



A weekly resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

TATTOOS

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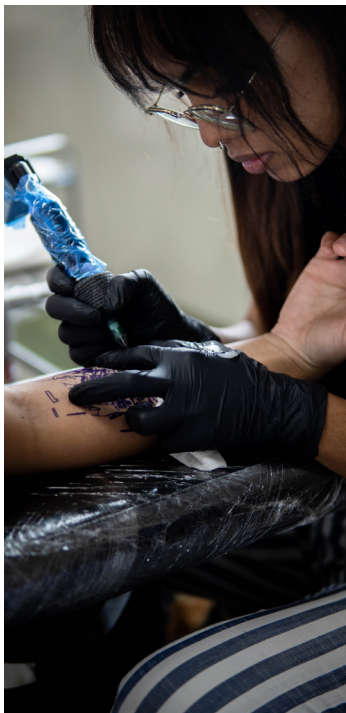
Although tattoos are more common today, they can still be controversial. Perhaps you are a parent who has a child considering getting a tattoo. Maybe you yourself are interested in getting some ink done. Whatever the case may be, we hope this article will help in your discussions around the topic of tattoos.



What is Happening?

Tattoos have been used for different purposes at different times in history. They are not new but have represented different meanings over the years. Even the motivations for getting a tattoo have changed.

- In the eighth to sixth century B.C. tattoos were used to mark slaves and to help identify criminals. More recently, sailors would apply tattoos by hand with needles.
- Tattoos have also been associated with gangs and riding motorcycles. These types of markings are often a sign or symbol of belonging to a particular group. They represent community.
- Today, many tattoos are predominately about expressing oneself. Both motivations for getting a tattoo - whether to signify one is a part of a group or as an individual form of self-expression - are rooted in a sense of identity.
- We have seen a massive increase in tattoos. One study indicates that 46% of Americans have a tattoo.
- Age varies: according to one study 32% of those with a tattoo are between the ages of 14-29, while 45% were 35-49 years old when they got their first tattoo.
- United States citizens spend \$1.65 billion a year on tattoos.
- The average age of someone that gets a tattoo removal is 29 years old.
- In 2019, the global tattoo removal industry was growing and valued at \$478 million.



69% of those with a tattoo cited a desire to remember or honor something or someone as the reason they have a tattoo



WORD

What Does God's Word Say?

Leviticus 19:28 is the one biblical text that speaks directly to tattoos. This prohibition against tattoos must be understood in its cultural context. God's people were not to engage in practices of the time that were associated with worship of the idol Baal, the cult of the dead, and worship of ancestors. This verse was God's call to His people to be holy and set apart from these pagan practices of the time. In today's world, decisions regarding tattoos should be made under the light of other scriptural directives, with one's reasoning and motivation being a primary point of consideration.

Honor your father and mother (Ephesians 6:1-2). Personally, I did not get my fist tattoo until I was 25. The reason for the late start? My mom hated tattoos. I did not do a great job of honoring my parents in my late teens and early twenties, but this was one thing I stuck with. That said, as soon as I was out the house, I filled my arms as quickly as I could. It could be said I appeased, but did not honor. As long as our children and teens are under our care, they are also under our authority and are called to obedience, even if they disagree or don't understand a parent's reasoning. Some of the greatest conflicts in our homes come when parental authority, exercised in loving grace and care, is challenged or disobeyed. Communicate that you are called by God to direct them into making wise decisions, especially when the results have permanence.

Everything is permissible not everything is beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12). Just because *I can* does not mean that *I should*. There are many things we as Christians can participate in, that doesn't mean we participate in all things.

Outward appearance is not as important as inward posture (1 Peter 3:3-4). Vanity is a plague of our culture. Are we adding to this by making sure we look a certain part? Do we spend more time allowing our hearts and minds to be shaped by the Word of God than we do in making sure we have that tattoo we really want?

Our calling is to glorify God, not to draw attention to ourselves (1 Corinthians 10:31). I remember thinking "I am *not* going to look like a 'normal' pastor." This offends lots of my good friends who pastor faithfully, and it was clearly a selfish and sinful motive for getting a tattoo. My desire needs to be to make God look awesome, and not worry if I look cool.

What are we saying with our tattoos (2 Corinthians 5:20)? Are we aware of what our tattoos are saying to those around us? Have we considered that perhaps our tattoos hinder, more than they help? I can speak from my experience. Not one single student has come to me, repented of sin, and turned to Jesus because I have tattoos.





Conversation Starters and Questions:

For the Parents:

- Ask your child why they want to get a tattoo. Listen closely and speak slowly in your response. Be sure you seek first to understand, before giving your opinions and directives.
- Ask if they can identify when they started wanting a tattoo, and what caused the excitement about tattoos?
- Who or what is influencing the desire to get a tattoo?
- Share some desires you had when you were younger that you did not follow through with which worked in your favor. Share things you did when you were younger that perhaps you later regretted years down the road.
- Present your objections and directives with love, grace, and kindness.
- Ultimately you are the authority in your child's life. You have been called by God to establish borders and boundaries to protect them from harm and to provide for their well-being. If your child is pushing back on your "No" to tattoos, enlist the help of a youth worker or other trusted adult who will stand by you, holding up your parental authority. Be sure your child knows that once they reach adulthood and are no longer under your authority, they can make an informed tattoo decision on their own.

For the One Wanting a Tattoo:

- It is important to examine your motivation. Why am I getting this tattoo?
- "Tattoos are missionally limiting."¹ Do we believe our tattoos make us more effective in our mission to make Jesus known? Are people without tattoos less effective?
- Are we submitting to the reality that our bodies are not our own?
- Is your conscience clear before God about tattoos? This will be the key indicator for each person.
- If you already have a tattoo you regret: You are loved by God no matter what tattoos you have or don't have. God's love for us is not contingent on tattoos (thank you Jesus), but solely rests on the finished work of Jesus Christ. We will not live perfectly, but He did. We have sinned, but He died for us. We need hope, and He will restore all things to the way they are supposed to be.

"All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be dominated by anything."

**- I Corinthians
6:12**

For further reflection:

John Piper offers this guidance; Romans 7:4 "Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God."

Ask that question when you go to get a tattoo: 'Is it bearing fruit for God?'

- John Piper

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/six-reasons-to-skip-tattoos>



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