

Seeing Where Jesus is in Middle School Melodrama

Odd title for an article isn't it? This article just came to me through a thing called life, so excuse me while I veer away from the current series.

If you're of the male species and you actually clicked on an article with such a title, kudos to you for your bravery...but I must warn you here, you may not be able to follow this one. Ever heard of the term "spider-webbing?" It's one of my favorite terms I picked up at a marriage retreat. Basically, it's a girl thing. We have the ability to start several conversations seemingly unrelated to the other, come back around to our original point and many times tie it all together in what seems a cohesive package to us and other females. **WARNING:** This article may possibly contain many spiderwebs!

Middle school...do I hear a collective, "yuck!?" For those of us with middle schoolers you know what I'm talking about. Middle school is just that season of life where things go from normal to devastating in a matter of seconds. I believe extreme might be a good adjective when describing a middle schooler's emotional state.

I have a daughter, Rachel, who is entering 7th grade. I would describe our relationship as better than average most of the time, for which I am extremely grateful. She likes to spend time with me, still likes to cuddle and usually isn't ashamed to show affection to me in public. Recently we took a trip, just the two of us, for some girl time. She was open with me about her struggles with friends and her relationship with God.

Rachel felt a call to missions in third grade. She has been on one foreign missions trip and one domestic. She has a heart for evangelism and is relatively unashamed to share her faith with complete strangers. Rachel loves Jesus....but Rachel is twelve and loving Jesus and following Jesus is sometimes a challenge due to peer pressure and overall desire to "fit in."

You know those families in church who *seem* to have it all together? The families with children who seem to always make the right choices and somehow steer clear of the pitfalls of the pre-teen/teenage years. Let me tell you right now, we are NOT one of those families! I also confess my tendency to covet such a family. I think I needed to get that out of the way before we proceeded any further!

After Rachel and I have one of our heart talks I feel really good about her spiritual maturity. Then I see her around her peers and the desires to home school and live in a

cave come back! Instead of walking away from gossip, or ungodly conversation topics she joins right in, then usually comes to me later feeling conviction for it. Here is where I would like to tell you I have all the answers, but I don't. Here is also where a generational trait rears its ugly head...PERFECTIONISM! Instead of loving Rachel and praising her for recognizing her ungodly behavior, I preach, and I'll admit it, sometimes I just get plain mad.

Registration was this past week and emotions were stirred in me that I didn't like. Watching Rachel leave me and want to "hang" with her friends was a harsh reminder that we were about to start another school year and hence all the drama that will accompany it.

There are things that make Rachel different from many of her classmates. She doesn't own a cell phone (collective gasp), isn't allowed to see movies with sexual content, isn't allowed to call or receive calls from boys... to name a few. I don't look at these limits as rules, but more as boundaries, a responsibility given to us by God as parents. Rachel has and I'm sure will continue to receive chastisement for our "strict rules."

On a day when things are good and conversations are deep, Rachel understands these limits and I believe deep down in her heart knows they are for her protection...but put her in a surrounding of peers and the veil goes back over her eyes and she sees them as unfair. Much like we know God's boundaries and commandments are for our good, but we don't always see it that way. Sometimes we view God as a cosmic kill joy.

I realize at this point many reading this might see me as an overprotective control freak, but truly I am not. We believe the Lord gave us two children to raise and equip. I use to say I wanted to protect my children, but a dear Christian lady pointed out to me she didn't want to merely protect her children, but equip them to make wise choices. With that as our goal there are many teachable moment opportunities. We don't hide with our heads in the sand. We simply choose for our daughters to be taught by us and the wisdom God gives us in parenting. So instead of them being trained by their peers, media and secular society on life issues we openly discuss these issues from a Christian worldview at home. Topics such as homosexuality, pre-marital sex, sexually transmitted diseases, drug/alcohol abuse, prostitution, gambling, pornography, teen pregnancy, abortion and the list goes on...

There are many different parenting styles and I certainly don't believe we have cornered the market. I don't write about these issues claiming to have it all figured out, I most definitely don't. I write this to give you a glimpse inside my mind and heart, so that you

might see where I am coming from. Because even though I know in my mind the Lord has a plan for our daughters that is far bigger, better and perfect than anything we could come up with on our own, knowing that in my mind doesn't always make it to my heart and here is where I learned the lesson I want to share with you today.

After registration I was in a funk, borderline, the ditch. I will confess to you my focus had veered, much like this article! I was lacking in my quiet time with the Lord. I didn't feel like praying (and I love to pray), I didn't feel like reading the Word and I certainly didn't feel like confessing any of this to an internet audience. Then the Lord spoke to me in that still quiet voice, "you are no different than Rachel." (Imagine the sound of a needle being pulled abruptly off a vinyl record right here.) What?!?!?!?!?

You see I was caught up in the perfectionism, wanting the perfect little Christian daughter. I was expecting something of my child that I hadn't even obtained and I'm a grown woman. Not even have I not obtained it, I can NOT obtain it. To obtain perfection here on this earth would be to become God and that obviously is NOT happening! I think a certain angel already tried that and it hasn't worked out to well for him!

The Lord revealed to me how my actions at times are different depending on the audience. It's easy peasy to be all Christian around other Christians, but put me in a worldly setting away from my peeps and I don't always shine like the stars for Jesus. OUCH, the pruning touch of our Savior isn't always easy to take, but oh so worth the pain.

Do I have the middle school world figured out, a resounding "NO!" Do I have a greater understanding of God's ways aren't our ways and we are in the palm of His hand, absolutely! So, where is Jesus in tween/teen life? He is right there, all the time. I pray I don't lose sight of that again!

The Lord gave me some time to process what He had revealed than topped it off with this, "My precious Amy, cut yourself and Rachel some slack. I have and it's called GRACE."

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