



Adolescent  
Problems

## THE DISCONNECTED GENERATION

JOSH MCDOWELL

(2 Samuel 15)

**I**'m so lonely I can't stand it. I want to be special to somebody, but there's nobody who cares about me. I can't remember anybody ever touching me, or smiling at me, or wanting to be with me. I feel so empty inside."

"It's like I have this really heavy heart and this burden on my back, but I don't know what it is. There's something in me that makes me want to cry, and I don't even know what it is."

Hear the words of teens—the outstanding representatives of the “disconnected generation.” They are part of the population group referred to as the Echo Boomers, born between 1977 and 1994. Primarily the offspring of the Baby Boomer generation, today's teenage population is over 30 million strong. They are perhaps the richest, most populous, best-educated, and most physically fit generation in history. Kids are growing up in a prosperous society with unprecedented career opportunities and access to virtually limitless information. And yet, more than any other generation before theirs, they feel disconnected. Even kids from good Christian homes feel alienated from their parents, from adults in general, and from society as a whole. Lacking a sense of personal identity, today's teens feel adrift in a hostile world.

### **ADOLESCENCE MEANS CHANGE**

When children enter adolescence, sometimes it seems like a metamorphosis gone bad. In some ways, it appears that a beautiful butterfly is being transformed into an ugly caterpillar. Almost overnight, these cute, cherubic, charming little kids who were a delight to be around turn into erratic, moody, and often unruly teenagers.

One minute they are all smiles, and the next minute they blow their stack or stomp away sullen and silent. Once-perfect kids can be forgetful, irresponsible, impulsive, contradictory, insolent, and confused—sometimes all in the same day!

A lot of young people are good kids whose priorities for school, work, money, or use of time are a little out of whack—or at least they don't match parents' priorities for them. They are no longer quick to obey and easy to control. In fact, parents wonder and worry at times if they will soon be totally beyond their control.

### **RESPONDING TO THE CHANGE**

So, how do parents respond to their emerging teenagers? In a genuinely sincere but misguided attempt to help, many think the primary answer to teenager angst and struggle is more structure. More rules. So they lay down the law and tighten the screws. Assuming that their primary job is to fix the problem, correct the misbehavior, enforce the rules, or right the wrong, their well-meaning efforts often leave kids feeling more disconnected from their own families.

Clearly, adults must provide clear guidance and hold their children accountable for their actions even when they feel confused and disconnected. Teens need to follow certain rules even when they think they have the right to make up their own rules. But here is the critical question: How

do parents provide appropriate rules and guidelines for children without prompting them to disconnect relationally?

The answer relates directly to how the rules are presented. Parents must be challenged to present rules in the context of loving relationships. Biblical principles and personal experience with youth show that **young people do not respond to rules; they respond to relationships.** Two formulas illustrate the contrast:

Rules - Relationships = Rebellion  
Rules + Relationships = Response

The real challenge is learning to enter each young person's sometimes complex and confusing world and make a relational connection at a deep emotional level. If kids perceive that their parents are more concerned about the rules than they are about them, the kids will be tempted to disregard the rules. When kids know that they are more important to their parents than the rules—that parents love them no matter what they do or do not do—they are much more likely to follow the guidelines. The difference is a relational context for the rules that govern a family.

Notice how important "relationship" was to God. Speaking for God, Moses said, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but . . . to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deut. 10:12, 13). As rebellious as Israel was at times, God always treated them like a loving Father, doing everything for their good. The Ten Commandments were given as a safeguard and a blessing, not a burden. The Law was God's loving effort to protect and provide for His people.

Many adults believe that the rules and regulations they lay down for their children are "for their own good." But what is of-

ten missing is the relational factor. Telling kids, "I'm doing this for your own good," will not cut it if they seldom see or hear unconditional love through time, attention, and care. Rules without relationship lead to a relational disconnect, which prompts rebellion. But rules within a loving relationship usually lead to a positive response.

**Not all children will rebel; many will rebel,** but in varying degrees. Adolescence is a time of discovering one's individuality and what God is preparing for each teenager's future. It is a time of uncertainty, wonder about the future, desire to be cared for at home while at the same time wanting (and needing) to eventually be out on their own. With love, open communication, and constant prayer, parents can weather these turbulent times, preparing their children to be responsible, God-honoring adults.

#### **FURTHER MEDITATION:**

Other passages to study about the issues of adolescent problems include:

- > Deuteronomy 6:1-25
- > Proverbs 3:12; 29:17
- > Ecclesiastes 12:1
- > Matthew 7:7-12
- > Luke 15:11-32
- > Ephesians 6:4

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on adolescent problems at Luke 15:17, 18 on page 1349. See also the personality profile of Eli's sons on page 346.

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with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

<sup>31</sup>"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. <sup>32</sup>It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"

#### THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD

**16** He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. <sup>2</sup>So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

<sup>3</sup>"Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup>I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'

<sup>5</sup>"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup>And he said, 'A hundred measures<sup>a</sup> of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' <sup>7</sup>Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures<sup>a</sup> of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' <sup>8</sup>So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world

are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

<sup>9</sup>"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail,<sup>a</sup> they may receive you into an everlasting home. <sup>10</sup>He who is faithful in *what is least* is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is least* is unjust also in much. <sup>11</sup>Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? <sup>12</sup>And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?"

<sup>13</sup>"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

#### THE LAW, THE PROPHETS, AND THE KINGDOM

<sup>14</sup>Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. <sup>15</sup>And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

<sup>16</sup>"The law and the prophets were until

**16:6** <sup>a</sup>Greek *batos*, eight or nine gallons each (Old Testament *bath*) **16:7** <sup>a</sup>Greek *koros*, ten or twelve bushels each (Old Testament *kor*) **16:9** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *it fails*.

### KEY PASSAGE

## NOW I GET IT!

(15:17, 18)

The story of the lost (rebellious) child is as relevant today as it was in Jesus' day. Adolescence can be turbulent—a time of learning independence, and often a time of rebellion against parental authority and regulations.

This parable reminds us that any parent can experience children with adolescent problems. It is not an indictment on the parent that the child struggles through the stage of adolescence—making wrong choices, challenging authority, seeking his or her own identity. What is a reflection on the parent is their attitude toward their struggling and wayward child. In the case of the father in the parable, he looked for and anticipated the return of his son. We should never close the door on our relationships with our children. Even when they have made the worst of choices, they need to know that loving, caring, and forgiving parents are waiting and praying and will rejoice when they return.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about adolescent problems on pages 410, 411. See also the personality profile of Eli's sons on page 346.



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“For the pillars of the earth *are* the LORD’s,  
And He has set the world upon them.  
He will guard the feet of His saints,  
But the wicked shall be silent in  
darkness.

“For by strength no man shall prevail.  
10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be  
broken in pieces;  
From heaven He will thunder against  
them.  
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth.

“He will give strength to His king,  
And exalt the horn of His anointed.”

11 Then Elkanah went to his house at Ramah.  
But the child ministered to the LORD before Eli  
the priest.

#### THE WICKED SONS OF ELI

12 Now the sons of Eli *were* corrupt;<sup>a</sup> they did not know the LORD. 13 And the priests’ custom with the people *was that* when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest’s servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. 14 Then he would thrust *it* into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. 15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest’s servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, “Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw.”

16 And *if* the man said to him, “They should

2:12 <sup>a</sup>Literally *sons of Belial*

### PERSONALITY PROFILE



#### Adolescent Problems

## ELI'S SONS—WAYWARD CHILDREN

(1 SAMUEL 2:12)

Eli served as a priest and judge in Israel. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, grew up in the shadow of God’s house, but they never learned to respect God.

Eli’s sons had the privileges of their father’s vocation, but they twisted their responsibilities into evil acts. They threatened violence and practiced sexual abuse. When Eli attempted to correct them verbally, they displayed the same disrespect for him that they had for God. Their response reveals a long-standing pattern of a lack of discipline in Eli’s home. God’s judgment on the entire household confirms that problem.

Hophni and Phinehas did not understand the reality of consequences. They continued blindly toward death as warnings turned into prophecies. The way in which they had learned to take advantage of their position led them to assume that they could manipulate the ark of God like a magical device. They wrongly believed that carrying the ark into battle somehow made them immune to defeat (1 Sam. 4:1–11), just as they thought pretending to be priests had kept them immune from punishment. Their mistake cost them their lives.

Although the sons suffered consequences, Eli had to bear the responsibility for the conditions that had led to God’s judgment on his family. By allowing his sons to remain in their positions, Eli himself had dishonored God. Apart from his words, Eli displayed an inability to discipline his sons. He confronted, but did not follow through with consequences.

One of the hardest parental tasks involves confronting wayward children. Delay only makes the job more difficult. Fear of being rejected by that son or daughter often leads to hesitation, denial, and soft correction. A parent may call it love, but the failure to discipline and correct is actually cowardice. Bold parental love doesn’t always result in positive responses from children, but responsibilities are kept clear. Children have a better opportunity to learn right and wrong when their parents give them both the tender and the tough sides of love.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about adolescent problems on pages 410, 411. See also the key passage note at Luke 15:17, 18 on page 1349.

may destroy and cut down, to build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued.

#### THE LAW CONCERNING UNSOLVED MURDER

**21** "If *anyone* is found slain, lying in the field in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, <sup>2</sup>then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure *the distance* from the slain man to the surrounding cities. <sup>3</sup>And it shall be *that* the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked and which has not pulled with a yoke. <sup>4</sup>The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. <sup>5</sup>Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled. <sup>6</sup>And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain *man* shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley. <sup>7</sup>Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. <sup>8</sup>Provide atonement, O LORD, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood. <sup>9</sup>So you shall put away the *guilt of* innocent blood from among you when you do *what is* right in the sight of the LORD.

#### FEMALE CAPTIVES

<sup>10</sup>"When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them

into your hand, and you take them captive, <sup>11</sup>and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, <sup>12</sup>then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. <sup>13</sup>She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. <sup>14</sup>And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her.

#### FIRSTBORN INHERITANCE RIGHTS

<sup>15</sup>"If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, *both* the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, <sup>16</sup>then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, *that* he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the *true* firstborn. <sup>17</sup>But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

#### THE REBELLIOUS SON

<sup>18</sup>"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and *who*, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, <sup>19</sup>then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. <sup>20</sup>And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our

#### SOUL NOTE



**Who's Responsible? (21:18-21)** Under Moses' law, incorrigibly stubborn and rebellious children were to be put to death. As God's holy people, the Israelites were responsible before God to eradicate all evil among them. Parents bear the responsibility of rearing their children, but sometimes they must face the pain of a child's waywardness. Even parents who have lovingly disciplined their children can still find they have a rebellious child. Parents need to discern between irresponsibility and willful defiance, and then discipline accordingly. They need to deal with defiance in order to help their children learn self-control and respect, important lessons for the rest of their lives.

**Topic: Adolescent Problems**

12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,<sup>a</sup>  
 And whole, like those who go down to  
 the Pit;  
 13 We shall find all *kinds* of precious  
 possessions,  
 We shall fill our houses with spoil;  
 14 Cast in your lot among us,  
 Let us all have one purse"—  
 15 My son, do not walk in the way with  
 them,  
 Keep your foot from their path;  
 16 For their feet run to evil,  
 And they make haste to shed blood.  
 17 Surely, in vain the net is spread  
 In the sight of any bird;  
 18 But they lie in wait for their *own* blood,  
 They lurk secretly for their *own* lives.  
 19 So *are* the ways of everyone who is  
 greedy for gain;  
 It takes away the life of its owners.

#### THE CALL OF WISDOM

20 Wisdom calls aloud outside;  
 She raises her voice in the open squares.  
 21 She cries out in the chief concourses,<sup>a</sup>  
 At the openings of the gates in the city  
 She speaks her words:  
 22 "How long, you simple ones, will you  
 love simplicity?  
 For scorners delight in their scorning,  
 And fools hate knowledge.  
 23 Turn at my rebuke;  
 Surely I will pour out my spirit on you;  
 I will make my words known to you.  
 24 Because I have called and you refused,  
 I have stretched out my hand and no  
 one regarded,  
 25 Because you disdained all my counsel,  
 And would have none of my rebuke,  
 26 I also will laugh at your calamity;  
 I will mock when your terror comes,  
 27 When your terror comes like a storm,

And your destruction comes like a  
 whirlwind,  
 When distress and anguish come upon  
 you.

28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not  
 answer;  
 They will seek me diligently, but they  
 will not find me.  
 29 Because they hated knowledge  
 And did not choose the fear of the LORD,  
 30 They would have none of my counsel  
 And despised my every rebuke.  
 31 Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their  
 own way,  
 And be filled to the full with their own  
 fancies.  
 32 For the turning away of the simple will  
 slay them,  
 And the complacency of fools will  
 destroy them;  
 33 But whoever listens to me will dwell  
 safely,  
 And will be secure, without fear of evil."

#### THE VALUE OF WISDOM

**2** My son, if you receive my words,  
 And treasure my commands within you,  
 2 So that you incline your ear to wisdom,  
 And apply your heart to understanding;  
 3 Yes, if you cry out for discernment,  
 And lift up your voice for understanding,  
 4 If you seek her as silver,  
 And search for her as *for* hidden  
 treasures;  
 5 Then you will understand the fear of the  
 LORD,  
 And find the knowledge of God.

1:12 <sup>a</sup>Or *the grave* 1:21 <sup>a</sup>Septuagint, Syriac, and  
 Targum read *top of the walls*; Vulgate reads *the*  
*head of multitudes*

#### SOUL NOTE



**Right Stand** (1:8–19) Solomon often addressed his readers as "my son," teaching as a parent would instruct a beloved child. Solomon advised young people to choose their peers carefully. If friends try to entice them to sin, wise young people will choose to "not walk in the way with them" (1:15). Parents must consistently guide their children in the path of wisdom by their teaching and their example so that their children will stand for what's right. **Topic: Adolescent Problems**



<sup>20</sup>But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. <sup>21</sup>Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. <sup>22</sup>Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. <sup>23</sup>But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. <sup>24</sup>And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, <sup>25</sup>in humility correcting those who are in opposi-

tion, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, <sup>26</sup>and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

#### PERILOUS TIMES AND PERILOUS MEN

**3** But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: <sup>2</sup>For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, <sup>4</sup>traitors, headstrong, haughty,

#### SOUL NOTE



**Run Away** (2:22) Believers have a responsibility to be pure. No matter what a person's past, God will forgive. Once someone believes, the Holy Spirit enters their life to help them deal with the continual temptations of the sinful nature.

Some situations are more tempting for a person than others are, and in such cases the believer's best resource may simply be to flee. The "youthful lusts" here are not just sexual desires, although these are included. The area of temptation that causes us the most difficulty may be the one from which we simply must run. God is not dishonored when we flee temptation. He is dishonored when we give in. **Topic: Temptation**

#### SOUL NOTE



**Never Give Up** (2:25, 26) Paul was teaching Timothy how to deal with those in the church who oppose the truth. This teaching also applies to parents who are dealing with "opposing" children. Timothy was not to give up on contrary church members, and parents shouldn't give up on their contrary children—because they don't know "if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth." Parents pray and teach, hoping that their children will "come to their senses." We must entrust our rebellious children to God. **Topic: Adolescent Problems**

#### SOUL NOTE



**Too Tolerant** (3:1-9) There is a time for tolerance; there is also a time for intolerance. Being tolerant can be a positive characteristic when dealing with people's idiosyncrasies or weaknesses. Tolerance is also positive when it frees someone from prejudice toward a person's race or culture. But believers must not be tolerant of anyone who claims to teach the faith while living opposed to it ("having a form of godliness but denying its power"). "From such people turn away," exclaims Paul, for they cause great danger to weak believers. That's the kind of tolerance we don't need. **Topic: Tolerance**