

A Teenage Reformation

Dr. David Shaw (notes from “How teens can change your life, your family, and your church for the better” by David Powlison)

It comes as no great surprise that many teens live in a universe that is all about them. (They learn that from parents, teachers, and Pastors who believe that the universe revolves around parents, teachers, and Pastors, although it would never be said out loud). With this assumption as a starting point, it comes as no great surprise that operationally there is no reference point outside their will and opinion.

In our culture, the more severe cases are labeled with ‘character disorders’ or ‘antisocial behavior.’ Or perhaps the label is ‘oppositional-defiant’ or ‘depressed.’ Perhaps teenagers need to be assigned therapists when they reach middle-school to ready them for the counseling they might need when the Psychiatrist treats them for their being bi-polar.

Please do not misunderstand. I am in no way making light of young people (or any age person) that needs the care of a Psychiatrist or counseling. I happen to like counselors very much (I am one). The intent of this article is to question if we are giving up too quickly on God’s methods for helping teenagers through the difficult years of middle and high school and in the process missing a great benefit for the family and the church.

Somewhere in the modern confines of Christianity, it seems to me that we (yes, I am included) decided that if we were going to hold the attention of teenagers in the church, we had to adopt a special brand of “Lite Christianity.” After all, anything else would be a bore to our teens and we would lose them. Our worst fears have been realized. Christianity is a bore to our teenagers and we have lost them. *WISDOM THAT LEARNS TO GRAPPLE WITH THE HARD QUESTIONS OF LIFE CAN MAKE THE DEEPEST DIFFERENCE IMAGINABLE.* When public ministry promises to get great crowds into heaven, but personal ministry fumbles the ball when it comes to sharing the struggles of real individuals amid the difficulties of everyday life, then all ministry verges on irrelevancy.

Martin Luther nailed his 95 Thesis on the door of the church. Teenagers today are nailing the church and parents with their unspoken questions.

1. How well do we really know our teenagers?
2. Are you a doer, organizer, talker and planner? Most ministries take place by those who first listen, observe, ponder, and pray.
3. Do you probe actions, thoughts, feelings, desires, and fears?
4. Are you willing to go past pat answers to say: “I don’t know the answer but I’ll walk with you until we can find out together.”

Such action on our part could literally bring much needed reformation to the church, our families, and our lives.

Recommended Reading

Shepherding a Child's Heart (Tedd Tripp)

What is Success in Parenting Teens? (Paul Tripp)

Why Do Kids Turn Out the Way They Do? (Jim Newheiser)

Communicate With Teens (Tedd Tripp)

Addressing the Problems of Rebellious Children (Mary Somerville)

Counseling Angry, Unmotivated, Self-Centered, and Spiritually-Indifferent Teens (Rick Horne)

Yelling At My Kids (Nina Campagna)