

The Problem with Teenagers....

One of the saddest things in life is for there to be a breakdown in the relationship between a parent and a child. Yet tragically this occurs all too frequently. As the teenager reaches adolescence they become, in the eyes of their parents, unreasonable and impossible. Unfortunately, they are still too young to leave home, and so home becomes a place of continual conflict, arguments, and bad feeling for both the parent and the teenager.

Sadly, this problem is just as likely to occur in a Christian home as it is in a non-Christian one. Infact it can be worse, as the Christian Parent longs to be a 'good example of Christianity' and ends up with feelings of guilt everytime he/she loses their temper. There is also the feeling of failure, as the breakdown of family life is contrary to the picture of the family as given in the Bible. If the teenager is also a Christian the feelings of frustration are compounded even further.

Often, of course, the problem is not as extreme as a total breakdown in family life; but the fact that 'things are not quite as they should be' causes a lot of agonizing. What answers are there, if any?

The Bible gives some guidelines, and most Christian parents are probably well-versed on those that speak to their children; for instance:

'Respect your Father and your Mother, so that you may live a long time in the land I am giving you' Exodus 20 . 12
'Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents always, for that is what pleases God' Colossians 3 . 20

The first thing that I feel is important is that the last people to to 'ram these verses down a teenager's throat' should be their parents. Paul wrote to the Church and addressed the children as part of the church, in the same way as he addressed wives, husbands and parents. Your teenager, if he/she is a Christian, will be spoken to about such things as these by the people they turn to for help (which, since we are supposing there is a problem at home, will not be you!). One day, praise God, you may again be the person that they turn to, but right now you are not. So do not worsen the situation by pushing the Bible at them. No-one can be taught the Truths of God unless they are teachable. No-one is teachable unless the Holy Spirit is working inside them, and if He is then He will get the truth home in His Own time!

Not one sided....

In Colossians Paul goes on to write in verse 21:

'Parents, do not irritate your children, or they will become discouraged'

Enough about what's wrong with your teenager. This is written to you, so let's think about what's wrong with *you*.

Still reading? Good, that means that you are at least prepared to accept that you may not be totally right in the way you are handling the situation. So Praise God, because there's now real hope it might be solved!

You see, *you* are the key to the solution of the problem. Whether or not they are Christian, *you* are, and you are reading this because *you* want the situation to change. They probably do as well, but any adjustment in their attitude must come from them. You CANNOT affect lasting change in their attitude, but you can affect your's.

A Bible Study (Luke 15 11 - 32)

The parable of the Prodigal Son. I believe that this speaks (or ought to speak) more to parents of teenagers than any other part of the Bible.

Let's remember that Jesus was giving an Analogy between God (the father), Himself (the elder son) and us (the younger son). He was teaching that we can have everything that He has *by right*. But the Parable says more than that.

Imagine *you* were the father in the story. Your teenager comes to you, asking for half your money now; and you know full well what he is going to do with it. What would you do? What *should* a loving parent do? Let's bring it home a little more. You as a Christian Parent are worried about the things you hear reported on the news about such things as drugs, promiscuity, crime, etc. You're not all that keen on their latest friend or gang. Do you forbid them to go to a forthcoming party, to see a certain friend, or do you let them?

The easiest thing from your point of view is to forbid them. Do you realise that? Yes, it will cause an argument or two, but it will save you some hours of worrying. When you refuse to let them go are you *honestly* doing so out of concern for them, or out of concern for yourself?

Try for a while to be in their shoes. *All their friends* are going to that party, and you say that they can't. That ostracises them from their friends and makes them look stupid. (It also does very little to make your Christian faith look attractive to those friends).

By saying that they can't go you are also saying, effectively, "Sorry, but I don't trust you one little bit". Is that the case? Or, if its not, do you give them the impression that it is? It is almost impossible to *respect* someone who doesn't *trust* you. If you are concerned that they do not respect you then the problem could well be entirely of your own doing : TRUST THEM!

If your teenager is a Christian then it is actually very unlikely that they *want* to take drugs, or do anything else that is 'wrong'. After all, the Holy Spirit lives in them too. Can you trust Him? Of course you can! And you can particularly as you pray for them, praying that they will grow in Christ. But you do do that, don't you?

Let's look again at the parable. I believe it teaches that it is the right thing to let your child make his/her own mistakes. The father suffered. The son had been 'lost to him' (24), and poor old dad had watched day after day for his return. The father had suffered because he *loved* his son so much that he did not count his own suffering a reason to stop the son going off, making mistakes and *finally* growing up.

Parenthood requires you to be a sufferer because you love your child. You need to allow them to make their own mistakes, however much it hurts you, whatever the neighbours might think, and however long it takes.

Be approachable....

You wouldn't believe the number of teenagers who just don't believe that they can talk to Mum or Dad about problems. The very people who ought to be the *first* that they turn to are actually the *last*, if they ever do at all. The reason for this is that Mum and Dad have normally gone 'Over the Top' on trivial issues far too often. Of course, not intentionally, but because you were worried. But they don't know that!

Consider this situation. Your beloved offspring arrives home half an hour later than they had said that they would. What do you do? Be

honest! Do you

- a) Ask them if there was a problem (eg delay on tube), and calmly chat about 'how worried you've been'
- b) Give them an icy stare and send them straight to bed
- c) Welcome them and ignore the lateness totally
- d) Create an enormous row, one to wake the neighbours and demonstrate to the world what unreasonable children you have ??

If, in all honesty, you can't handle that situation, they're never going to believe it possible that you would understand when something *important* goes wrong, so they're *not* going to tell you. Incidentally, time of arrival home is one of the worst causes of arguments. Are you unreasonable about the hour you expect them back? (if its always earlier than all their friends then probably *yes*). Have you explained to them that you worry because of the things you hear about muggings, and so on. If so, do you let them know what time *you* expect to be back when you go out (and keep to it)? They worry too, you know (but they're better at hiding it!) Have you ever tried to understand life from their viewpoint? Being a teenager today is *not* like what it was in your day, so it isn't good enough to expect them to be exactly like what you were. They have to be in the world of *today*, and have to cope with their friends enjoyment of getting drunk, etc. They might not wish to do that themselves, but they still want to have friends!!!!

When, finally, the Prodigal returns home, what does father do?

- a) Ask calmly why he's not written
- b) Stare icily and walk away
- c) Welcome him with open arms
- d) Create a blazing row ??

Instantly the father's worries become relief, and this is expressed in welcome rather than anger. If that was what your teenager was certain of, they would begin to share much more with you. In the end, a happy family relationship was restored: one which would last. If the father had refused to give the money in the first place (and saved himself a whole load of worrying) that family would have been destroyed.

The Christian Family

'The Family that prays together stays together.'

It might seem obvious, but do you pray for each other as a family? Do you pray together as a family? Do you share the problems of being a family together? Do you accept valid criticisms from other members of your family (including your spouse)? Do you dominate your family, or does the Holy Spirit?

Apart from adjusting your attitude towards your teenager, the greatest thing you can do is, of course, PRAY for them. After a while, it may well be right to suggest to them that you spend some time together - at their convenience (even if you have to put yourself out, prove you mean it!) - to pray about the problems. You'll both have to be ready to be hurt, because that will happen. It will happen particularly if you've both been praying about the time before you get together, asking God to be there and to be in charge; because then you will both begin to see the love you have for each other, and the way you've been hurting each other. But don't rush into this, its better to wait for God to initiate it as you

pray.

Finally....

In the end you are the Boss (under God) and they have to respect that. But Jesus taught his disciples not by displays of temper, or unreasonable (or even reasonable) demands, but by lovingly *showing* all He wanted them to be.

You are going to get hurt, so get a Supporter. Someone to pray with you regularly. Your spouse, of course, but possibly someone outside the family would be good too.

Accept the fact, hard as it is, that your teenagers are fast becoming Adults. You may still think of them as children, but outside the family circle they are more and more treated as adults. Certainly they don't want to be treated as children any more. In many ways they are still children, and they will remain so until they have learnt to make decisions for themselves. That is what you *must* let them do, even though they will get hurt. Be ready for that, not to say 'I TOLD YOU SO', but to offer a shoulder to cry on, and a hand to hold, and a relationship of love. God is more than ready to forgive them their mistakes. Surely you can too, with His help.

Pray for your family

Pray with your family

Allow your teenagers to make mistakes and grow up.