

Warning: Tween with an Attitude!

God used this volatile time in my daughter's life to teach me a lesson, too.

by [Tracey Eyster](#)

“Whatever.” And the door slammed.

I stood in amazement, staring at the wooden door inches from my nose. How could my sweet little girl have turned into this trite little eye-rolling creature that hurls hurtful words at me? Knowing that my age and experience would make me a sure winner, I was tempted to join in on a war of words with her. But I remembered that I was the adult, so I swallowed my pride, lifted up a quick prayer, and asked God to direct my next step. I recognized that how I handled that explosive moment would determine the atmosphere of my home for the entire evening and the coming days.

I tried to put myself in my daughter’s place and asked myself what could be the motive for this continual display of blatant disrespect. She knows better, and quite frankly, it’s out of character for her. Maybe it’s adolescence. Maybe she’s testing her boundaries. Or just maybe it’s that she spends eight hours every day in an atmosphere where she is trying to maneuver her way into being accepted and valued in a school building filled with children who can bring out the very best, or the very worst, in each other. These children—appropriately referred to as “twens”—are no longer young children, but not quite teenagers. At this age children are put under a microscope by every other tween they come into contact with and emotions are on edge. I remember those years and they weren’t easy.

Regardless of why she was choosing to act that way, as a parent, I needed to help her through it, not fight with her. I paused for a cooling off period, took a deep breath, and decided: I’m going in.

I knocked. A quiet voice mumbled, “Come in.” She looked up at me through those bangs that curl just a bit on each side of her big brown eyes, and I could see a look of curious apprehension. She knew she messed up and she was waiting to see what her punishment would be. It seemed she might have even been welcoming it, as all children do want boundaries and she is no exception.

“I’ve been hearing that word whatever from you a lot lately. The word itself is not offensive, it is the way you say it. And what’s with the door slam? We don’t slam doors in this house.”

Her gentle voice, with a tinge of aggravation replied, “I know, I just get so sick of you telling me what to do.”

We spent the better part of the evening discussing how she could remember to complete her daily responsibilities without me constantly telling her what to do. We came up with a written reminder checklist and posted it on her bedroom door. That list would allow her to check her own progress throughout the day. We agreed that if she did not accomplish her daily tasks the consequence would be more chores. I wish I could say things went perfectly after that, but although things did get a lot better, we did (and sometimes still do) struggle with the completion of tasks. However, the other problem was solved and continues to be to this day.

What was that other problem? Remember the attitude, the “whatever”? Our biggest discussion sitting in that bedroom, filled with horse posters, was about her attitude. Yes, she was having a hard time at school. Yes, there were cruelties and challenges and we talked about how that was part of growing up. I assured her that I went through the same issues at her age. I also told her that maybe God was giving her a method to work through all those “whatever” issues; she was just using it the wrong way.

There was another item I posted on her door. Something for her to memorize.

Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Philippians 4:8, emphasis added)

For the next several weeks, every time she said “whatever” to me, she was asked to recite the verse out loud. I challenged her that whenever she became frustrated or hurt and the word “whatever” popped into her mind, she should recite Philippians 4:8 in her head. Interestingly, God challenged me to do the same thing, so we ended up memorizing it together.

In our home “whatever” became a reminder that God wants our minds, and we learned that when we turn over our issues to Him, our attitudes become more like Christ.