

What American Families Need Most  
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Nausea, grief, anger, fear—these were some of my feelings a few weeks ago when I heard about yet another student who took a gun to school and opened fire. I fear because I'm a parent: What if it happens at my son's school? What can we do to halt this frightening trend?

Obviously the problem is linked to the overall moral decay of our society. Kids who get no moral training or example at home are exposed to filth and violence on television, in movies, and in rock music. Most kids have easy access to the Internet, where over 300 new pornographic sites are added every day. Garbage in, garbage out. Coupled with this is the frustrating leniency of our judicial system that often treats violent criminals as if *they* were the victims.

Many are advocating political solutions: tougher penalties on violent criminals, returning the Bible and prayer to public schools, teaching morality (not "values clarification") in our schools, boycotting the supporters and purveyors of smut on TV, passing laws to protect and promote traditional family values, etc. While there is some merit in many of these approaches, the reality is that the ACLU and others who promote immorality under the banner of "freedom" will try to block every such attempt to stop the moral skid.

So what, if anything, can we as parents do? I believe that the solution begins in our homes. Rather than pointing our finger at the corruption of the society or system out there, we need to face squarely our own failures. All of these delinquent children grew up in homes where, to a great extent, the parents were delinquent. I am not absolving the kids of responsibility for their own wrongs. They are accountable to God for what they have done. But invariably these children have grown up in homes where the parents did not set the example of godly living and did not properly train the children to love and fear God. If my teenager rebels, rather than offering the lame excuse, "I did the best I could," I need to examine my own life and make some needed changes.

Every parent should ask himself or herself, "Have I genuinely repented of my sins and trusted in Jesus Christ to reconcile me to God? Do I *truly* know God and walk in personal reality with Him each day? Do I spend consistent time alone with God in His Word and prayer? Are my attitudes, my words, and my behavior toward my family pleasing in God's sight? When I sin against my family, do I humbly ask their forgiveness and seek to change?" We must be able to say with the apostle Paul, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

The late Senate Chaplain, Richard Halverson, once spoke to several hundred men at a church's men's dinner. He asked the men how many believed in prayer in the public schools. Almost every hand went up. Then he asked, "How many of you pray daily with your children in your home?" Only a few raised their hands. As James Baldwin has observed, "Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."

In addition to my example, I need to spend adequate time with my kids for godly values to be seen, heard, and felt. In 1994, Bo Jackson announced his retirement from baseball. His reason? His then six-year-old son had asked his mother why his father was never home. When he didn't get a satisfactory answer, he asked her if his father had another family somewhere else. "If that isn't enough for any man to make up his mind, then he isn't a man," said Jackson. "And he isn't a father."

You don't need a Ph.D. in child psychology to figure it out. If your kids spend hours with the TV and with their friends, but they only see you occasionally in passing, which will influence them the most? I'm often surprised at how few families consistently eat dinner together (with the TV off) and how few families take regular vacations together. No time together, no influence imparted. It's not a quick fix for the massive problems infecting our society. But if it doesn't start with us in our homes, everything else is just a Band-Aid on the cancer.