

Understanding Teenagers



- In general, parents are afraid of their teenagers.
- Biological view: Teen-agers are victims of raging, rebel **hormones** encased in developing skin and not responsible for their own choices and reactions
- Parents' aim is to keep the hormones in check in order to survive this period of child's life
- 2 Timothy 2:22 acknowledges temptations & lusts that uniquely plague young people
- Timothy is exhorted not to let his heart be controlled by evil desires
- Rom 1:25: Worship of Creator is exchanged for worship of a created thing
- Teens are tempted to believe that identity, meaning and purpose can be found in the creature

Tripp, 2001:13-17

Understanding Teenagers

Although most people have some idea of who and what the adolescent is, perceptions of adolescents differ radically and are largely determined by people's respective frames of reference and their experience of adolescents in their cultural and social setting.

Although adolescents all over the world have certain features in common, sweeping generalisations should not be made.

Gouws, 2000:1



Understanding Teenagers



A teenager can go from
optimism to pessimism,
excitement to boredom,
self-confidence to self-doubt,
happiness to despair,
sociability to reclusiveness,
cooperation to opposition ...
in a head-spinning second!
And when you ask them, 'What's wrong?'
they say, 'Nothing,' or, 'I don't know.'
And the truth is, they don't!

(Bob & Debby Gass. The Word for Today, 21 Jan 14)

Understanding Teenagers



Your child is navigating between the worlds of childhood and adulthood, needing your understanding and patience. Children know the roles and rules of their world, adults know theirs. Children are expected to act like children, and adults like adults. But teenagers have traits of both worlds, yet belong in neither. When they're in child-mode, they're forbidden to be childish. When they're in adult-mode, they're denied adult privileges. 'Of course you can't...You're just a child!'

The worlds of adults and children are relatively distinct, stable, predictable places. But it's not so in the fuzzy realm of your teen. They alternate between two worlds, never certain whether they're fish or fowl, adult or child. So they gravitate toward peers who share but also don't understand their experiences.

What do they need? Parents who understand and assure them, 'When I was a child, I spoke...understood...thought as a child, like you do. But when I became a man [or woman], I outgrew the confusion, and you will too' (1 Cor 13:11)

(Bob & Debby Gass. The Word for Today, 21 Jan 14)

Understanding Teenagers



The teen years are often cataclysmic years of conflict, struggle, and grief. They are years of new temptations, of trial and testing. Yet these very struggles, conflicts, trials and tests are what produce such wonderful parental opportunities (19-20).

I am convinced that this is a time of unbridled opportunity. There are issues that get exposed in the delicate, scary, awkward, and volatile period of development that make it so full of opportunity (23)

Yes, the teen years are years of change, insecurity, and tumult,
Yet these are the very things that God uses to bring truth to light in the eyes of our children (27)

Understanding Teenagers



“PC is a confused child in a man’s body, struggling to make sense of life, overwhelmed by his fears and hormones, chaffing for independence but longing for acceptance, stability, relationships, and answers to some of life’s ultimate spiritual questions”

Collins, 2007:234

Understanding Adolescents

1. Identity: *“Who am I?”*

Imitate and identify with parents and family members, with peers and admired adults. Then develop own self-concept and uniqueness. Time of self-searching, confusion, anxiety, experimentation, goal-less behavior

2. Relationships: *“How do I get along with others?”*

Building relationships, setting boundaries, fitting into society, learning of social skills. Conflicts with authority; gang behavior; sexual involvement; hero worship; “best friend” relationships; petty squabbles, resistance to authority, yielding to peer pressure

3. Future: *“Where will I fit?”*

Choosing a career.

4. Ideology: *“What do I believe?”*

Distrust in rigid denominational religion. Questions about poverty, terrorism, war, authority of Scripture. Develop own beliefs and values

Understanding Parent's Heart & Conduct

- The troubles of the teen years exposes the heart of the parent, e.g. craving for comfort
- Example: Father angry about son's bad report: "How dare you do this to me after all I have done for you?" Dad driven by desires: his reputation as successful Christian father; the respect he deserves (James 4:2)
- Parents must own, confess and turn away from own wrong heart attitudes & actions
- "Parents who are humbly willing to change, position themselves to be God's instruments of change"
- Parents should not regard adolescence as a burden, but as an opportunity for:
 - + penetrating questions
 - + intensive discussions
 - + exposure of hearts
 - + daily ministry
 - + help, hope and truth

Tripp, 2001:17-20





Understanding Teenagers

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: INTERNAL SITUATION

- Growth acceleration or “spurt” (between 9 – 14 years; lasting 2 years; girls sooner than boys)
- Changes with regards to height, weight, body hair, size, strength, skin, voice, underarm sweat and odor
- Hormones released by pituitary and sex glands cause drastic and rapid physical changes
- Menstruation, erection, ejaculation, acne, obesity, etc.
- At onset of puberty coordination, balance and agility usually deteriorate
- Later on excellent motor skills may develop
- Teens don’t develop at the same tempo

Gouws, 2000: 8-28



Understanding Teenagers

- God provides dramatic moments (drugs, pregnancy, violence) and little moments loaded with opportunity
- Parents are God's agents on the watch to utilize the moments for engagement, interaction, discussion and committed relationship
- It's a time to pursue, love, encourage, teach, forgive, confess, and accept.
- **Three fundamental doors of opportunity** for teenage parents:
 - + Insecurity
 - + Rebellion
 - + Widening world

Tripp, 2001:20-23

Understanding Teenagers

Insecurity

- Unsure about looks, abilities, social skills, who he is, future, God
- Insecurity with regards to physical appearance, relationships, ideas, responsibilities



Rebellion

- Teenagers push at boundaries
- Driven by desires: to be an individual who thinks for himself; to be free; to try new things; to control; to make one's own decisions; to be different; to fit in; to be accepted; etc



Widening World

- Teenagers explore new locations, experiences, friends, opportunities, responsibilities, thoughts, plans, feelings, discoveries, etc.



Tripp, 2001:23-27; 2005: 184-186

Family: A Definition



- What did God intend the family to do?
- What does God want parents to do with their teenagers?
- Family = God's primary learning community
- Deuteronomy 6 depicts family as primary learning community
- Family is a living classroom: life happens in every room and begs to be evaluated, interpreted and discussed

There is no more consistent, pregnant, dynamic forum for instruction about life than the family, because that is exactly what God designed the family to be, a learning community
(42)

- God called parents to be his primary teachers
- Every moment of family life is a teaching (VC: & counselling) moment

Tripp, 2001:39-42

Getting To Know The Students

Who are the students?

How does the Bible describe our children?



Children are covenantal beings

- Made for relationship with God – to know, love, serve and obey Him
- Not made to live autonomous, self-oriented, self-directed & self-sufficient lives
- Made to submit to God and love Him (Matt 22:37-38)
- Children who do not submit to God will submit to somebody/something else
- Every child is a worshipper. What does he worship? (Rom 1:18-32)

There is a vertical, Godward dimension to every horizontal, interpersonal action (44)

- Children's lives are shaped and controlled by whatever they worship
- Every moment is a God or idol moment.
- Parent-teacher/counsellor should point these moments out

Tripp, 2001:43-44

Getting To Know The Students

RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

- Able to think abstractly
- Search for spiritual certainty, meaning and fulfillment
- Asking critical questions; re-examine and re-evaluate
- Tendency to doubt and explore



Gouws, 2000:116-119

Getting To Know The Students

Teenagers are social beings

- Children were created for relationship with other people (Matth 22:39)
- Everything a child does expresses community or not
- Naturally children have an idolatrous love of self and are unloving towards others – example of donuts (p 45)



Tripp, 2001:44-46

Getting To Know The Students

Teenagers are social beings

- Socializing & developing interpersonal skills
- Finding a place in society
- Handling personal and cultural differences
- Relating to parents, siblings, adults, peer group, friends
- Identity formation: vocational, cultural, sexual



Gouws, 2000:63-94

Getting To Know The Students

Teenagers are interpreters

- All children think and these thoughts shape their lives
- Thoughts may be right or wrong
- Thinking = to make sense out of life: organize, interpret, explain
- Adam & Eve needed God's words to make sense of their world
- The Serpent offered an alternative interpretation to them
- Parents should help their children to make their thoughts audible as issues appear
- Do it by asking good questions and listening carefully

Tripp, 2001:46-48



Understanding Teenagers



COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

- Entails perception, conceptualization, insight, knowledge, imagination and intuition
- Capable of more complex thinking, questioning, evaluation and criticizing
- Thinking becomes systematic & logical
- Abstract thinking:
 - + Think and reason about concepts such as love, hate, justice, injustice
 - + Examine and question motives of people
 - + Able to think historically: linking past, present and future
 - + Critical about themselves & reflect on own ideas
- Propositional thinking:
 - + Can move between what is real and what is possible (can be; may be)
 - + Explore alternatives
- Hypothetical-deductive/combinatory thinking:
 - + Isolate all variables
 - + Combine them to determine their individual or combined influence
- Inter-propositional thinking: test for logical consistency
- Creativity: flexibility, variety, divergence

Gouws, 2000: 37-59

Getting To Know The Students



Teenagers behave out of the heart

- Most parents want to control, direct or guide the behavior of their children
- Rules are made for that purpose
- Sue steals: What thoughts about herself and others and God makes stealing acceptable
- Children behave (speak) out of their hearts (Luke 6:43-45)
- Bad apple tree bears bad apples – not to be fixed by fruit stapling
- Behavior modification is cosmetic and doesn't shepherd the heart of the child
- Christ points out the heart as the source of behavior (Matth 5:27-28).

Tripp, 2001:48-51

Getting To Know Teenagers

Characteristics

- Self-consciousness; physical self-awareness; general confusion; extreme emotions; trying to be cool but messing up; immaturity; irresponsibility
- Examples: car ran out of gas; poured soda into lap with girls laughing
- Parents should take embarrassments of teenagers seriously: listen, love, support and help
- Unpredictable: *“Dad, what do you think of my ears?”* Be willing to attend.



Tripp, 2001:73-75

What the Bible Says About Teenagers

- Parenting should not simply be reactive but goal driven
- Goals are set according to the struggles of teenagers
- Proverbs 1-7: Father giving instruction to his son thematically to address his struggles
- The opportunities are in the struggles/troubles
- Six struggles:
 1. No hunger for wisdom or correction
 2. Legalism
 3. Unwise in choice of companions
 4. Susceptibility to sexual temptation
 5. Absence of eschatological perspective
 6. Lack of heart awareness
- 7. Open doors all around



Tripp, 2001:76; 2009: Session 9, DVD Ch 3 & 4

Bible On Teenagers

No hunger for wisdom

- Most teenagers think they are much wiser than they are
- Think their parents are not wise and don't understand
- Teenagers lack wisdom and need correction
- Do parents make wisdom & correction *appealing* and *attractive* and *beautiful*?
- Instead: *Nasty* confrontations and *ugly* power struggles – e.g. science project 11:30
- Parent tend to say: “I wasn't like you when I were your age” – child sees a fool
- Parent should acknowledge: “I'm very much like my child; I also procrastinate; You should take responsibility for you actions; procrastination is foolish; but there is someone wise who offers you his wisdom, Jesus” – that is making wisdom beautiful
- Deal with yourself before you deal with your kid (Matth 7:3-5)



What the Bible Says About Teenagers

No hunger for correction

- When teen is sinning (e.g. not doing his homework), don't be demeaning and ugly in the way you speak to him; he'll probably rage against you in his heart
- Don't feed his rebellion : he'll not be excited
- Talk in the right place at the right time
- Teen: "I don't always like what this person says to me, but I know this person loves me"
- Be careful not to debate or argue or fight with teenagers – they are defensive and fight back easily (Prov 15:1)
- Approach the with honest questions, not accusations based on conclusions
- Make correction beautiful

Tripp, 2001:76-78



What the Bible Says About Teenagers

No hunger for wisdom or correction

- How parent can handle teenager who is defensive:
 - + Declare own loving intent: not to accuse or misjudge
 - + Help them to examine their own defensiveness: *“Could you explain why you are so angry with me?”*
 - + Confess sins against kid: irritation, impatience, name-calling, condemnation, hitting, grabbing, pushing – get forgiveness
- Handling teenager who is **self-protective**: they tend to isolate themselves and are masters of non-answers:
 - + Don't accept their silence but pursue them
 - + Ask open-ended questions that require description, explanation and self-disclosure
 - + Don't relate to them only during times of correction
 - + Encourage them when they do something right
 - + Pray with them
 - + Enter and stay in their functional world
 - + Say a warm “goodnight”

Tripp, 2001:78-80



What the Bible Says About Teenagers

No hunger for wisdom or correction

- **Blame-shifting:**
 - + Blame parent for being too hard on them and too soft on siblings
 - + If true, acknowledge it and schedule to talk about it later, but then focus on the blame-shifting of the child
- **Bad listening:**
 - + Keep conversations to the point
 - + Don't lecture
 - + Ask questions that helps teenager to examine his own actions, desires and thoughts
 - + Help him to discover the truth rather than lecturing on truth

Tripp, 2001:80-81



Bible On Teenagers

A Tendency Towards Legalism

- Proverbs is not an encyclopedia of rights and wrongs but describes two worldviews: wisdom and foolishness
- The wise man is directed by God, the fool is controlled by his desires
- Teens tend to be legalistic, focusing on the letter of the law rather than the spirit
- They want to know how far they can go, pushing the boundaries: Teen presses his face against the fence because he believes the good stuff is out there; believes he is being disadvantaged by living in a family of faith
- Belief in this lie that the good stuff is out there is the root of teen's rebellion
- Parent will not be able to keep him a prisoner by using authority to confine him with rules, e.g. locking him up
- Parent should counteract lie in teen's heart by showing him that God's way is beautiful
- When faced with their inability to adhere to the spirit of the law, and to attain a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, they may begin to hunger for Christ
- Refrain from boundary debates and minister Jesus Christ who came to fulfill the spirit and letter of the law – He is our righteousness



Tripp, 2001:81-83; 2009, DVD, Session 9, Ch

What the Bible Says About Teenagers

A Tendency to Be Unwise in Choice of Companions

- Friendships are very influential – teens think they can handle any influence
- Teens think: *“If you reject my friends, you reject me”*
- Help them too evaluate each relationship biblically and not simply emotionally
- Avoid labeling their friends, judging motives and ungrounded assumptions
- Ask questions that will help them to evaluate their hearts and behavior
- Make your home the most hospitable one in the neighborhood: large screen TV; skate board ramp; snacks; hamburgers; don’t worry about carpet & couch getting damaged



Tripp, 2001:83-85; 2009: DVD Ch3

What the Bible Says About Teenagers

Susceptibility to Sexual Temptation

- Father in Proverbs has much to say about this
- Many distorted views of sexuality in culture: insanity, craziness, obsession with appearance: implants; reconstruction of face
- Many boys struggle with pornography addiction
- Body objectified
- Teens struggle with sexual desires, fantasies, lust and masturbation
- 17 year old boy = “goody” consumer
- Do parents know about the sexual pressures, desires, thoughts and conduct of their children?
- Parents should discuss sex at pre-teen age with their kids
- Our God made sex; take back what belongs to God
- Keep the door open for follow-up discussions – a process over years
- Teach them to be respected for their inside, not simply outside
- Regard sex as a gift – don’t communicate fear, reticence and avoidance

Tripp, 2001:85-87; 2009: DVD Ch 3



What the Bible Says About Teenagers

Absence of Eschatological Perspective

- Teenagers are shockingly present-focused
- They also deny responsibility and tend to blame-shift
- Forget the reality of seasons: sowing and reaping
- Need to think in terms of long-term investment, a harvest mentality
- Don't look for identity in looks, abilities and enjoyment

Tripp, 2001:87-88; 2009: DVD Ch 3



What the Bible Says About Teenagers

Lack of Heart Awareness

- *“Keep my words in your heart”* (Prov 4:21)
- *“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life”* (4:23)
- Heart is the control centre of your life; heart determines conduct
- Dig below surface of situations and reactions to the roots
- Examine the desires that rule the heart; have treasure conversations
- What creature has taken the Creator’s place?
- Ask questions that expose the thoughts and motives of the heart
- Teenagers struggle with heart awareness because they tend to think of life in terms of physical & behavioral (external) and present terms
- Ask appropriate questions in order to bring about self-awareness in the face of God-awareness
- Teen-agers tend to focus on their situation: What other people do to them , thereby shifting responsibility to others. Example of daughter getting a D for Spanish and blaming the teacher for it
- The enemy is a liar and deceiver: *“The problem is not with me”*
- Scripture reveals heart: Fear of man, materialism, lust, etc.
- Help child to see what he should see



Tripp, 2001:89-92; 2009: DVD Ch 3

What the Bible Says About Teenagers

Open Doors All Around

- Parental approach: Living with teen is a minefield. Will lead to anxiety, irritation, fear, control, raging emotions, threats and manipulation
- By God's grace we can approach teens with love, understanding, grace and hope



Tripp, 2001:92-94