I need to do is to listen to her heart. I believe lots of girls look for love in the wrong places because their parents simply have no time to listen to them. By listening to them we can identify potential red flags before they become real issues. One of the best times I can do this is when we are folding clothes together or just before our bedtime cuddle. If you have more than one daughter, you may have to find some activity you can do together alone with her so you can give her some undivided attention. Do this at least two-three times a week. If you can do this daily, better still. A few minutes per day is better than an hour each week or each month.

When was the last time you really listened to your daughter?

6) Teach Them Christian Self-Government

I cannot stress this enough. We need to teach our daughter self-government. Control from within. Control from the Holy Spirit who lives in her. If she does not know the Lord yet, pray passionately for her soul. Once your daughter knows the Lord, teach her this Biblical principle. You want to train your daughter to be able to rule her own actions and behavior according to what the Scriptures teach. This therefore begs the question:

Are you teaching your daughter from the Word of God?

Academics are important, but the love and knowledge of the Word of God takes precedence over everything. How does self-government relate to keeping your daughter's heart? For one thing, she will not be easily swayed by carnal delights and hence seek "greener" pastures outside the home when she has self-government.

7) Choose your Battles

Yes, we want to teach our daughters to obey the first time. We want them to have good habits. But even as our own sanctification takes time, let's extend grace to our daughters. Some things are not worth fighting for. For example: the order they want to do their subjects, whether or not they want their hair short or long, which attire they choose to wear (so long as it is appropriate). Know your priorities for your family and be faithful to them. In other areas, cut some slack if they are really irrelevant in the light of eternity.

Are you having a power struggle with your daughter now? If so, ask yourself this: Am I majoring in minor things or can I relax and trust God instead? Choose the latter, dear sister.

8) Keep them at Home.

If you are not already home educating your daughter, and that is an option, seriously consider this. Statistically speaking, it is easier to keep your daughter's heart when you home educate than when you don't. I'm sympathetic to families who really have no choice but to send their children to school. But if you are still sitting on the fence, I strongly suggest you bring your daughter home. Much has already been expounded on the advantages of home educating, so enough said!


9) Help them Choose Godly Friends.

Though home is where the heart is, friendships among girls can be very sweet and special. And fun. By being a friend, they learn how to love, give and care outside their family, and friendships from girlhood can develop into very deep and beautiful lifetime ones. But we need to help our daughters choose godly friends. Peers can tear the family fabric with their negative influence, but godly friends can encourage your daughter to deepen her own relationship with the Lord. Pray about your daughter's choice of friends. They should preferably be children of your own dear woman friends. Then pray for her friendships, that your daughter and friends will mutually bless one another. From your daughter's very young age, be actively involved with her friends so when she becomes a tween or teen, she won't resent your involvement but instead trust and desire it.

Who are your daughter's friends?

10) Engage in Meaningful Activities as a Family

"Meaningful activities" can be quiet or noisy. They can be fun or hard work. They can be indoors or outdoors. They can be short-term or long-term. They are any kind of activities that give meaning to your family life and act as



a cohesive that binds everyone in unity. It can be anything from doing the laundry, cooking, camping and scrapbooking, to playing ball-games, growing a vegetable garden, reading, caving, boating, journaling, birding. Your daughter's heart will not wander too far when her family life is stable, happy and meaningful.

Is there something you can do as a family?

These thoughts are not in any order of importance. They are not a complete list and not all are original - some have been around for a long time. They work for me and I trust they will continue to work for me as I seek to continually strengthen my relationship with my daughter and with the Lord. The Lord is after all the center of our relationship. And perhaps *that*, though not directly stated above, is the most important hint of all!