



Adolescent
Develop-
ment

HELPING TEENS GROW WITH GOD

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(Daniel 1:8)

Pimples, proms, and puberty—talk about a memorable time in life! Adults may recall those days through rose-colored glasses as a whimsical, carefree time filled with lots of fun and few responsibilities. Many think, “If I could just relive those high school days.” But would they really want to do it again? Uncertainty, insecurity, relationships, rejection, curfews, cliques, homework—these are but a few of the “fun” experiences of adolescence. These sometimes painful, often confusing, years provide unique challenges even for Christian teenagers. Though there are volumes one could write about adolescent development, four issues stand out as being crucial during this time: fear, feelings, friends, and faith.

FEAR

Many men remember the first time they, as growing boys, tripped over their own feet because those feet were growing faster than any other parts of their bodies. Many women remember the experience of insecurity as they watched their bodies mature and change—never as beautifully as someone else’s, and certainly never like those teen idols in their favorite magazines. The fear of not measuring up; the fear of not being acceptable and therefore accepted—these are just some of the fears of adolescence.

Being an adolescent is like being in the Army. It’s not a job, it’s an adventure. Helping teenagers to understand what is happening to them during this part of their life is crucial to successful navigation of the adolescent stage. Like Daniel in Babylon, many teenagers today feel out of place, besieged by temptation, and confused about what they should be doing at this point in their lives.

The challenge for parents, pastors, teachers, and counselors is to help adolescents live above their fear. Because of the power of Christ, adolescents can live a life

of peace. Jesus promised, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

FEELINGS

It has been said that teenagers are “walking hormones.” Often, they are tossed about like the waves in the sea because of their emotions. Two teenage girls can be best friends one day and mortal enemies the next. A snide glance or a sarcastic remark can mean devastation for an adolescent.

So much of people’s identity is formed during the adolescent years that it is hard not to exaggerate the role their feelings play during this time. Loneliness, depression, anxiousness, low self-worth—these feelings bubble to the surface amidst all the other issues facing the typical teenager. Increasing sensitivity causes them to feel persecuted, misunderstood, rejected, or smothered.

Adults need to teach and to be an example of Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians about “bringing every thought into

captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Young people need to learn how to "take captive" thoughts and feelings that contradict the reality of God's Word.

FRIENDS

Relationships with friends during the adolescent years take on a whole new dimension. The term "peer pressure" describes the immense tension that exists between a teenager's knowledge of the right action to take and the temptation to follow a friend's enticement to do wrong. Acceptance by one's friends becomes the most important thing in life during the adolescent period. Longing for a place to fit in and feel accepted becomes a driving force in their everyday lives. Unfortunately for many, even many Christian teenagers, little thought is given to their spiritual life.

As enticing as it may be to fit in and feel accepted, often it comes at a high moral price. It is vital to help adolescents to understand and grasp the words of Paul, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

FAITH

Although many teenagers are caught up in the fads of the day, adolescence is a time when many want to discover faith in something beyond themselves. When given the opportunity, teenagers want to grapple with the deep issues of personal faith. Some hear it for the first time and question it; others are grappling with the faith handed down from their parents. Some rebel against their family's Christian faith. That rebellion may occur because they observe hypocrisy or desire attention. For many, however, it is merely a healthy exploration to discover that Jesus Christ is the only

answer to the problems they are experiencing.

Adolescents may question the authenticity of the Bible, an earlier decision to follow Christ, the meaning of salvation, and the reality of eternal life. For some, the spiritual walk is more like a roller coaster than a joyous ride. They experience fluctuating highs and lows from intense spiritual mountaintops to lonely spiritual isolation.

It is during this period that adults need to assure them of God's unconditional love and acceptance. Adolescents need this period of testing and questioning in order to fully understand the faith that they profess. Many adults try to squelch this exploratory time in an adolescent's life. However, a more fruitful way of dealing with this period is to encourage teenagers to give God a chance at making a difference in their lives. As Psalm 34:8 says: "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!"

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of adolescent development include:

- > 1 Samuel 17
- > Ecclesiastes 11:9—12:1
- > Acts 2:17
- > 1 Corinthians 13:11
- > 2 Timothy 2:22; 3:14, 15

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on adolescent development at 1 Timothy 4:7 on page 1595. See also the personality profile of Daniel on page 1102.

selves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

THE GREAT MYSTERY

¹⁴These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; ¹⁵but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ¹⁶And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

God^a was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,

THE GREAT APOSTASY

4 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if

3:16 ^aNU-Text reads *Who*.

SOUL NOTE



Satan's Lies (4:1-3) False teachers abound today as they did in Paul's day. They may teach that god is in nature, or that god is found within oneself. Others may teach that God wants people to be rich or that He will not judge anyone. But any teaching that is contrary to God's Word is a lie. When people follow these teachings, they are "giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons." Believers have to be on guard against the subtleties of false teaching, and we need to check every teaching against the truth in God's Word. **Topic: Cults**

KEY PASSAGE



**Adolescent
Development**

SENSIBLE ADOLESCENCE

(4:7)

Adolescence is a time of great change. Young people transform from children into adults, gaining independence from their parents and moving toward life on their own. During this time, some young people rebel against authority, committing sins with consequences that last a lifetime. But it need not be that way.

Paul borrowed athletic words to describe spiritual growth. Whether new to the faith or raised in it from childhood, young people can "exercise" themselves toward godliness. To live a godly life during turbulent and uncertain adolescent years takes self-control, commitment, and continual work. As in working out for a sport, the Christian life requires daily work. Young people can develop spiritually through this time by entrusting their temptations, desires, frustrations, fears, and future to God. He cares about every part of their lives. Parents can help by praying for their children and maintaining open communication. The time of change can be exciting and rewarding for both the parents and the children who keep God front and center.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about adolescent development on pages 1104, 1105. See also the personality profile of Daniel on page 1102.

DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS OBEY GOD

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

³Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, ⁴young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵And the king appointed for

them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of *that time* they might serve before the king. ⁶Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

⁸But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ⁹Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. ¹⁰And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see



Adolescent
Development

PERSONALITY PROFILE

DANIEL SERVED GOD FIRST

(DANIEL 1)

Daniel was taken captive to Babylon from his native Jerusalem when he was about 15 years old. He and his Jewish friends were thrust into a hostile environment where much pressure was put on them to accept pagan beliefs and lifestyles. The fact that Daniel "purposed in his heart" (Dan. 1:8) not to defile himself under this pressure is a great testimony to the ability of an adolescent to develop the kind of spiritual maturity that will enable them to reject peer pressure.

When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in the summer of 605 B.C., Daniel was only a teenager. He and several others were taken captive by the Babylonians and placed in a three-year training program in which they were expected to learn the Babylonian view of life and religion. They were even forced to learn the Babylonian language and given Babylonian names. Daniel in Hebrew means "God is my judge"; his name was changed to Belteshazzar, which in the Babylonian language means "the god Bel is my judge." It may have been as close as the Babylonians could come to translating the meaning of his name.

The verse that summarizes Jesus' adolescence serves to describe Daniel's: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). Daniel built upon the good start he received as a child. He exercised great wisdom in discerning between acceptable Babylonian habits and those that would compromise his faith. He accepted the king's training but not the king's diet. He served the king loyally, but stopped at acknowledging the divine claim of the king. Daniel learned the new language, but he kept an old habit of daily prayer. Because he continually made God the focus of his life, Daniel made a deep impression on all he met. He grew into one of the clearest biblical examples of a godly person. Young people seeking to grow to serve God can learn much from Daniel's example.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about adolescent development on pages 1104, 1105. See also the key passage note at 1 Timothy 4:7 on page 1595.

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³³And Joseph and His mother^a marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

ANNA BEARS WITNESS TO THE REDEEMER

³⁶Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷and this woman *was* a widow of about eighty-four years,^a who did not depart from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord,^a and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

THE FAMILY RETURNS TO NAZARETH

³⁹So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their *own* city, Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit,^a

filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

THE BOY JESUS AMAZES THE SCHOLARS

⁴¹His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. ⁴³When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother^a did not know *it*; ⁴⁴but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. ⁴⁶Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. ⁴⁸So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us?"

^{2:33} ^aNU-Text reads *And His father and mother.*

^{2:37} ^aNU-Text reads *a widow until she was eighty-four.* ^{2:38} ^aNU-Text reads *to God.* ^{2:40} ^aNU-Text omits *in spirit.* ^{2:43} ^aNU-Text reads *And His parents.*

SOUL NOTE



Being Content (2:36) Anna was very young when her husband died, and she had been a widow for 84 years. Anna remained single, choosing to give her life to serving God through fasting and prayer. People are single for a number of reasons, and they respond to singleness in different ways. Some single people, like Anna, seek to serve God without concern about marriage; others dearly long for a spouse. It is important to remember that the key to a fulfilled single life is contentment in God. He has places of service for all people—married or single. **Topic: Singleness**

SOUL NOTE



Coming of Age (2:41, 42) He was God incarnate, but the twelve-year-old Jesus did have His time of adolescent development—taking on more responsibility, seeking independence, and wanting answers to His questions. And Mary reacted as any parent would—worrying, being surprised, and becoming upset. Adolescent development and parental reactions are basically the same today. As children grow and mature, they are learning to become independent of their parents and more dependent on God through a personal relationship with Him. Parents must learn to allow their children to find God's direction in their lives. **Topic: Adolescent Development**