



Want to raise intentional teens?

ASK QUESTIONS.

By Sissy Goff

Last night, I met with a group of high school seniors. Like most teenagers, these kids are still learning what the word *intentional* means.

They spend a lot of their lives reacting to things. They react when their parents put up a boundary or a consequence ... often with anger. They react to a low grade and then decide to study harder. They react when their peers confront them with a hard decision, sometimes making a healthy choice in the moment—and sometimes not.

I spend a lot of time trying to help teenagers learn to think forward. Instead of asking what their day has been like, I ask them what they want for tomorrow, and how they'd like to change things.

Last night, I asked these seniors two questions: What's one thing you'd like to learn before college? And what's one characteristic you want to see grow in yourself?

Questions are so important because they imply to the kids we love that we believe they're capable of finding the answers themselves. The resounding answer from these kids last night was that they want to develop more independence. Questions help. They move them out of reaction and toward intentionality—forward thinking. And forward thinking helps them learn to control their emotions.

Intentionality helps us make healthy decisions in the face of hard ones. It's what helps us keep a cool head, and what this passage in Ezekiel talks specifically about, even from God's perspective:

"I considered pouring out my wrath on them and exhausting my anger against them in the wilderness. But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, so that it would not be profaned ..." —Ezekiel 20:21-22

As we think about goals for our teenagers, the easiest thing in the world would be to spell it all out for them. You will make these grades. You will make good decisions. You will take on leadership roles and volunteer and get into this college.

But, as we know, those are our goals. The goal of raising these future grown-ups is to help them become just that: grown-ups. They want to be independent. They feel best about themselves when they make good decisions. Our questions help

them grow up with more intentionality and more confidence in who God has uniquely created them to be.

To help them think through their long-term goals, ask them:

- What kinds of things do you feel most passionate about?
- When do you feel most like yourself?
- When do you feel most proud of yourself?
- How could those things be tied up in who God has called you to be?
- Where do you think He has gifted you?
- What do you feel God prompting you to do?

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