

# Called to Parent My Teenager

## Opening Prayer

*Dear God, I thank You for the gift of this young person to raise, this life to share, this mind to help model, this body to nurture, and this spirit to enrich. Let me never betray this young person's trust, dampen his hope, or discourage her dreams. Help me dear God to help this precious young person become all You mean him to be. Let Your grace and love fall on her like gentle breezes and give her inner strength and peace and patience for the journey ahead. (Guide My Feet. Marian Wright Edeleman. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995. Page 3)*

## Scripture Theme

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. (Psalm 78:1-4)

## Introduction

Adolescence is a time of rapid change for the young person, as well as the family. Young adolescents are developing physically, sexually, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually—presenting parents with new challenges and growth opportunities for you both.

It's a myth that the adolescent years are automatically problem years. Almost all youth and their parents survive the teen years without serious problems. When young people feel good about their family, the challenges of adolescence are easier to navigate. For parents, this can be a period that brings pride in your child's new abilities, independent thinking, and sense of self.

Relationships and family life are crucial at this stage. This statement carries some irony, as you likely know, because our child(ren) is reaching the point where hanging with the family is not as desirable as it once was. However, when push comes to shove, when serious questions arise, when deep emotions overwhelm, and when life feels uncertain, young adolescents turn to parents and families first. If your relationship with your young teen is well-greased with rapport and understanding, then you both can weather the challenges of adolescent angst.

So what is your call at this stage? That's the focus of this reflection. Think of yourself more as steward of your child's journey rather than owner. As steward, you want to help your child discover and grow into God's ideas for her/him. Whereas the 'owner' parent seeks to raise the child in the 'image and likeness' of the parent. As good and sincere as your ideas are for your child, God has even better things in mind.

At certain times in your life you may have carried the assumption that God calls you *once*, for just one purpose. Don't miss the call, or you might spend the remainder of your days in meaningless mediocrity. In reality, it is safe to say that God calls us many times throughout the seasons of our lives, and each call challenges us to stretch further than we might have anticipated or imagined.

Congratulations! Your child has become a teenager, and your call in parenting has shifted. As you respond to this call, your young adolescent will show you facets of God that you have not seen or experienced before and will surely astound you. Place your trust in God, say 'yes' to the call as best you can, and give it your all.

## What's Changing?

One thing is sure: as your child encounters all the changes of moving into adolescents, you too are certainly called and challenged to change. It's the nature of the stage. In his book *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges writes that transitions always start with an ending. Seems odd, yes, but he maintains that the first step toward a life change is identifying what you are losing and learning how to manage the losses.

### **Exercise**

Draw two pictures of your family. On one side of the paper, draw a picture of your family at an earlier time in your family's history (when your young adolescent was in the primary grades). On the other side, draw a picture of your family today. Include people, objects or scenery that portray your family at each stage of life, e.g., include the picture of your house at each time, or family members particular to each stage, such as grandparents or activities in which your family participated, such as sports.

### **Write and/or Discuss**

Jot some notes or share with others your responses to these questions:

- ◆ How are we the same? How are we different?
- ◆ What are the changes your child is experiencing?
- ◆ What are the changes you are experiencing?

### **Reflect**

As your calling in parenthood shifts, and you embrace the changes in your child, in yourself, and in your family, reflect on . . .

- ◆ One of the best things about being a parent of a young adolescent is...
- ◆ One of the most challenging things about being a parent of a young adolescent is...
- ◆ One thing I've learned from my son/daughter is...
- ◆ One thing I still need to learn as a parent of a young adolescent...
- ◆ The biggest change in my parenting style is...
- ◆ One thing I am afraid of...

All these wonderments and anxieties are normal. It's part of the shifting process. Acknowledge them and recognize that God is present in them. And pray for trust that God will re-mold you into the authentic parent that your child needs and deserves.

### **Take Heart**

*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:1-5)*

## What's Emerging in My Life?

Let's consider what might be emerging in your life as a result of these changes. As we do so, let us remember a few things that others have discovered about God's callings in their lives. We can say that responding to God's call will likely . . .

- ◆ Lead to happiness in the long run. If it makes you depressed, it's likely not God's call. Although it won't make you immune to all other emotions such as sadness, frustration, resentment, guilt, etc. But if there is no happiness whatsoever, somehow you are not aligned with God's desire.
- ◆ Not be easy. It will probably stretch you toward something you never thought you could do or be. But you can do it, especially if you have some help.
- ◆ Benefit others besides yourself. If it only involves you, it's not God's call. This is baked-in to parenting at all stages.
- ◆ Not be overly complicated. You'll be able to explain it to others in just a few words.

### **Consider**

Let's focus on the last bullet point: not be overly complicated. While life itself can get complicated and confusing for your child, yourself, and your family, your call as parent remains relatively sound and clear: love your child into adulthood with faithfulness and authenticity.

The experts at Search Institute tell us that the key to fulfilling this call is *relationships*. Relationships are the active ingredient that empowers your child to eventually launch well into adulthood. So, in the context of your relationship with your child, you seek to:

- 1) *Express Care*: Show your children that you enjoy being with them. You care about things that are important to them.
- 2) *Challenge Growth*: Help your children to see possibilities for their own futures. Encourage them to work hard to be their best.
- 3) *Provide Support*: Guide and encourage your children as they work to complete tasks and achieve their goals.
- 4) *Share Power*: Take your children's ideas seriously. Work together to solve problems and reach goals.

- 5) *Expand Possibilities*: Help your children connect with people, ideas, and opportunities that help them learn and grow.

When kids experience these five qualities in their relationships, they are more likely to grow up well. They do better in school. They are more caring. And they develop attitudes and skills that will help them throughout their lives. They also become more resilient, which helps them overcome challenges they face in life. In fact, the research suggests that strengthening these five areas of our relationships is one of the most important things we can do as parents for our kids.

**Write and/or Discuss**

- ◆ In a few words, how would you describe your call as a parent of a young teenager?
- ◆ Which of the five relationship keys—express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power, expand possibilities—do you most confident in? Least confident?
- ◆ Who is a role model for you to fulfill your call at this stage in your life? Who would you like to emulate?

**Take Heart**

*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

## How Should I Live?

Now we seek to turn the corner and fully embrace the call. We seek to develop fruitful patterns of behavior and action that bring fulfillment and grace to you, your young teenager, and the family as a whole.

**Consider**

In their book, *10 Best Gifts for Your Teen*, Pat and Steve Saso express ten things that every adolescent needs from her or his parents.

1. *Respect*: Respect is the key to a successful parent-teen relationship. It is at the heart and serves as the foundation for parenting adolescents. Respecting teenagers means to look again at them and what they are going through in four different ways. It means: a) take them seriously, b) separate what they do from who they are, c) avoid comparisons, d) honor their plans.
2. *Room*: Giving teenagers room figuratively means allowing them the privacy they need to begin the process of individuation, of becoming their own persons. Giving teens room literally means allowing them to keep their bedrooms in a way that reflects their personality.

3. *Receptivity*: Become an attentive and active listener. To be receptive to what your teen is saying, stop what you are doing, face your child, make eye contact, and listen with your full attention.
4. *Revelation of Self*: Reveal the journey of how you have grown into the person you are. Build a relationship of trust, openness, and honesty with your teenager by letting your teen know who you are outside of your parental role. When you share about your very human struggles and reflect on your life experiences, you are inviting your son or daughter to do the same. Revelation of self means sharing your past and your present, as well as your dreams for the future. To do this: a) show interest in your teenager's activities, b) spend time with them, c) be vulnerable, and d) be honest with them.
5. *Responsibility*: Teaching your teen to be responsible is a lifelong process. Nurture responsible behavior in your teenager by a) giving your teenager choices and holding them accountable for the consequences, b) helping your teenager set goals, c) giving responsibilities at home, d) holding regular family meetings, and e) modeling responsible behavior.
6. *Resolve*: Resolve means to parent with purpose, to be consistent, to say what you mean and mean what you say. Parenting with resolve includes a) sharing and living out your values, b) setting clear limits and rules to keep your teen safe, c) using natural and logical consequences, d) being consistent and following through when those limits or rules are broken, e) using mistakes as an opportunity to learn, and f) building a family support system with other families in the congregation and community.
7. *Recognition*: Recognition means honoring your teenagers for their successes, hard work, and strengths. It also means putting light on those parts that need attention and guiding them in developing those areas. Give recognition by a) affirming positive behavior, b) affirming personal qualities, c) expressing love and saying I love you, d) trusting in your teenager, e) attending your teen's events, and f) accepting your teenager for the person he or she is.
8. *Reconciliation*: Everyone makes mistakes. By admitting your mistakes and seeking forgiveness, you are doing three things: a) healing a wounded relationship, b) modeling the ability to admit mistakes and seek forgiveness, and c) offering your teenager the opportunity to extend forgiveness. Reconciliation requires respect, sensitivity to feelings, vulnerability, honesty, responsibility, self-discipline and courage. It is essential to building a trusting, loving relationship with your teenager. As you model for your teen a willingness to ask forgiveness and seek reconciliation, they will be more open to admitting their mistakes. The healing will be mutual.
9. *Release*: Release is the gift of "letting go." It means giving teenagers more and more freedom as they get older, encouraging them to be their own person. It is also about helping them grow up, so that by eighteen years of age, when you launch your teen into the world of college or career, they will be prepared.

10. *Role-Modeling*: Our goal as parents is to model the very behaviors we want to see in our teens as they grow into adults.

(Summarized from *10 Best Gifts for Your Teen*. Pat and Steve Saso. Ave Maria Press, 1999.)

**Write and/or Discuss**

- ◆ In which of these do you feel confident, like, “I got this. Next.”?
- ◆ Which of these do you need to work on?
- ◆ Would you add any to the list?

**Consider**

Here are links to helpful practices and strategies for parenting a teenager.

- ◆ *Discovering Themselves as Young Adolescents – Ages 10-14*, Keep Connected Parenting Resources. <https://keepconnected.searchinstitute.org/understanding-ages-and-stages/ages-10-14>. These years are a pivotal time when young people begin to discover who they are and their place in the world.
- ◆ *Bringing Developmental Relationships Home: Tips and Relationship Builders for Families*. Search Institute. <https://keepconnected.searchinstitute.org/DR-home>. This research-based booklet for parenting teens provides tips and activities families can use to be more intentional in building developmental relationships.
- ◆ *Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development: Young Teens (12-14 years old)*. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/adolescence.html>. Produced by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- ◆ *Just in Time Parenting*. <https://jitp.info/>. A free parenting newsletter that is delivered by email and specific to a child's age and needs.
- ◆ “7 Tips to Help Your Teenager Develop Faith Skills” by Ben Crenshaw from Parent Cue. <https://theparentcue.org/7-tips-to-help-your-teenager-develop-faith-skills/>

**Take heart**

*"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened (Matthew 7:7-8).*

# Blessing for Parents

*This blessing may be used with a small group or with the entire congregation.*

## **To the Parents**

Dear parents, your children have become teenagers. They are discovering themselves as separate individuals. As they are growing and changing, you also are called to grow and change. As they are responding to God's ideas for them, you are called to let go, and trust in the nurture you have provided them. Today, we bless you and pledge our prayers and support for you.

## **To the Community Gathered**

Please extend your hand in blessing over these parents. We thank God for them, for all the ways they model God's unconditional love for us. Please respond with "Amen" to each blessing.

## **To the Parents**

As you witness your child's expanding boundaries, may you also experience the blessing of your own growth, maturity, wisdom, and good judgement.

All: Amen.

As your child demands independence and expanding boundaries, may you have the patience and understanding to know—in the heat of the moment—that those are exactly the things they need.

All: Amen.

As your parenting role shifts perhaps from "hands-on" to head and heart, may your head be non-anxious and your heart always soft.

All: Amen.

As your teen discovers God's activity in her or his life, may you find authentic, faith-filled role models who inspire and call you forward in your own journey of faith.

All: Amen.

As you partner with all the other adults in your child's life, may your child be blessed with adult role models that give them a positive, healthy outlook on life, and reassurance that they are safe in the world, and loved by many.

All: Amen.

And may God bless *you* with every heavenly blessing, and keep you safe and strong. Know that we carry you in our hearts each and every day. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

## **Closing Prayer**

O God, help these parents to be honest so their teens will learn honesty.

Help these parents to be kind so their teens will learn kindness.

Help these parents to be faithful so their teens will learn faith.

Help these parents to love so that their teens will be loving."

(Adapted from *Guide My Feet*. Marian Wright Edeleman. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995. page 1)