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Winter 3-1-2019

# HOW NORTH AMERICAN PARENTS CAN SUPPORT THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR TEENAGE CHILDREN

Teresa Tong

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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

HOW NORTH AMERICAN PARENTS CAN SUPPORT  
THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR TEENAGE CHILDREN

Written by

TERESA TONG

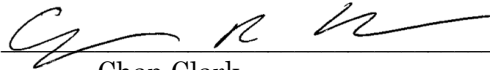
and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



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Chap Clark



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Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: March 11, 2019

HOW NORTH AMERICAN PARENTS CAN SUPPORT  
THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR TEENAGE CHILDREN

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

TERESA TONG  
MARCH 2019



## ABSTRACT

### **How North American Parents Can Support the Holistic Development of Their Teenage Children**

Teresa Tong

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2019

The purpose of this project is to analyze the current context of North American parents and their teenagers so as to recommend ways they can support the holistic development (body, mind, and soul) of their children. Although many factors contribute to the outcome, balanced nurturing can give them a better chance of enjoying a healthier adulthood later in life. Children need support and guidance from multiple sectors, especially parents, in their holistic development.

This paper is divided into three parts. Part One focuses on analyzing the environment and challenges faced by today's young people and their parents in North America. Under the impact of postmodernism in a performance-driven, high-tech culture, many adolescents feel confused, abandoned, and time-pressured. They are desperately searching for self-identity, autonomy, and a sense of belonging as their root of life. Parents, on the other hand, often feel inadequate and stressed in raising their children, especially in today's competitive and multicultural world. Many do not receive support from their family of origin. Contextually, this information forms the basis for the next sections of the project.

Part Two analyzes the identified challenges both parents and their teenage children are facing. This section goes deeper to study the Bible's teaching on the body, mind, and soul to facilitate holistic development. It then reflects on the issues identified in Part One through the lens of biblical theology. From the insights gained, suggestions are made for how parents can support the balanced development of their children.

Part Three presents a series of systematic parenting courses, designed to equip parents in their task. This section includes an outline of the course curriculum and suggests an implementation plan. The hope is that Christian parents and family ministry workers may consider it as a reference in parenting practice or ministry.

Content Reader: Chap Clark, PhD

Words: 296

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is to analyze the current context of North American parents and their teenagers so as to recommend ways they can support the holistic development (body, mind, and soul) of their children. The idea of balanced holistic development suggests multi-dimensional growth that includes physical, emotional, and spiritual components.<sup>1</sup> Although there are many contributing factors, balanced nurturing can give them a better chance to enjoy a healthier adulthood later in life.<sup>2</sup> Children need support and guidance from multiple sectors—such as family, school, friends, community, church, and social systems. However, parents have the most significant influence on their holistic development.<sup>3</sup>

Since Canada and the United States are highly industrialized and technologically advanced nations, it might be easy to assume that there exists a relatively stable environment for young people in North America. However, surveys, interviews, and research show a different picture. They report that many adolescents are confused and feel abandoned and wounded.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, many parents also feel hurt, disappointed, and helpless in raising their teenagers—particularly when it seems that regardless the amount of time and money they have invested in these young lives, issues and problems keep surfacing.

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<sup>1</sup> David Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010), xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Shimi Kang, *The Dolphin Way: A Parent's Guide to Raising Healthy, Happy, and Motivated Kids—Without Turning into a Tiger* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2014), 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), xi.

Parents in past generations naturally seemed to know how to nurture their young ones at home; in contrast, today's parents often hop from one parenting seminar to the next, and their shelves are packed with parenting books even before the baby is born.<sup>5</sup> Still, many of them feel frustrated and clueless about what to do with their teenage children.<sup>6</sup> This issue is especially prominent for immigrant families, when the culture of the East meets that of the West.<sup>7</sup> As a consulting children/family pastor specializing in equipping youth workers and parents, I have encountered many desperate parents who have lost confidence in their parenting role and are easily brought to tears. Although I have heard repeatedly how they are eager to show their affection and support,<sup>8</sup> the new younger generation continues to feel abandoned<sup>9</sup> and without supervision or love.<sup>10</sup> It is sad to see how the two ends cannot seem to connect.

In a fast-changing environment with advancing technology, today's young people live in a world that is vastly unlike that of their parents. For this reason, retaining outdated worldviews and parenting approaches may not work. It is beneficial for today's parents to understand present circumstances so as to realize the impact of current culture on their children. By doing so, they can position themselves to better comprehend the

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<sup>5</sup> David Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1984), 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Priscilla P. Lui and David Rollock, "Tiger Mother: Popular and Psychological Scientific Perspectives on Asian Culture and Parenting," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 83, no. 4 (October 28 2013): 452.

<sup>8</sup> I have ministered, counseled, and given parenting workshops for over fifteen years in both English-speaking and Chinese-speaking congregations.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

challenges a teenager faces physically, emotionally, and spiritually and be able to provide appropriate guidance and love. Only then can parents and their teenagers begin existing on the same dimensional plane.

Today's teenagers live in a fluid, postmodern world.<sup>11</sup> As it advances towards globalization, adolescents may face further challenges in multiculturalism and consumerism. They are under the imminent influence of social media innovation and individualism. This can lead to doubts in faith matters, as they yearn for “identity, autonomy, and belonging”<sup>12</sup> and have a “longing for community.”<sup>13</sup> With such dynamics in mind, this doctoral project will consider and address the challenges youth currently face.

Afterwards, the discussion will turn its focus to understanding challenges encountered by parents. In today's materialistic society with its high inflation rate, North Americans generally confront economic challenges.<sup>14</sup> Due to financial burdens and modern trends, many families have dual-working couples.<sup>15</sup> With the effect of globalization and promising job opportunities, young parents often uproot from their hometown to relocate to other cities<sup>16</sup> or migrate to North America from different parts of the world. Consequently, many couples live far away from their family of origin and do not receive much support

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<sup>11</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first-century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 29; Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 26-27.

<sup>12</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 167.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>14</sup> Juliet B. Schor, *The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer* (New York: Harper, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 192-202.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, “The Psychology of Globalization,” *American Psychologist* 57, no. 10 (October 2002): 774–783.

from their extended families and community, especially in nurturing their own offspring. This contributes to parents feeling stressed in raising their children and a bit lost without traditional help or advice.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to meeting the demands of today's competitive and multicultural world, many parents push their children for high achievements in both academic and extracurricular activities.<sup>18</sup> They may think that such opportunities bring the promise of a successful and happy life. When children cannot meet parental expectations or push back against their high control, many parents feel hurt and disappointed, experience confusion, and see themselves as inadequate in their parenting role. Even in the scholastic realm, constantly developing technology can leave parents feeling inadequate and unable to keep pace with the rapid knowledge of the next generation. These factors form a general barrier in communication between parents and their teenage children. It pulls parents even further away from their children and hinders them from providing a secured social capital,<sup>19</sup> which is trust and support gained through interactions.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, Christian parents face the recent faith exile of younger generations from churches, which some call "hemorrhaging faith."<sup>21</sup> Many young people who have been raised in a Christian family start to question the religion they have been observing since

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<sup>17</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Amy Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 121-128.

<sup>19</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Paula Cristina Pelli Paiva et al., "Development and Validation of a Social Capital Questionnaire for Adolescent Students (SCQ-AS)," *Plos ONE* 9, no. 8 (August 2014): 1, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0103785>.

<sup>21</sup> James Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church* (Ontario: The EFC Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, 2011), 110.

birth. Parents feel sad as they witness their children rebel in faith matters and stop attending church. This serves as a clarion call for a partnership between the family and local church.

The second part of this paper offers sound theological reflection. In both the Old and New Testaments, believers are commanded to love God with all their body, mind, and soul (Deuteronomy 6:5; Luke 10:27). This biblical-theological reflection will study the Word of God to show what parents need to do in order to support the holistic development of their adolescent children. With the current challenges faced by both parents and teenagers, it is vital to bring the Bible alive to inform and teach today's parenting.

Human bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit,” says 1 Corinthians 6:19.<sup>22</sup> This helps to affirm that children's physical growth is a key component of their holistic development. Consequently, this portion of the paper will explore the physiological aspects of a teenager's brain development. Combining biblical exploration and neuroscientific research can offer insights on how God has formed humanity and desires proper care of the body, mind, and soul.

Understanding the psychological development of adolescents also involves examining the heart. Jeremiah 17:10 says that God searches the heart. Matthew 5:11 explains that what comes out of the mouth indicates the state of our heart and what defiles us. Young people need guidance and role-modeling from key adults as a “scaffolding”<sup>23</sup> step in their development. Sadly, many parents in their hectic schedule do not provide the social capital needed by their children. Through the lens of biblical teaching and wrestling

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<sup>22</sup> All Scripture has been taken from *Holy Bible: New International Version* (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1984), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>23</sup> Lev Semenovič Vygotskij and Michael Cole, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 86.

with psychological struggles faced by teenagers, this discussion will establish theological precepts and practical wisdom for dealing with such issues and aim to provide a foundation for biblical parenting. Moses reminded the Israelites to teach their children to maintain and pass on God's commandments from generation to generation (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). His teaching also applies to today's parents.

The final part of this project will suggest some practical strategies and a series of systematic parenting courses. Although there is no formula that can guarantee fruitful parenthood, the ministry strategy can benefit both parents and teenagers. When parents are trained and equipped to gain a deeper understanding of their adolescents, they can become more empathetic and calmer in dealing with their rebellious children and teenage mood swings. The strategy aims to help parents develop patient listening ears, as they seek to provide supportive and caring responses to their youth. This approach aspires to reduce the intensity of parent-teen conflicts and promote a more harmonious atmosphere at home. Hopefully, this will help parents sustain their children's faith and guide them in the way of the Lord even when youth seem to walk away from faith. This paper discusses potential approaches and offers an outline of the course curriculum. It also includes an implementation plan as well as samples of the course materials in the Appendix. Christian parents and family ministry workers will be able to use it as a reference, as they partner together to raise up the next generation of Christ-followers.

PART ONE

CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### CURRENT CONTEXT OF NORTH AMERICAN TEENAGERS

David Bainbridge asserts that the “human life-span is built around the centrepiece of adolescence.”<sup>1</sup> Parents need to nurture their children well during this critical stage. As young people have their “decisions and actions emerge from a broader cultural context,”<sup>2</sup> it is essential to analyze the current world and culture in which they live. With this knowledge, parents can better understand the emotions and challenges that bombard adolescents and what they desperately search for and need. This examination forms the groundwork for suggesting ways to support the holistic development of today’s youth.

#### **The External World of Today’s Teenagers**

Today’s young people emerge fully into a postmodern world dominated by media and entertainment, which exert a significant impact on youth.<sup>3</sup> This environment brings with it a variety of shifting worldviews. Graham Johnston declares that “this shift in Western

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<sup>1</sup> David Bainbridge, *Teenagers: A Natural History* (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2009), 308.

<sup>2</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2001), 29.



thinking is like the air that we breathe.”<sup>4</sup> Examining the postmodern world from this permeable perspective can help in understanding how adolescents are under its imminent influences and rippling effects. Together with rapid advancement in technology and globalization, the cultural dynamic they face can include competitiveness, individualism, multiculturalism, and consumerism.

### A Shifting Postmodern World

In the mid-seventeenth century, Western civilization underwent the Enlightenment Age, during which people relied mainly on scientific study for deriving absolute truth. They believed that human beings were progressing towards a better world because they considered metanarratives as “the all-consuming, all-encompassing overview that seeks to answer the big questions of human existence.”<sup>5</sup> However, with the advent of the twentieth century and the disasters of “two World Wars, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, the population explosion, the deterioration of natural resources, and the deterioration of the environment,” David Elkind notes that people started to question the validity of such an optimistic view.<sup>6</sup> Although “these metanarratives traditionally serve to give cultural practices some form of legitimation or authority,”<sup>7</sup> many people today remain skeptical about metanarratives, ideologies, rationality, and absolute truth. They do not readily accept them as they did in the past. Subsequently, modernity gave rise to postmodernity.

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<sup>4</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

According to Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick, “Postmodernity represents a radical response to the access emphasis on rationalism found in modernity and sees truth as what is in the eye of the beholder, that is, what one experiences.”<sup>8</sup> This means that people generally respect and value differences and tend to accept diverse individuals and viewpoints, instead of condemning variances from their own personal beliefs. Even though people may still respect universal laws and principles, they give room for multiple theories and explanations.<sup>9</sup> They have a more open mind, as they believe that one person’s perspective is equally legitimate to that of another and see it as necessary to honor other views.<sup>10</sup> People no longer regard Christianity as irrational compared to other rationale.<sup>11</sup>

The drawback of the postmodern perspective is that people cannot be certain if they are right in holding a particular opinion. It is easy to doubt the validity of a point raised by others, so they “mix and match what suits them best at the present time.”<sup>12</sup> This leads to a reluctance to rely on or follow the teaching and commands of individual human intellects or authorities, for fear that they are being deceived by others for malicious or personal gains. Postmodern people tend to count on their own intuition or emotions.<sup>13</sup> This paves the

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<sup>8</sup> Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 348.

<sup>9</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> P. J. Watson, “Transition Beyond Postmodernism: Pluralistic Culture, Incommensurable Rationalities, and Future Objectivity,” *Review & Expositor* 111, no. 1 (February 1, 2014): 34, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0034637313510480?journalCode=raeb>.

<sup>12</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 14.

way to accept pluralism in religious faith. Such belief opposes Christianity, which emphasizes only one true God.<sup>14</sup>

It is no wonder that today's younger generation is so confused and lost yet wary of authority figures and religious faith. They have no strong hold on personal belief, as they consider and accept opposing points of view. In this way, "loyalty is perceived as a weakness, not a virtue."<sup>15</sup> Society is more fragmented due to the acceptance of a variety of worldviews, including faith matters. Young people can puzzle over what moral standards or life values they should follow and question the validity of their own personal beliefs.

### The World of Media and High Technology

With the introduction of television, Robert D. Putnam notes how people in the twentieth century "shifted their news consumption from the printed page to the glowing screen."<sup>16</sup> Today's young people go one step further. They are growing up under the digital revolution. Technology has advanced away from analogue into digital formats, which are interactive and interconnected. "While it may look and feel a lot like the analog media we're used to, it's actually a whole new world. To use another analogy, we haven't just upgraded our baseball bat from wood to aluminum. We started playing hockey instead."<sup>17</sup>

Young people often engage in interactive digital activities, such as connecting with friends and family any time anywhere, sharing music and pictures instantly, playing online

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<sup>14</sup> Watson, "Transition Beyond Postmodernism," 35.

<sup>15</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 219.

<sup>17</sup> Kara Powell, Art Bamford, and Brad M. Griffin, *Right Click: Parenting Your Teenager in a Digital Media World* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Youth Institute, 2015), 20.

video games, and downloading materials from websites.<sup>18</sup> With this digital technology, young people expect immediate response. As they gradually adopt this mentality of quick turnaround without using thoughtful and thorough thinking, it can increase their rate of impulsiveness and decrease their tolerance for delayed gratification. They tend to have a shorter attention span and rely on their own interpretation of perceived information. The fast response also gives them a sense of reward that may lead to addiction to the media world. Some adolescents cannot control such a compulsion, although they realize the negative effects.<sup>19</sup> According to the statistics compiled by the Pew Research Center in “Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015,” “92% of teens report going online daily—including 24% who say they go online ‘almost constantly.’”<sup>20</sup>

Pew also found that “a majority of teens—71%—report using more than one social network site”<sup>21</sup> to keep in touch with friends, and “57% of teens have met a new friend online. . . . Most of these friendships stay in the digital space; only 20% of all teens have met an online friend in person.”<sup>22</sup> Adolescents often use digital devices or social media as a means to engage with their peer group. This can let them feel more connected to their

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<sup>18</sup> Jane D. Brown and Piotr S. Bobkowski, “Older and Newer Media: Patterns of Use and Effects on Adolescents Health and Well-Being,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 21, no. 1 (March 2011): 95, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/research/publications/4865>.

<sup>19</sup> Candice M. Kelsey, *Generation MySpace: Helping Your Teen Survive Online Adolescence* (New York: Marlowe & Co., 2007), 16.

<sup>20</sup> Statistics compiled from Pew Research Center, “Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015,” April 9, 2015, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>; see also Pew Research Center, “Teens, Technology and Friendships,” August 6, 2015, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/>.

<sup>21</sup> Pew Research Center, “Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015.”

<sup>22</sup> Pew Research Center, “Teens, Technology and Friendships.”

friends or get support during tough or challenging times,<sup>23</sup> but they may not have a genuine desire to bond with one another. It may just be a way to position themselves on a social ladder or for some other motivations.<sup>24</sup> Frequently, when young people ask or even beg for a digital device or network, it is to fit into peer groups and prove self-worth. Danah Boyd says they use “digital media as a resource to help them define themselves and develop the social connections vital in adolescence.”<sup>25</sup> People tend to post edited versions to show the best side in life. This can lead to comparisons among friends and feed their craving to receive attention online. When youth fall short in their comparisons, they can feel envy, disappointment, and loneliness within the social media circle of “friends.”<sup>26</sup>

The word “media” originally means “middle,” indicating its intent to be “an intermediary that connects people with one another,” but actually it “gets in the middle and becomes a wedge between people.”<sup>27</sup> People prefer remaining in their private world for entertainment or relaxation, preferring to connect with others while alone, instead of stepping out to have social encounters in person with other human beings. Social media seems to offer the advantage of allowing effective interaction among people of similar interests, regardless of differences in time and location. However, the Hemorrhaging Faith Report finds that “despite the original claim that technology would make us more

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<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Center, “Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015” and “Teens, Technology and Friendships.”

<sup>24</sup> Kelsey, *Generation MySpace*, 81.

<sup>25</sup> Danah Boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Amanda Wyatt, ed., *Help Your Kids with Adolescence: A No-Nonsense Guide to Puberty and the Teenage Years* (New York: DK Publishing, 2017), 131.

<sup>27</sup> Powell, Bamford, and Griffin, *Right Click*, 20.

efficient and free up time for us to engage in personal interests, the opposite is true.”<sup>28</sup> It consumes a lot of their precious time, so “people are busier than ever before.”<sup>29</sup> With enhanced interconnectivity, Reginald Bibby warns that digital devices “dramatically alter people’s expectations of us, namely the speed with which we could turn things around.”<sup>30</sup> Such expectations introduce more stress to modern life.<sup>31</sup>

In today’s busy world, time is a precious commodity. However, modern people, including children, dedicate so much time to media and electronic entertainment, often they are not aware of how much time they lose. Digital media knits tightly into the fabric of daily life. Current statistics are very alarming. Cris Rowan, a pediatric occupational therapist, reports in her research that the impact of technology on child development is tremendous. She says that “infants watch 2.5 hours per day of TV, children use 7.5 and teens 9 hours per day of entertainment technologies (cell phone, TV, internet).”<sup>32</sup> High-tech activity only advances with age, and children as young as one year now have iPads as a babysitting device. Rowan warns that it may be one of the factors that contribute to later issues of “developmental delay, obesity, mental illness, attention deficit, and illiteracy.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Reginald Bibby, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada’s Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind* (Toronto: Bastian Books, 2006), 87.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 77. See also Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Bibby, *The Boomer Factor*, 77.

<sup>32</sup> Cris Rowan, “Zone’in Fact Sheet: A Research Review Regarding the Impact of Technology on Child Development, Behavior, and Academic Performance,” accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.zoneinworkshops.com/zonein-fact-sheet.html>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

With the simple touch of a finger, people can retrieve information across the globe. Bibby claims that nowadays it is much easier to retrieve any type of data in large volume.<sup>34</sup> The effect of the information explosion is even more significant among younger generations. They have been labeled “Digital Natives,” as they were born into a world that is already surrounded by digital technology,<sup>35</sup> and also the “Google Generation,” because they always use the internet and blindly rely on search engines to look up the desired information without checking its validity.<sup>36</sup> They even may have a hard time distinguishing actual events and fiction from news or entertainment.

The impact of today’s technology is exponential. Even if youth surf the web with self-discipline and ethics, undesirable images and information related to violence, sex, drugs, and unethical advice can appear on their screen. Nicholas L. Carnagey, Craig A. Anderson, and Bruce D. Bartholow warn that “players of violent video games actually engage in virtual violent actions, receive direct rewards for those actions, closely identify with the characters they control, and actively rehearse aggressive behavioral scripts.”<sup>37</sup> They need extra effort and self-control to resist such temptations in real life. While technology and media bring benefits to humankind, without proper guidance or boundaries its usage can lead to a variety of issues for youth. These can cause health problems due to physical

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<sup>34</sup> Bibby, *The Boomer Factor*, 92.

<sup>35</sup> Powell, Bamford, and Griffin, *Right Click*, 36.

<sup>36</sup> Ian Rowlands et al., “The Google Generation: The Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future,” *Aslib Journal of Information Management* 60, no. 4 (March/April 2008): 290-310, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/00012530810887953>.

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas L. Carnagey, Craig A. Anderson, and Bruce D. Bartholow, “Media Violence and Social Neuroscience,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 16, no. 4 (August 1, 2007): 179, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00499.x>.

inactivity, handicap communication as direct contact with family and friends becomes limited, spawn addiction to a media world, and induce mental delusions due to an inability to differentiate reality from virtual experiences. If not handled properly, these problems can bring even deeper challenges and further complicate youth development.

### Globalization and Multiculturalism

Today's adolescents were born "in a world that is considerably more multicultural than the world in which their parents and grandparents grew up. Due to the processes of globalization, adolescents increasingly have knowledge of and interactions with people from diverse cultures."<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey Jensen Arnett finds that adolescents are receptive to a great variety of life values and practices.<sup>39</sup> With such fast-developing globalization, young people encounter distinct cultures and ethnic groups through different channels.<sup>40</sup> With the stimulation of "popular and media culture (television, movies, music, and the Internet),"<sup>41</sup> adolescents generally have a keen interest for accessing and connecting with various cultures. There are both advantages and disadvantages when teenagers develop a multicultural identity that is different from their culture of origin.<sup>42</sup>

Arnett warns that these youth tend to have issues, such as substance abuse and suicide. He claims that it is related to globalization and the conflict between cultural

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<sup>38</sup> Lene Arnett Jensen, "Coming of Age in a Multicultural World: Globalization and Adolescent Cultural Identity Formation," *Applied Developmental Science* 7, no. 3 (June 2003): 189.

<sup>39</sup> Arnett, "The Psychology of Globalization," 774–783.

<sup>40</sup> Pierre R. Dasen, "Rapid Social Change and the Turmoil of Adolescence: A Cross-Cultural Perspective," *International Journal of Group Tensions* 29, no. 17 (June 2000): 29.

<sup>41</sup> L. Jensen, "Coming of Age in a Multicultural World," 191.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.



identities.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, multicultural identity can have a positive impact on those adolescents who overcome the obstacles and manage them well, because they develop “new skills . . . necessary for a multicultural world, that allow adolescents to function well psychologically and to contribute to society.”<sup>44</sup> Either way, young people need support and guidance in order to untangle the confusing self-image that can come through multiculturalism.

### Individualism

Richard Eckersley thinks that “people today live in an individualistic and materialistic age that is hazardous to human thriving. Morality and belief is just a matter of what works for me instead of being based on a principle.”<sup>45</sup> In biblical terms, everyone is doing “what is right in his own eyes” (Proverbs 21:2; Deuteronomy 12:8; Judges 17:6). This is the essence of individualism. Individual authority is derived “from within and not without.”<sup>46</sup> For many postmoderns, this can lead to thinking that what has worked for others in the past has little bearing today. This means drawing one’s own conclusions about the meaning of things, and it is a personal meaning with conclusions based on personal experiences. Taking the example of shopping, Christian Smith et al. observe that postmodern people tend to avoid “making any evaluative judgments of anyone’s consumption habits. It is entirely an individual matter and should be driven by whatever

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<sup>43</sup> Arnett, “The Psychology of Globalization,” 774-83.

<sup>44</sup> L. Jensen, “Coming of Age in a Multicultural World,” 195.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Eckersley, “Is Modern Western Culture a Health Hazard?” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35, no. 2 (April 2005): 258.

<sup>46</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 34.

makes people happy. Thinking collectively about these concerns as a society is either inconceivable or illegitimate. It's up to individual people."<sup>47</sup> However, if human decision ignores valuable lessons learned from history, the voices from a wise community—and more importantly, the guidance of God—one may become self-centered and develop tunnel vision, walking in an opposite way from the Lord.

James Cote and Charles G. Levine further pinpoint the problem of individualism in a postmodern world. People can blame external influences for eroding their authentic core. However, without a concrete base, they are only composing a false self. Cote and Levine assert that “the distinction between false self and real self loses its meaning in the postmodernism paradigm, because postmodern society provides a ‘cafeteria’ from which identities can be selected and combined with each meal, and then discarded.”<sup>48</sup> Such an impact is especially significant on developing youth. While they desire to develop their own individual core, they also have a strong desire for acceptance and belonging within a larger community. With such confusion and mixed expectations, they may develop “isolation, vulnerability and depression.”<sup>49</sup>

Putnam puts the blame on individualism for unhealthy emotional development in adolescents. He finds that when adolescents encounter challenges or failure in life, they need to turn to someone or a community that can support and comfort them or bring them

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<sup>47</sup> Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 74.

<sup>48</sup> James E. Cote and Charles G. Levine, *Identity, Formation, Agency, and Culture A Social Psychological Synthesis* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 41.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Palmer and Sheila Panchal, *Developmental Coaching: Life Transitions and Generational Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2011), 63.

back to hope.<sup>50</sup> Face-to-face communities are needed to provide young people with such stability. Unfortunately, digital media can lead the next generation down the road of individualism, as it “creates a false sense of companionship, making people feel intimate, informed, clever, busy, and important.”<sup>51</sup> Facebook, Twitter, and other digital platforms can confuse young people into thinking that they are engaged in a true community, yet such connections can disappear with the mere flick of switch.

### Consumerism

In addition to individualism, today’s young people are also greatly influenced by consumerism. Juliet Schor claims that “contemporary American tweens and teens have emerged as the most brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and materialistic generations in history.”<sup>52</sup> Materialism is different from having enough money for the basic needs. Lisa Stiepoek finds that young people’s “preoccupation with material goods has become disturbing.”<sup>53</sup> Most young people enjoy shopping and consuming, as it makes them feel good and self-confident.<sup>54</sup> With rapid physical development during adolescence, young people are extra conscious of their appearance. They tend to spend a lot of time on self-

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<sup>50</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 264.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>52</sup> Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 13.

<sup>53</sup> Lisa Stiepoek, *Tough Love: Raising Confident, Kind, Resilient Kids* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 108.

<sup>54</sup> Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 72-73.

admiration or self-criticism, trying to impress an imaginative audience.<sup>55</sup> This may further encourage their desire to purchase more commodities to make them look impressive.

Postmodernism encourages short-term commitment. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh agree and state that “instead of long-term commitment, the postmodern self just moves onto to the next game, to the next show, to the next relationship. . . . This is the nomadic self, on the road with the carnival.”<sup>56</sup> Since there is no one absolute standard, no definite design, people have the choice to become whoever they want. This mindset offers a variety of possibilities and expanding parameters of life.

Consumerism advocates using material goods to fill and satisfy one’s life. The expectation of today’s young people is to lead a financially and materially comfortable life.<sup>57</sup> Many of them desire to earn good money in order to sustain their consumption of products and services. Some youth may even take this as their life purpose.<sup>58</sup> Ads use every opportunity to stir up viewers’ hearts for purchasing new products. Schor notices that “marketed leisure has replaced unstructured socializing, and most of what kids do revolves around commodities. Children’s purchasing power and influence have exploded as they spend their days shopping and watching more television.”<sup>59</sup> Exposed to many hours of digital media, adolescents are bombarded by consumerism, which encourages them to hop

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<sup>55</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 54.

<sup>56</sup> J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 58; see also Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 39.

<sup>57</sup> Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 93.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>59</sup> Schor, *Born to Buy*, 15.

from one choice to the next to get the thrill of satisfaction. David Cook speaks for the younger generation, “We want to have fun. We want the good things in life and we want them here and now. Our needs are at the centre of our existence.”<sup>60</sup> This is the driving force of consumerism. To make it worse, young people can get credit cards or online loans easily.<sup>61</sup> With such access and the consumerist mindset, adolescents may make judgements based on what they see. This can lead to becoming short-sighted and taking on commitment lightheartedly. Johnston describes it well: “Life is superficial and appearance counts for everything. You need not take anything seriously because everything’s merely froth and bubble.”<sup>62</sup> James Penner et al. assert that even church is considered a product for meeting the perceived needs of people.<sup>63</sup>

When such consumerism roots deeply in the core of young people, it can even impact their sense of loyalty in relationships and later in marriage. With this mentality, young people may be trained to view themselves as a product, thinking that people only evaluate them based on their possessions or appearance.<sup>64</sup> They are valued only for their consuming ability. Consumer culture can lead to “dysfunction in the forms of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and psychosomatic complaints.”<sup>65</sup> This is a sad prospect for the

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<sup>60</sup> David Cook, *Blind Alley Beliefs* (Leicester, GB: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 13.

<sup>61</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 56.

<sup>63</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Dean Borgman, *Foundations for Youth Ministry: Theological Engagement with Teen Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997), 233-240.

<sup>65</sup> Schor, *Born to Buy*, 17.

next generation. Although the impact may happen slowly and subtly, over the long term such dysfunction is destructive.

### Competitiveness in a Performance-Driven Culture

With the collective effect of globalization, multiculturalism, individualism, and consumerism, it is easy to understand why today's youth are constantly under the pressure to perform and compete. They keep receiving the message that they have to be special, with some unique talents, in order to be recognized.<sup>66</sup> Parents face tremendous pressure in raising their children, due to steep requirements for school admission, top standards in extracurricular activities, and keen competition in daily life.<sup>67</sup> This pushes highly controlling parents even further to the extreme in order to keep up. They want to help their children move ahead of others in order to secure a "successful" life, which often is envisioned as wealth, fame, and popularity. Chap Clark notices that such parents "highlight these and other activities as proof of their commitment to the young."<sup>68</sup>

Putnam notices that adding to the problem is the inequality of opportunity and social mobility between children from poor households and wealthier children. Ideally, less privileged children who have the ability and ambition could move up the economic ladder beyond their parents. However, in Putnam's observation, the economic inequality started to reappear after the early 1970s. Today's young people from the same school district often attend separate schools, depending on their family's financial status. Privileged students

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<sup>66</sup> Polly Young-Eisendrath, *The Self-esteem Trap: Raising Confident and Compassionate Kids in an Age of Self-importance* (New York: Little, Brown, 2008), 11.

<sup>67</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 26-27.

<sup>68</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 30.

have the opportunity to receive more advanced education than children from poorer families.<sup>69</sup> Putnam warns that “this educational segregation has consequences far beyond the classroom, in terms of friendship networks and other social resources.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, children from lower-income families can experience even more of a competitive burden—particularly if parents push harder, because they desire for their children to climb beyond their own economic level.

This translates as high-pressure expectations for young ones to excel. Even when children are top-ranking in a particular area, “these parents are still driven by an irresistible and often irrational desire for them to do even better.”<sup>71</sup> Sometimes students become so lost they may not know their target and wonder with whom they are competing. They become confused and do not know where to direct their effort. This can give teenagers the impression that they are not yet good enough, despite how hard they have tried.<sup>72</sup> Such “tiger parents”<sup>73</sup> insist that this is the most effective way to raise successful children, but “this parental micromanagement only deprives children from developing their internal traits.”<sup>74</sup> Shimi Kang claims that “it makes young people mindlessly pursue externally

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<sup>69</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 31-44.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 43.

<sup>72</sup> Maryann Rosenthal with Dale Fetherling, *Be a Parent, Not a Pushover: A Guide to Raising Happy, Emotionally Healthy Teens* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2006), 93.

<sup>73</sup> Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. The actual term used here in this title is “tiger mother,” but I have adapted its use to “tiger parents.”

<sup>74</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 30.

driven goals of individual performance at the expense of internal goals of mental, physical and social health.” They may even turn into a tiger parent themselves.<sup>75</sup>

For adolescents driven externally in this way, life is about competitions. The original goal of extracurricular participation was to develop soft skills and to build character.<sup>76</sup> However, in this competitive world, youth are pushed to aim at becoming number one in every field: academics, extracurricular activities, arts, sports, and music. The list can go on without end. Such young people are subject to “adult-driven and adult-controlled programs, systems, and institutions that are primarily concerned with adults’ agendas, needs, and dreams.”<sup>77</sup> Over-competitiveness pushes children to win at any cost. It trains them to be self-centered, encourages them to cheat, and becomes a justification to set aside ethics in order to maintain high grades or stand on trophy podiums.<sup>78</sup> Most of what they plan or do is for the sake of winning. They view achievements almost as a matter of life and death.

When young people fail to get the final victory, they may retreat to unhealthy modes to cope with overwhelming anxiety. This can include “self-mutilation, substance abuse, taking stimulant drugs to neutralize the exhaustion of excessively long hours of practice or homework.”<sup>79</sup> Ronald D. Siegel reminds parents, “Emotional suffering comes in all shapes and sizes. We might worry about the future, be angry or sad, feel guilty or ashamed, get upset about physical pain, or just feel bored or stressed. Sometimes it’s pretty

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<sup>75</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 76.

<sup>76</sup> Putnam, *Our Kids*, 176.

<sup>77</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 30.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>79</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 60.



subtle. . . . anxiety, depression, addictions, pain, or stress-related symptoms that it's hard to even function.”<sup>80</sup> Although many parents realize the shortcoming of the tiger-parenting approach, some cannot resist the temptation or pressure to follow the crowd. This has tremendous, negative impact on young people.

### **The Inside World of Today's Teenagers**

Under the weight of current culture and parental pressures, today's youth face many challenges. Even for high achievers who seem healthy and happy in their life journey, there can be a lot of hidden turmoil as they confront daily struggles.<sup>81</sup> They need strong support from the caring adults around them.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, this discussion must delve to a deeper level in order to understand what is happening in their inner world.

#### Low Social Capital

Putnam indicates that the concept of social capital is broadly accepted, but recently it has been expressed in new language and discussed on various platforms.<sup>83</sup> It is defined as the “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”<sup>84</sup> Social capital accumulates when there is a meeting of the minds, either through formal content or less formal social interactions. According to the nested concentric model of the well-known developmental psychologist, Urie

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<sup>80</sup> Ronald D. Siegel, *The Mindfulness Solution: Everyday Practices for Everyday Problems* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 999.

<sup>81</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 33.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>83</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 24.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Bronfenbrenner, developing human beings interact with their immediate surroundings on a few levels: first comes family, school, and friends, followed by social settings and cultures.<sup>85</sup> All of these elements directly or indirectly influence human development.

Besides satisfying the immediate needs of a person, such as job searching, social capital most importantly provides for companionship as well as overall emotional support. In Bainbridge's view, adolescents deserve adult support in this area, because they are in an important yet difficult stage in life.<sup>86</sup> Sharon K. Hall believes healthy adult-child relationships are crucial to help them develop into a well-adjusted person. She writes: "Adults scaffold the development of children by providing a framework the children can use to grow in their environments. Healthy, happy people who can connect well with others, see others' perspectives with tolerance, and care about their world are possible with the right foundation."<sup>87</sup> Daniel J. Siegel further supports this from a neurological point of view. He claims that "human connections shape neural connections, and each contributes to mind. Relationships and neural linkages together shape the mind."<sup>88</sup> Parents play a very important role in this developmental stage. They provide cognitive stimulation for their children to raise their ability to learn.<sup>89</sup> In this way, the relationship between parents and their children

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<sup>85</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 22-26.

<sup>86</sup> Bainbridge, *Teenagers*, 308.

<sup>87</sup> Sharon K. Hall, *Raising Kids in the 21st Century: The Science of Psychological Health for Children* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 2.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Putnam, *Our Kids*, 110.

could be described as a dance.<sup>90</sup> For the healthy development of young people, support from the caring adults around them is indispensable.

In Putnam's view, civic connections play an important role in human health, both physiologically and emotionally. He claims that social capital boosts the immune system of a person against sickness and reduces the chance of having depression.<sup>91</sup> When adults have a closer relationship with adolescents, they are able to understand the young mind and its challenges better. Such a relationship helps to keep them from making snap judgments about youth. One study in particular has concluded that overall social capital is one of the factors that help youth to survive disadvantages.<sup>92</sup> This is supported by the research that "social support plays a crucial part in successful coping."<sup>93</sup>

Although social capital provides various benefits for the healthy development of adolescents, its availability is declining. Clark finds that teenagers pass very little time in the company of adults. He says, "Adolescents spent only 4.8 percent of their time with their parents and only 2 percent with adults who were not their parents."<sup>94</sup> Under a hectic daily schedule, today's young people spend less time contributing to the community. That further

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<sup>90</sup> Robert Campbell Roberts and Mark R. Talbot, *Limning the Psyche: Explorations in Christian Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 999.

<sup>91</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 327-332.

<sup>92</sup> Catherine Rethon, Laura Goodwin, and Stephen Stansfeld, "Family Social Support, Community 'Social Capital' and Adolescents' Mental Health and Educational Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study in England," *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology* 47, no. 5 (May 2012): 698.

<sup>93</sup> John Eckenrode and Stephen Hamilton, "One to One Support Interventions: Home Visitation and Mentoring," *Social Support Measurement and Intervention: A Guide for Health and Social Scientists*, eds. Sheldon Cohen, Lynn G. Underwood, and Benjamin H. Gottlieb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 278-308.

<sup>94</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 38.

cuts back their chance of interacting with adults.<sup>95</sup> Given the importance of social capital in the development of young people, it is shocking to observe the gap between the demand and the amount of time young people need from adults in their lives, especially when adults have the luxury of more spare time in this modernized world.

Moreover, Kang finds that young people have spent so much time on studying and extracurricular activities that they lack social capital, which is essential for equipping them with coping skills to deal with stressful or problematic life situations.<sup>96</sup> These social skills and social bonding are vital for human beings. Having a poor relationship with the family and underdeveloped social skill with peers, children often are not prepared well for a healthy adulthood. Putnam echoes this unfortunate finding. He says that today's young people have less social interaction with their friends than earlier generations. Without such a frequent connection, adolescents do not have enough support when they encounter challenges or failure in life.<sup>97</sup>

When social capital is not available to young people, they may consider adults as unnecessary and not trustworthy for them to share their inner feelings or hurts. Clark says they escape to "a world beneath, a world in which rules, expectations, a value system, and even social norms are created to maintain an environment in which the middle adolescent can achieve the single most important goal of this stage of life: survival."<sup>98</sup> This further

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<sup>95</sup> Bainbridge, *Teenagers*, 222.

<sup>96</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 42-48.

<sup>97</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 335.

<sup>98</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 39-48.

detaches adolescents from interacting with adults. Without a positive association with adults, it may lead to their self-destructive impulses or joining street gangs.<sup>99</sup>

Having low social capital, such adolescents experience high stress and generally have poorer mental health. The impact is particularly significant during their development and identity formation. It may explain why suicide is higher for adolescents with low social capital. It has been reported that a third of young people in America have suicidal ideation and 10 percent actually have taken the action. The finding also indicates that this group of young people tends to have risky behaviors and substance abuse.<sup>100</sup> Other health issues may be associated with low social capital, such as muscle or skeletal pain, depression, or psychosomatic warning signs. This shows the importance of social support in the holistic health of human beings.<sup>101</sup> As the world progresses, human beings seem to be drifting further apart and the bonding that is essential for young people is in fact diminishing.

### Stress from High Pressure

Today there are constant pressures for high performance from all sides on both parents and their children. These often include standardized test scores, high bars for school admission, and outstanding performance in extracurricular activities so as to prepare a good

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<sup>99</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 312; see also Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 46.

<sup>100</sup> Donald Langille. "Suicidal Behaviours in Adolescents in Nova Scotia, Canada: Protective Associations with Measures of Social Capital," *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology* 47, no. 10 (October 2012): 1549-1955.

<sup>101</sup> Cecilia Åslund, et al., "Social Capital in Relation to Depression, Musculoskeletal Pain, and Psychosomatic Symptoms: A Cross-Sectional Study of a Large Population-Based Cohort of Swedish Adolescents," *BMC Public Health* 10 (January 2010): 715-724.

résumé.<sup>102</sup> The definition of success is usually based on measurable achievements. It is interesting to note that working parents tend to fill their children's after-school schedule with extracurricular activities to ensure their safety and well-being.<sup>103</sup> More affluent, educated parents tend to invest time and money in their children's activities for potentially favorable consequences.<sup>104</sup> All of this packs the family schedule, which means less time for relationship. To make things worse, globalization introduces more competitions, while technology and Facebook allow people to show only the ideal sides of life and hide their negative emotions and situations from others.<sup>105</sup> Amidst such a trend, many parents push their children to get A's in school and gold medals or trophies in music, sports, and arts. They think they can employ high control to prepare a successful path for their children.

Amy Chua, author of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, is a typical example of such parents. She promotes the idea of “drill to learn” and asserts that Chinese parents realize the concept of mastery experience—essentially, “nothing is fun until you're good at it.”<sup>106</sup> Children under this heavy influence tend to find themselves constantly active and involved in hectic time tables. They can feel exhausted and pressured to be what adults expect of them and become very concerned about their grades and performance. Due to the frenetic pace, families can sacrifice relaxation and the simple time to sit down together for a meal. Even if they do, many are too exhausted to exchange meaningful

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<sup>102</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 22-23.

<sup>103</sup> Stiepick, *Tough Love*, 11.

<sup>104</sup> Putnam, *Our Kids*, 174.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>106</sup> Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, 29; see also Annie Murphy Paul, “Tiger Moms: Is Tough Parenting Really the Answer?” *Time in Partnership with CNN*, January 20, 2011.

conversation. To avoid negative interactions, children tend to withdraw from their parents.<sup>107</sup> This can lead them to experience an ever-increasing level of anxiety. Clark warns, “The worst part is, they don’t even know how stressed they are.”<sup>108</sup> In order to stay alive in a competitive school system, some children even try to avoid their parents to minimize potential conflicts or criticism.<sup>109</sup> This leads to increased anxiety and may introduce young people to various mental disorders.

God created human beings to rest on the seventh day (Exodus 23:12; 34:21). However, children under tiger parenting are so busy with work that they ignore the biological signals of not having enough rest.<sup>110</sup> Not resting once per week can give rise to many issues, including an inability to focus and depression. Xinyin Chen, Mowei Liu, and Dan Li confirm that parental unresponsiveness to a child’s emotions and feelings can lead to insecurity.<sup>111</sup> When children spend so much time in planned activities and advanced classes, they have no time to unwind, rest, or even sleep; they do not take time to eat, explore, or learn through their natural curiosity about the world around them.<sup>112</sup> Children and adolescents need sufficient rest daily to stay balanced and maintain their overall well-being.

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<sup>107</sup> Heather L. Bender et al., “Use of Harsh Physical Discipline and Developmental Outcomes in Adolescence,” *Development and Psychopathology* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 227-42.

<sup>108</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 86, 132.

<sup>109</sup> Bender et al., “Use of Harsh Physical Discipline and Developmental Outcomes in Adolescence,” 227-42.

<sup>110</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 38-39.

<sup>111</sup> Xinyin Chen, Mowei Liu, and Dan Li, “Parental Warmth, Control, and Indulgence and Their Relations to Adjustment in Chinese Children: A Longitudinal Study,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 14, no. 3 (September 2000): 401-19.

<sup>112</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 39.

Some children develop overstressed symptoms and anxiety disorders that prevent them from sleeping, even when they are lying in bed. With such a busy schedule, this may be the only time for them to process emotions encountered during the day.<sup>113</sup> Without such essentials, stress and mental illness among young people will keep rising.

### Feeling Abandoned and Hurt

Children need caring adults to provide support and navigate their path towards adulthood. D. Siegel declares that “earlier attachment relationships . . . directly shape the ability of the mind to integrate experience and to adapt to future stressors.”<sup>114</sup> Study in neuroscience also finds that the brain activity of a person for a certain kind of emotion can trigger similar brain activity in another person. This means that “as one person empathizes with their conversational partner, the other person could respond by continuing with the conversation and increasing disclosure.”<sup>115</sup> Such a dynamic may explain why parents form the base of the social relationship of their children; from their child’s birth, they are responsible for extending to them warmth and feelings of security.<sup>116</sup> Parental attachment, support, and love are essential to the healthy development of children.

However, today’s young people often complain that they are being abandoned by adults. Clark believes that “the surface of the adolescent landscape is where internal fears, loneliness, and insecurities must be held in check, where friendships are generally

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 9.

<sup>115</sup> Jillian M. Hawks et al., “Adolescents’ and Parents’ Expression of Empathy: A Social Neuroscience Perspective,” *Contemporary Family Therapy* 37, no. 2 (June 2015): 150, accessed December 12, 2017, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10591-015-9334-x>.

<sup>116</sup> Hall, *Raising Kids in the 21st Century*, 10.



shallow, and where performance and image are the name of the game.”<sup>117</sup> Teenagers complain that adults abandon them when they need them most, while parents mistakenly think that they desire to be left alone. Stiepock observes that many young people feel the adolescent experience is “lonely, cheap, and painful and just not worth living.”<sup>118</sup>

Many students with whom Clark has talked admit their feelings of loneliness. He says that “on the surface, the adolescent appears to be relatively stable and healthy. Yet beneath the calm waters presented by positive empirical data there is turmoil that is difficult, painful, lonely and even harmful.”<sup>119</sup> Generally, they perceive that adults are not there for them. During this searching stage, adolescents cannot answer many life questions. Most of them complain that there is no one to offer support or help them, so they have to figure these out alone. Clark describes their frustrating situation: “They are not waving, they are drowning.”<sup>120</sup>

Even youth, who are high achievers and for whom life seems fruitful and focused during their adolescent years, can wake up to this reality of abandonment in their mid-twenties. Without the proper guidance of caring adults as their social capital, when they try to emerge into adulthood, they can feel lost in “knowing how to get a job, managing money, cooking, or even living on their own.”<sup>121</sup> While parents cannot guarantee a smooth life without any challenges, regardless of life’s inevitable difficulties parents are

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<sup>117</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Stiepock, *Tough Love*, 90.

<sup>119</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 26.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

responsible for fostering their children’s well-being and developing their “coping skills, and therefore the resilience, that make adaptive recovery from challenge possible.”<sup>122</sup>

Many young people feel burdened by shallow friendships and the constant pressure of living up to top-performing icons. Although they seek caring parents to pay attention and show concern, they have no choice but to turn to such peers for companionship and emotional support. Studies have shown that family social support is particularly important. Research shows that “having an evening meal at least three times a week as a family reduced the odds” of having mental health issues by about a quarter and even boosts overall achievements.<sup>123</sup> From the findings of both neuroscience and social science, it is evident that young people need guidance and support from adults.

### Hemorrhaging Faith

Although postmodern thought stimulates a new search for the transcendent, many people still reject absolute truth in today’s world. They have an open mind without definite criteria and may seek God based merely on their own understanding and preference. They “seek faith without boundaries, categories, or definition. . . . [and are] “open to knowing God but on their own terms,” without any specific parameters.<sup>124</sup> People can choose to believe in something, simply because they feel it is true. Therefore, individuals may have different perspectives on faith matters. Nicola Madge, Peter J.

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<sup>122</sup> Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success* (New York: Harper, 2012), xvi.

<sup>123</sup> Rotheron, Goodwin, and Stansfield, “Family Social Support, Community ‘Social Capital,’” 700.

<sup>124</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 31.

Hemming, and Kevin Stenson say that “many young people in modern day Westernised society are best described as religious ‘in their own way.’”<sup>125</sup>

This new openness in faith matters has given rise to many alternative belief systems and cults. The New Age movement is one of today’s popular spiritual approaches. It mixes and matches practices from different faith cultures. It leads gradually into supernatural practices that often rely on psychic-related practices. Some practitioners even seek to renew ancient pagan rituals and beliefs.<sup>126</sup> Generally, they accept pluralism in deity, and this differs fundamentally from Christian belief.<sup>127</sup> Some people begrudge Christianity for dominating Western religious choice for so long and claiming Jesus as the only way to God.<sup>128</sup>

Young people may attend Christian religious events or worship, even though they secretly do not believe in God or they are an atheist. There are many possible reasons for their participation, but some share that they simply want to please their family by maintaining church-going or other religious rituals as a family tradition. They treasure the family unity and identity more than a genuine commitment in this family faith.<sup>129</sup>

Since loyalty is not a trait of postmodern culture, many young people who are believers just attend a church that fits their preference. They are not restricted to a fixed denomination or theological teachings. They also may switch to another church if the

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<sup>125</sup> Nicola Madge, Peter J. Hemming, and Kevin Stenson, *Youth on Religion: The Development, Negotiation and Impact of Faith and Non-faith Identity* (London: Routledge, 2014), 120.

<sup>126</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 44-45.

<sup>127</sup> Watson, “Transition Beyond Postmodernism,” 35.

<sup>128</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 31-34.

<sup>129</sup> Madge, Hemming, and Stenson, *Youth on Religion*, 112-113.

existing church does not satisfy their need or they think another congregation offers what they perceive as a better deal. By the same token, young people may abandon Christian faith because they do not desire it anymore.<sup>130</sup>

Even if they are Christian, after spending so much time on their studies and extracurricular activities, many prefer to engage the spare time they do have for personal use or relaxation. Consequently, congregational faith practices often fall to the bottom of their list and going to church drops by the wayside.<sup>131</sup> Religion might be seen only as a tool that “provides a moral framework. Most young adults believe that ‘right and wrong are easy’ and can be reliably discerned through intuition,”<sup>132</sup> so religion seems redundant. Even if they engage in such spiritual practice in daily life, it may be viewed as “unnecessarily restrictive.”<sup>133</sup>

The Hemorrhaging Faith Report for Canadian adolescents sheds light on this issue. Penner et al. discuss how Hemorrhaging Faith shows that “for every five Catholic and Mainline Protestant kids who attended church at least weekly in the 1980s and ’90s only one still attends at least weekly now as an adult; for those raised in Evangelical traditions it is one in two. . . . most who have quit attending altogether also have dropped their Christian affiliation.”<sup>134</sup> The Church is losing young people mostly as they move from elementary to junior high school. Research reveals that there are more male dropouts than

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<sup>130</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 37.

<sup>131</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 14.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>133</sup> Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 46.

<sup>134</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 5.

females.<sup>135</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean warns American churches that their young people are not committed to an authentic Christian faith. They just adopt a mutated version as part of what seems to be a balanced life.<sup>136</sup>

Smith and Patricia Snell explain that for many young adults “religion exists to support individuals. . . . There’s no need for religion to have to all hang together in a single, coherent package of beliefs and lifestyle.”<sup>137</sup> This precludes the perceived need for affiliating with the local Body of Christ. In addition, many young people have bad experiences with church. They complain that there is not enough loving support from the church community. They also despise the hypocrisy and lip service of Christians.<sup>138</sup> There seems to be disappointment in Christianity as experienced through the lens of local church.

When adolescents doubt or even reject the family faith with which they were raised, it can shake a family’s spiritual unity and lead to other complications. Highly controlling Christian parents have difficulty tolerating the deviation of faith within the family, so they may become anxious and bombard the adolescent with theology. Having a child who holds to a religious belief different from their own, parents may feel defeated and embarrassed within the church community. They want to shape the image their child portrays to the world, so they can manipulate the way people view them.<sup>139</sup> However, focusing on self-centered concerns prevents parents from exhibiting a genuine concern for

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>136</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>137</sup> Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 157.

<sup>138</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 59-63.

<sup>139</sup> J. O. Balswick and J. K. Balswick, *The Family*, 152-153.

the spiritual well-being of their children. Some youth want to avoid conflicts, so they may conform to the family religion even though their hearts are far from it. This paves the way for them to abandon the faith when they leave home.<sup>140</sup> Many churches and Christian families have been awakened by this alarming faith exit of the next generation—so much that new initiatives on family ministry have bloomed in recent years.<sup>141</sup>

### **Needs of Today’s Teenager**

Adolescence is a critical period for forming a home base, as youth are emerging into adulthood. Young people often ask implicitly “what kind of person they should be, who their friends ought to be, in what or whom they should place trust, or what kind of world they should make.”<sup>142</sup> With the ever-changing culture and the pressures from various sources, “they search for a locus in order to define their core and the path to follow. This helps them to construct who they become and the way they approach the world.”<sup>143</sup> Basically, they need three components, namely “identity, autonomy, and belonging,”<sup>144</sup> to lay the foundation for building up their core.

### **Searching for Self-Identity**

During adolescence, there is a common question that young people ask, “Who am I?” Stephen Palmer and Sheila Panchal state that “identity is often described in terms of

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> See Chapter 2 for further discussion on such ministry.

<sup>142</sup> Michael J. Nakkula and Eric Toshalis, *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 167.

one's interpersonal characteristics, such as self-definition or personality traits, the roles and relationships one takes on in various interactions and one's personal values or moral beliefs."<sup>145</sup> The way adolescents feel about themselves influences the self-identity they construct. The sense of how they feel about themselves and how much they value themselves affects the way they interact with others, whether at home, school, church, or work. When young people go through the critical period of puberty, they may even compare their height and weight with their peers. This can have significant impact on their self-image and self-esteem.<sup>146</sup> Michael J. Nakkula and Eric Toshalis comment:

The construction of one's life, from this perspective, occurs through and gets held together by the evolving stories we tell ourselves and the ways in which these stories become internal guideposts for ongoing and decision-making, everyday behavior, and self-understanding . . . . Having a coherent, functional sense of one's self requires ongoing, active engagement in this authoring process.<sup>147</sup>

Thus, self-identity is the product of individual psychology and one's social experience.

Bernd Simon further notes that self-identities "ensure that all cognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioural functioning take place from a socially defined vantage point and are regulated and mediated by socially produced anchor-points."<sup>148</sup> The task of constructing an identity is challenging and complex. This formed identity helps adolescents capture their personal stories and translates past events and experience into a base for

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<sup>145</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 57.

<sup>146</sup> John Bancroft and June Machover Reinisch, *Adolescence and Puberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 91.

<sup>147</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 6.

<sup>148</sup> Bernd Simon, *Identity in Modern Society: A Social Psychological Perspective*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), xiii.

supporting future possibilities. This develops into the core themes around which they formulate the meaning of life.<sup>149</sup>

This is the period when they may question things that they always have accepted during their upbringing as a norm in life, such as religion, parenting styles, and their political beliefs. This questioning can lead to what is perceived as a rebellious stage and provoke family conflicts. During this period, they may develop their own standpoint in these matters.<sup>150</sup> However, this is part of the growing process. This self-process will develop an individual personality “within a social field in which individuals always, implicitly or explicitly test the validity of their beliefs against the views of others with whom they share a relevant social identity.”<sup>151</sup> With a healthy identity and self-image, adolescents have a better chance of leading a fruitful life with fewer worries. They have a healthier interaction with people, and the chance of addiction also is minimized.<sup>152</sup>

Those with whom one interacts “influence and speak into one’s life story. This means parents naturally become a ‘co-author’”<sup>153</sup> of the adolescent’s life. They have a great impact in the identity formation of their children. Elkind echoes this and says, “Identity formation requires a kind of envelope of adult standards, values, and beliefs that the adolescent can confront and challenge in order to construct and test out her own

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<sup>149</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 3-4.

<sup>150</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 57.

<sup>151</sup> Simon, *Identity in Modern Society*, xiv.

<sup>152</sup> Ellen Purser and James Windell, *Building Children’s Self-esteem: A Guide for Parents and Teachers* (Waterford, MI: Minerva Press, 1987), 94.

<sup>153</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 7.



standards, values and beliefs.”<sup>154</sup> They need to look up to a role model and have a place for “social experimentation.”<sup>155</sup> However, today’s adults have looser standards and values, so adolescents do not get the support of this adult envelope. They have to look for their own ways or struggle through a difficult and lonely process that may be harmful at times.<sup>156</sup> Walt Anderson claims that “this is especially challenging in the postmodern world, where there is no ‘real’ world and no true self. There are too many different realities with different ways of experiencing them.”<sup>157</sup> Cote and Levine say that postmodern society provides a great variety of identities for individuals to pick, choose, and then discard. Today’s youth sometimes cannot distinguish between real and false self.<sup>158</sup> This further causes confusion and complexity for young people emerging into adulthood without a well-defined identity.

### Autonomy

Autonomy is the desire of individuals to direct their own life and aims at an internal control. Many young people dislike being told what to do, even though the words may stem from good intent. Children and adolescents may resist when they feel their personal freedom is controlled or threatened by their parents. Eric Amsel and Judith G. Smetana write: “This reasoning reflects adolescents’ attempts to understand the self,

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<sup>154</sup> David Elkind, *A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child: Birth to Sixteen* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1994), 197; see also Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 26.

<sup>155</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 23.

<sup>156</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 26.

<sup>157</sup> Walt Anderson, *Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 152.

<sup>158</sup> Cote and Levine, *Identity, Formation, Agency, and Culture*, 41.

construct an identity, and assert control over specific areas of their lives. Rather than reflecting defiance and resistance to parents' authority, these responses are part of a developmental and conceptual system of social knowledge that has been referred to as the personal domain."<sup>159</sup> Therefore, this same desire for autonomy gives young people the motivation to reach out to explore the world and enter fields that matter to them. Through free play and exploration, they may discover and develop the passion of mastering a subject regardless of challenges.<sup>160</sup>

It also encourages the continuous stretching of their potential. Such autonomy enables adolescents to engage in something that is beyond them. As the main social capital of their children, parents must gradually release an appropriate amount of autonomy to them according to their age and maturity level. During this stage of life journey, parents have to walk side by side with their teenagers,<sup>161</sup> in order to help them develop their autonomy. Parents have to be more flexible with their adolescent children, while expecting responsible decision-making and commitment. Instead of making a decision for them, parents are advised to brainstorm alternative ways to assist them in the decision process. This will help them to think through different options and make a commitment to the decision.<sup>162</sup> By doing so, adolescents can see their parents as role models and guides instead of the controller of their lives.

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<sup>159</sup> Eric Amsel and Judith G. Smetana, *Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental and Constructivist Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 141.

<sup>160</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2013), 23.

<sup>161</sup> Young-Eisendrath, *The Self-esteem Trap*, 69.

<sup>162</sup> Hall, *Raising Kids in the 21st Century*, 83-84.

Clark vividly offers the tightrope model to describe the adolescent stage of life. On one side of the post is childhood, and on the other is emerging adulthood with adolescence in the middle as the tightrope.<sup>163</sup> In his opinion, when children reach early adolescence, they seek independence just like someone crossing a tightrope. During this stage, they try to discover who they are as a unique person and revolve around the question: “Who am I?” Just like an acrobat crossing the tightrope, adolescents think that they have to walk alone on it from one side to the other end. No one can walk the tightrope for another person.<sup>164</sup>

To survive on the tightrope, teenagers need self-confidence, which is closely related to self-esteem. Although parents have good intentions, if they disregard their children’s need for independence, uniqueness, individuality and make all choices in their lives, children lose the opportunity to experiment. Adolescents emerge into their adult identity through both failure and success. As they learn how to deal with daily challenges, they benefit from the gradual growth of self-confidence. Parents who use their authority to control this process subtly instill a sense of dependence in their teenager.<sup>165</sup> Although parents may have more knowledge and skills, adolescents need to learn to get things done by themselves through easy and difficult ways. Tim Kimmel says, “Half-successful attempts enhance their confidence much more than our sophisticated ‘best shots’ at getting the job done well.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 2001), 50-51.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 207.

<sup>166</sup> Tim Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control: How to Deal with Powerful Personalities* (Scottsdale, AZ: Family Matters, 2005), 27.

Due to immediate reward, adolescents may like taking risks regardless of their growth in knowledge and logical thought. However, this can develop their impulse control to emerge into stable adulthood.<sup>167</sup> It is not healthy for adolescents to keep revolving around their parents as a permanent apron string. Such children can seem like a puppet, without learning to form their own vision. They are so used to receiving help and input from adults that they cannot make solo decisions, even when they grow up. Such a relational dynamic can lead to anxiety and depression in the adolescent.<sup>168</sup>

Clark observes that “by the time children, even the successful ones, reach high school and middle adolescence, they are aware of the fact that for most of their lives they have been pushed, prodded, and molded to become a person whose value rests in his or her ability to serve someone else’s agenda.”<sup>169</sup> As they grow older, the relationship may turn downhill as they want to be released from their parents. Since they still need the relational support during this development stage, they may transfer their dependency to their peer group as a co-author of their life story.<sup>170</sup> This is fine if the group is a healthy, positive, and reliable influence, but adolescents may find themselves in turmoil from the influence of a bad crowd.

### Sense of Belonging

Besides being a well-behaved high achiever at school, young people need to develop a strong bond with their parents and a healthy relationship with the world. This

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<sup>167</sup> Amsel and Smetana, *Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities*, 59.

<sup>168</sup> Stiepock, *Tough Love*, 11.

<sup>169</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 40-41.

<sup>170</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 36-37.

sense of belonging may come from their siblings, parents, school, church, and community. Parents have the opportunity to promote a healthy sense of belonging in their children, beginning in early childhood and gradually into their teen years. This family bond can provide a safe cushion for them to land on, when they face challenges or negative situations. Hall emphasizes that “belonging can be considered the cornerstone of good Ph (psychology) because of the nature of cognitive and social growth within the family environment.”<sup>171</sup> As youth emerge into adulthood, this enables them to interact appropriately with their spouse, children, and colleagues. Young people need to develop a healthy sense so that they can “become an integral part of their world, experience the ups and downs of a life with grace, and make the most of their limited time on this earth.”<sup>172</sup>

Young people desperately seek authentic relationships and a community with integrity, particularly when they do not find any long-term commitment within their postmodern world. Authentic relationships guide them in realizing the importance of social values and ethics.<sup>173</sup> By doing so, young people can establish a safe place where they have a sense of belonging. No longer do they need to rely on their performance to establish a secure position within the community. It is also not necessary for them to build their self-esteem based on achievements. Instead, they can thrive from close ties to people around them. During the transition, it is important for parents to walk alongside them so that their adolescent children can have a safe harbor in which to anchor a healthy sense of belonging in today’s changing world. Amsel and Smetana warn that parent-child

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<sup>171</sup> Hall, *Raising Kids in the 21st Century*, 66-67.

<sup>172</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 107.

<sup>173</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 38-43.

relationships may decline during the adolescent stage.<sup>174</sup> However, regardless the strong peer influence on them, parental influence is still at the top of the list. Many young people may choose friends that have similar values as their parents.<sup>175</sup> Therefore, parents should never give up on nurturing their adolescent children, even though they may seem defiant.

Spending casual and spontaneous time in community also helps to provide a safe place in which young people can establish their sense of belonging. Johnston finds that “simply being together and talking about life helps them know that they’re not alone in their common struggles and longings.”<sup>176</sup> Not feeling alone or abandoned is crucial. Gene Edward Veith says, “The combination of social changes, technological developments, and postmodernist ideology has under-mined the very principle of a unified national culture and has driven individuals to find their identities in subcultures.”<sup>177</sup> People feel accepted with a sense of security through these subcultures. Faith community is one type of subculture within the church context. Madge, Hemming, and Stenson report that many young people have enjoyed being in a religious community, because “being able to trust others who shared similar beliefs and values, and learn[ing] from those who were more knowledgeable, were important aspects.”<sup>178</sup> However, many young people experience criticism and judgment from older people in the church, so they leave their faith

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<sup>174</sup> Amsel and Smetana, *Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities*, 139.

<sup>175</sup> Hall, *Raising Kids in the 21st Century*, 107.

<sup>176</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 55.

<sup>177</sup> Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 144; see also Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 55.

<sup>178</sup> Madge, Hemming, and Stenson, *Youth on Religion*, 105.

community.<sup>179</sup> Without a safe harbor that offers them a sense of belonging, young people may feel lonely and depressed during this critical developmental stage. After presenting the flip side of the current situation, the context of North American parents, Part Two of this project will offer theological reflections on how caring followers of God can offer youth a safe refuge during their crucial human development.

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<sup>179</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 61-62.

## CHAPTER 2

### CURRENT CONTEXT OF NORTH AMERICAN PARENTS

In order to suggest ways for North American parents to support the development of their teenagers, it is essential to understand their current context. Due to financial burdens and modern trends, many North American families have dual-working parents.<sup>1</sup> Without deep support from extended families and community, many parents experience stress trying to raise their children. They often have to fulfill their role as a parent, labor in the work force, and meet their responsibilities as a citizen in the community.<sup>2</sup> If they have an active Christian faith, they likely are church members and are involved in ministry. As parents try to support their children's holistic development, they often face competing situations and challenges at home, in society, and at church.

#### **Parenting in the Household**

In an ever-changing and competitive world, the role of parents in the household is transforming. The structure is shifting from a nuclear family to a permeable family.<sup>3</sup> Under

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<sup>1</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 191-195.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-203.

<sup>3</sup> David Elkind, *Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8.



the pressure of performance-driven culture,<sup>4</sup> many parents are pushing their children to attain high achievements.<sup>5</sup> This can lead to conflicts between parents and children. The clash of cultures also can contribute to a barrier in communication between the generations, making parents feel helpless as they try to understand their children,<sup>6</sup> let alone nurture them.

### Permeable Family

The image of the nuclear family has been considered a norm in the past.<sup>7</sup> In the modern world, a nuclear family consists of a pair of married adults and their children. This social structure traditionally has been viewed as offering stability to its members. It is an individual family unit that is walled off from the rest of the society.<sup>8</sup>

This family model usually provides consistency that enables children to flourish and have a better chance of healthier development. However, in recent decades, permeable family has been emerging rapidly. Unlike the stereotypical nuclear family, permeable family is open to any social influences. In modern Western culture, nuclear family structure has transformed into a more fluid and flexible form. That includes single-parent family due to divorce or parental bereavement, adoptive family, blended family with remarrying couples who bring children from a previous marriage, and same-gender-parent family.<sup>9</sup> With changes in the familial structure, individual members may

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<sup>4</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Lui and Rollock, "Tiger Mother," 452.

<sup>7</sup> Elkind, *All Grown Up & No Place to Go*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

value their own goals or activities as a higher priority than the family's mutual interest. This provides for increased autonomy for individuals,<sup>10</sup> but it affects family unity and its dynamics.

With the increasing number of divorced families, children feel its full impact in all aspects of life. Very often children are not informed about the family crisis until after the fact. Many parents are so disturbed emotionally that they are not aware of the needs of their troubled children. They cannot provide the necessary support to their children for handling challenges and may even rely on their children for emotional sustenance.<sup>11</sup> Suzy Yehl Marta warns that children may not know how to grieve, and this exerts a negative influence on their development.<sup>12</sup> Young people in a divorced family desperately need support from the parents to go through the deep waters of family crisis.

Blended family makes the situation even more complicated. When children have to adopt strangers as relatives beyond their choice, it can lead to instability, disruptions in identity, and emotional disturbance. A stepfather may feel guilty for putting aside his own children from the first marriage, while a young stepmother may not exert effective discipline on a teenage stepchild due to the narrow age difference. Very often, children will transfer their resentment to the new stepparent or stepsiblings.<sup>13</sup> Kevin Leman declares that blended family is not a proper term as the blending is not completed yet. It is

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<sup>10</sup> *Psychology Dictionary*, s.vv. "What Is Permeable Family?" accessed July 25, 2016, <http://psychologydictionary.org/permeable-family/>.

<sup>11</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Suzy Yehl Marta, *Healing the Hurt, Restoring the Hope: How to Guide Children and Teens Through Times of Divorce, Death, and Crisis with the Rainbows Approach* (USA: Saw Robin Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 150-51.

always in process and may never reach its completion at the end.<sup>14</sup> Children growing up in such a family condition need extra support from loved ones.

The issue of same-sex marriage also impacts children, especially when they are forming their own gender identity. They can become confused with the role of a father and that of a mother, especially if the parent was functioning as heterosexual previously. This can lead to mixed feelings and frustration for youth in the development of their own gender role. Since same-gender marriage is still not commonly accepted as a norm in all of society, children from such a family may experience discrimination or embarrassment. This pressure may introduce a time bomb during their growing stage.

#### Clash of Cultures

Besides the change in family structure, with high technology and open trade, the world is moving rapidly towards globalization. Immigration influxes further promote multiculturalism around the world. Cultures consist of “beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices, such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life.”<sup>15</sup> As new immigrants land in a new country, they will encounter local cultures that are different from their own. This is known as acculturation, which is a phenomenon “when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous

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<sup>14</sup> Kevin Leman, *Living in a Step-Family Without Getting Stepped On: Helping Your Children Survive the Birth Order Blender* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (April 1986): 273; see also Cote and Levine, *Identity, Formation, Agency, and Culture*, 122.

first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.”<sup>16</sup> It is simply how people adopt local cultures and values.<sup>17</sup>

Nowadays acculturation becomes more multi-directional and multi-dimensional, and the degree of impact depends on the social capital or position people possess before and after immigration.<sup>18</sup> It seems that the impact is particularly significant when East meets West. D. Siegel observes that when immigrant parents interact with their acculturated children, it can easily trigger negative and intense images from the culture of origin. A preoccupation with past experiences can impact the effectiveness of their parenting.<sup>19</sup>

Most immigrant families experience acculturation. If they face language barriers or discrimination in the new country, the transition can be more challenging. According to John W. Berry, younger people generally have a higher adaptation rate to the new culture, but this can introduce intergenerational conflicts at home.<sup>20</sup> In a pluralistic society, it is possible to have multiple social structures, fusions, or subcultures that preserve part of the minor cultures.<sup>21</sup> This offers the flexibility of having the coexistence of different cultures within a community.

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits, “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation,” *American Anthropologist* 38, no. 1 (January – March 1936): 149, accessed December 11, 2017, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1525/aa.1936.38.1.02a00330/epdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, *Raising Kids in the 21st Century*, 119.

<sup>18</sup> John W. Berry, “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation,” *International Journal of Applied Psychology* 46, no. 1 (January 1997): 91.

<sup>19</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 131.

<sup>20</sup> Berry, “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation,” 91-93.

<sup>21</sup> Cote and Levine, *Identity, Formation, Agency, and Culture*, 124-125.

Many immigrant parents have concerns regarding the potentially negative impact of children not following the norm or social order of their original culture.<sup>22</sup> Chinese immigrant families are typical examples of such a controversial dynamic. Many Chinese parents adopt an authoritarian approach,<sup>23</sup> because in their culture it emphasizes submission and respect from the younger generations. The study of Yiyuan Xu and his colleagues affirms this belief takes shape as “Asian cultural values of collectivism, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, and humility.”<sup>24</sup> It is likely that such a high-controlling parenting approach is passed down subtly from generation to generation.

Priscilla P. Lui and David Rollock say that many Asian parents view their children as their continuation, so children are expected to submit fully to parents and excel to maintain the good reputation of the family. They feel embarrassed with any low performance or improper behavior of their young ones.<sup>25</sup> Since this doctoral project has been developed in a Chinese-Canadian context, understanding such dynamics is crucial.

### Gap in Technology

Many adults are considered “digital immigrants,” whereas children and youth are considered “digital natives.”<sup>26</sup> Many parents only got to know the digital world after they

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<sup>22</sup> Amsel and Smetana, *Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities*, 143

<sup>23</sup> Suet-ling Pong, Lingxin Hao, and Erica Gardner, “The Roles of Parenting Styles and Social Capital in the School Performance of Immigrant Asian and Hispanic Adolescents,” *Social Science Quarterly* 86 (November 11, 2005): 928-50.

<sup>24</sup> Yiyuan Xu et al., “Mainland Chinese Parenting Styles and Parent-Child Interaction,” *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 29, no. 6 (November 2005): 524-31.

<sup>25</sup> Lui and Rollock, “Tiger Mother,” 451.

<sup>26</sup> John G. Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

reached adulthood.<sup>27</sup> However, for younger generations, high technology already existed when they were born. It seems instinctual for them, because they can pick up new skills quickly and use technology with ease.

Johnston describes it well: “While baby boomers were more consumed with downloading information and data, generation Xers want to interact with what’s being said and see the way something works in everyday life. Boomers are the products of TV screens and busters are the product of computer screens.”<sup>28</sup> Parents usually have a more passive type of engagement, using technology as an enhancement to their original social culture. However, for their children, media simply means an interactive experience.<sup>29</sup> Through this interactivity, young people often use technology as a means to establish their identity.

Parents may want to talk more about media with their children but often lack knowledge. In contrast, young people are unwilling to spend time to explain it to adults who seem naïve in technology. They are impatient and do not want to put their digital experience in a language their parents can understand.<sup>30</sup> Some parents are concerned about the negative impact technology may impose on young people. They can worry about teenagers’ school grades and lack of sleep due to spending so much time in the digital world. Such parents may regard digital media as a virtual enemy. Instead, parents need to step into their child’s digital world to gain a better understanding and create an appropriate family plan, rather than taking an exhausting and defensive position.

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<sup>27</sup> Powell, Bamford, and Griffin, *Right Click*, 36-37.

<sup>28</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 56.

<sup>29</sup> Powell, Bamford, and Griffin, *Right Click*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-46.

## High-Controlling Parenting

Human beings at times have a desire to control in order to protect themselves from any external forces, especially in case of emergency.<sup>31</sup> Most adolescents agree that parents have the right “to regulate moral, conventional, and prudential issues.”<sup>32</sup> Sometimes such controls are valid and necessary, but seeking to control can become problematic if the control is exercised for some selfish agenda or benefit.<sup>33</sup> It is fine for a parent to extend behavioral control on a child so as to set limits and supervision to teach maturity. However, some parents use psychological control, guilt trips, or love withdrawal to manipulate their child’s emotions and behavior.<sup>34</sup> According to J. O. Balswick and J. K. Balswick, “control” is defined as directing the child to behave according to the desire of the parents, while “support” is defined as giving the child a sense of parental warmth and acceptance.<sup>35</sup>

Maryann Rosenthal and Dale Fetherling identify four parenting styles—namely authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved. Authoritarian parenting is defined as controlling with low responsiveness, demanding obedience but providing little warmth or support while uninvolved parents are at the other extreme, giving a great range of

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<sup>31</sup> Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Amsel and Smetana, *Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities*, 146.

<sup>33</sup> Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Craig H. Hart, Lloyd D. Newell, and Suzanne Frost Olsen, “Parenting Skills and Social-Communicative Competence in Childhood,” in *Handbook of Communication and Social Interaction Skills*, eds. John O. Greene and Brant R. Burlison (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2003), 753-97.

<sup>35</sup> J. O. Balswick and J. K. Balswick, *The Family*, 105.

freedom.<sup>36</sup> Neither extreme is desirable but many parents still adopt these styles, especially authoritarian parenting. Very often, parents have the good intent and desire to ensure their children's safety, healthy development of body and character, and flourishing life prospects. However, it is a challenge to define reasonable boundaries for both parties. Amsel and Smetana find that "adolescents and parents have different interpretations of the issues that cause conflict in their relationships. Adolescents claim personal jurisdiction over issues that parents view as social-conventional or prudential."<sup>37</sup> As parents and children disagree on the boundary for legitimate authority, conflicts are inevitable within the family.

There may be other factors at work. Parents today can encounter turmoil in marriage, illness, and other negative life experiences—for example, abandonment, unemployment, and the accumulation of excessive debt. Such pressures may contribute to the desire to try to control everything around them, including their children, in order to establish a sense of security, while the flip side of authoritarianism involves overly confident parents. They think they know best, so they tend to override their children's preferences or desires.<sup>38</sup> They do not want to take a chance that their offspring may fail and in turn cost them extra time or energy to fix problems, which might bring them embarrassment.<sup>39</sup> This fear drives their urge to get over-involved in a teen's everyday life and manipulate details.

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<sup>36</sup> Rosenthal and Fetherling, *Be a Parent, Not a Pushover*, 20-22.

<sup>37</sup> Amsel and Smetana, *Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities*, 144.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 156, 26-27.

<sup>39</sup> Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control*, 164.



However it manifests, highly controlling parents tend to protect their children from failure by making decisions for them. They can mistakenly think that pain means danger.<sup>40</sup> Sometimes children need to learn from their failures through pain as long as the situation does not induce life-threatening risk; otherwise, children may not learn how to manage their lives well and may push the responsibility of failure to someone else, instead of examining their own mistakes.<sup>41</sup> Parenting should emphasize discipleship instead of discipline, because God has created children as “active agents in their own development and that the role of parenting is one of preparing the young to grow in discernment and wisdom.”<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, human beings must learn self-control as an essential to become a healthy, independent individual. This involves the need to claim responsibility for their actions and consequences on others.<sup>43</sup>

When children become increasingly dependent on parental orders or external rewards to become motivated, they cannot develop internal self-control. Such young people tend to be motivated by rewards and encounter difficulty when attempting to handle challenges in life.<sup>44</sup> Angela R. MacPhee and Jac J. W. Andrews warn that when parents are over-reactive, their children tend to have low self-esteem,<sup>45</sup> because they are

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Cloud and John Sims Townsend, *Boundaries with Kids: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Children* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 135.

<sup>41</sup> Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control*, 161-162.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts and Talbot, *Limning the Psyche*, 185.

<sup>43</sup> Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control*, 27.

<sup>44</sup> Kang, *The Dolphin Way*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Angela R. MacPhee and Jac J. W. Andrews, “Risk Factors for Depression in Early Adolescence,” *Adolescence* 41 (Fall 2006): 435-66.

used to relying on parental instructions. When these parents leave their children, such adolescents or adults may be tempted to seek others to exert control over them later in life. When one member has obsessive control over another member, it can hinder the development of genuine intimacy and trust.<sup>46</sup> Although children in a highly controlling home environment may seem compliant to their parents, parent-child bonding can lack warmth, openness, and intimacy. As indicated by Clark, “the family is the primary source of the relational and emotional stability necessary for healthy development.”<sup>47</sup>

### Frustration in Parenting

While today’s North American parents may have higher levels of education than past generations, many are without extended families around them in today’s modern world and seem to hunger for knowledge on how to raise children. Thomas Gordon claims that when young couples become parents, they have no one to teach them parenting skills. As they become parents, they may pressure themselves to raise a super child without making the same mistakes as their own parents. The burden increases, which makes their parenting less effective.<sup>48</sup> Nowadays, many children keep demanding what they want as an entitlement while the parents may think that they owe everything to their children. This can lead children to develop a mentality that there is no consequence in what they have done

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<sup>46</sup> Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control*, 28.

<sup>47</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 95.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Tested New Way to Raise Responsible Children* (New York: P. H. Wyden, 1970), 13-14.

and they are not motivated to achieve anything.<sup>49</sup> With such high expectations and their great investment of time and money, parents can set themselves up for disappointment and even resent children who do not reach a desired goal.

In addition, today's young people are maturing at an earlier age, so they may reject their parents at a younger age. This can lead to the decline of parent-child relationship and cause great frustration for parents.<sup>50</sup> Parents may start to see themselves as failures. While parents may make mistakes in raising children, at times they are blamed unfairly for troubles caused by young people—such as failing at school, drug addiction, violence, crime, or mental illness. In light of such blaming, Gordon stands up for parents. He claims that they also need support to learn the proper way to do a good job in parenting, instead of just receiving endless blame.<sup>51</sup>

In their frustration and confusion, parents begin looking to experts for advice on how to parent, discipline, toilet train, and other basic skills. Such parents sometimes feel powerless to provide later the kind of guidance they believe their teenagers need.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, they look to different resources or workshops that offer insights for effective parenting. Seeing themselves with a lack of knowledge, they can lose self-confidence in raising their children. Elkind notices that “many of these books about children and adolescents say little about child development and suggest that the same techniques and

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<sup>49</sup> Richard M. Eyre and Linda Eyre, *The Entitlement Trap: How to Rescue Your Child With a New Family System of Choosing, Earning, and Ownership* (New York: Avery, 2011), 2-5.

<sup>50</sup> Bainbridge, *Teenagers*, 222.

<sup>51</sup> Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training*, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 14.

verbal formulae are appropriate for preschoolers, children, and adolescents.”<sup>53</sup> Since individual parent and child may have a different background and personality from other families, it is not a good idea to apply one formula to all. While parents have piles of parenting books on their shelf and attend many seminars, their parenting skills often do not bear any fruit.

Some youth reject their parents with harsh interactions in their efforts to individuate. Conscientious parents may feel hurt personally when pondering their love and effort in nurturing their children and guiding them to walk the most promising path. Some parents even develop resentment against their overly dependent young adults whom they now perceive as a burden.<sup>54</sup> Such parents can be clueless as to what they should do and how to convey love and support to their beloved children in an appropriate way.

### **Parenting in Society**

Just like their children, today’s parents are impacted greatly by their current culture. Bronfenbrenner writes:

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded.<sup>55</sup>

These “larger contexts” affect parenting and the way children are being nurtured. The fast developing pace of North America exerts implicit pressure on parents, both in financial matters and time. In light of constant mobilization and immigration, many young couples

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 21.

do not live close to their families and intimate relatives. This decreases the support and social capital they might receive, particularly in parenting and caring for their young ones.

### Financial and Time Burdens

Even though there was a major financial recession in early 1975, most Americans survived the crisis with their family income, which was still high enough to satisfy the most important expenses. However, in 1999 this statistic dropped, indicating that more people now have financial worries and economic troubles.<sup>56</sup> The rough waters of today's global economy still exist. Materialism further contributes to the general financial burdens on families. As a result, many people devote an increasing amount of time to work or lean on more than one income to cover family expenses.

As the general educational level of women has increased, it is common for them to stay in the work force after marriage and children. Dual-career families with young children require childcare service during work hours. Elkind states that "more than 4,000 firms either support childcare services or have childcare facilities on their premises. The workplace is now moving into the homeplace just as the homeplace is moving into the workplace."<sup>57</sup> Sometimes, families may complain that the money they spend on such services is even higher than the monthly income of an individual parent, but many parents are not willing or able to give up current job opportunity.

Some parents are not satisfied with the public school system. They prefer to spend money on tuition to send their children to a private school for better education. Private

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<sup>56</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 192.

<sup>57</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 35.

education is a costly item on the list of family expenses. Many school children also participate in extracurricular activities—such as piano lessons, swimming classes, sports teams, academic tutoring, and the like. Putnam declares that these activities usually produce desirable benefits and provide a way of social upward mobility, so parents are willing to invest increasing time and money in them.<sup>58</sup> The extra money parents spend on tutoring and activity/equipment fees to supplement a standard education further contributes to their financial burdens.

With the influence of consumerism, parents have extra financial burdens to satisfy the desires of their children.<sup>59</sup> In addition, when today’s teenagers become young adults, it seems difficult for them to find a decent job after college graduation to establish their career. With the general delay in reaching independent adulthood, many young adults either continue with post-graduate studies or just stay home to look for the right moment to step into the job market. That means they often rely on their parents financially, thus laying further burdens on the family to absorb expenses.<sup>60</sup> Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Rubén G. Rumbaut, and Richard A. Settersten, Jr. say that when young adults face financial challenges, it may affect their timetable in marriage and having children. It then leads to less time for fertility, which can “ultimately reduce the workforce, and further

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<sup>58</sup> Putnam, *Our Kids*, 174-176.

<sup>59</sup> For more details, see related discussion on this topic in Chapter 1 under “Consumerism.”

<sup>60</sup> Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Rubén G. Rumbaut, and Richard A. Settersten, Jr., “On the Frontier of Adulthood: Emerging Themes and New Directions,” in *Network on Transitions to Adulthood Policy Brief*, no. 1 (October 2004), accessed August 10, 2016, <http://files.umwblogs.org/blogs.dir/1160/files/2008/05/adulthdnewthemestrاد.pdf>.

aggravate the problem of providing both for increasing numbers of the elderly and for the young.”<sup>61</sup> This dynamic can impact both individual families and the broader community.

It becomes a vicious cycle and puts more financial burden on society as a whole. As household expenses increase, families have no other choice but to have both parents work to support the family. More time working means less time with family. Married couples spent an average of fourteen more hours at work each week in 1998 than in 1969.<sup>62</sup> Given the increased activity and influences of globalization, the rate likely is higher now. Putnam observes that when people spend more time at work, they tend to feel more rushed. In this hectic schedule, they generally spend less time in personal relaxation and leisure.<sup>63</sup> This also affects the amount of quality time parents can spend with their children. In such a stressful environment, family interaction time has decreased, especially when a significant number of spare hours has been spent on extracurricular activities. Elkind claims that “over the last twenty years young people have lost about twelve hours of parental interaction each week.”<sup>64</sup> This puts more time burdens on parents, because they try to support children by attending all their activities. With all these time-consuming and exhausting engagements, there is little time left for developing the parent-child relationship,<sup>65</sup> which is one of many important factors for the healthy development of young people.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 191.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 192-196.

<sup>64</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 35-36.

## Support Needed from Community

Facing such financial and time burdens, it is beneficial for young families to receive support from their family of origin and the community. Nakkula and Toshalis find that “children’s self-understanding is strongly influenced by parental support and experiences with siblings, friends, and other important caretakers. Early life experiences weigh heavily in the shaping of subsequent behavior and self-understanding.”<sup>66</sup> The two scholars further claim that “adolescents and adults likewise depend on ongoing support to construct their realities and the internalized stories of those realities. In this sense, no one is solo author. All life stories are multi-authored.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, it is important to have a circle of caring relatives and a supportive community to walk side by side with a growing family. Support can meet the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of people and form a strong social capital for family development.

For immigrants or young couples who move away from their hometown to build new families beyond the support radar of their family of origin, such support can be a great encouragement. When caring relatives are too far away for emergencies or to lend a helping hand when their children are sick, a supportive community can offer role-modeling in parenting and access to childrearing advice.<sup>68</sup> This is vital, especially when relatives live at a distance and children may not see parental models of respecting seniors in the family.

In the past, families knew their neighborhood and community well, so they could receive support and enjoy community life even if their senior parents were absent.

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<sup>66</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 14.



However, in today's postmodern and globalized world filled with hectic schedules, many people have less spare time to connect with their neighbors or to become actively involved in community activities. There is minimal social interaction between families within the same neighborhood due to the increase in individual driving. With limited street activities, mutual support is also drastically reduced.<sup>69</sup> Putnam further finds that weekly churchgoers are more willing to serve as a volunteer in supporting young people, yet the current trend shows that the rate of involvement with religious community has dropped significantly among adolescents from poor families.<sup>70</sup> Teenagers growing up in such an atomized environment are further deprived of the social capital that is required for their healthy development.

### **Parenting in Church**

Deuteronomy 6 teaches parents to pass on God's commandments to their children. Kimmel views it like this: "Family: the domestic church" and "Church: a gathering of domestic churches."<sup>71</sup> With the recognition of the unique developmental stage of adolescence, churches also have established youth ministry to meet the need. Parents and church can be good partners in their joint efforts to nurture the young people among them. This is especially important, since "faith anchors us and provides meaning, it gives hope to our identity. . . . [particularly for] adolescents who are newly able to conceive of

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<sup>69</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 210-211.

<sup>70</sup> Putnam, *Our Kids*, 223-224.

<sup>71</sup> Tim Kimmel, *Connecting Church & Home: A Grace-based Partnership* (Nashville: Randall House, 2013), 1.

multiple and sometimes competing roles within themselves and strive to locate a consistent ‘me’ within varying and demanding allegiances.”<sup>72</sup>

### Mission of Youth Ministry

In the eighteenth century a British journalist, Robert Raikes, realized the poor children in his country had to work all the time and did not have the chance to receive any education. So he introduced the concept of Sunday school, which aimed to provide literacy training as well as Christian teaching to the children.<sup>73</sup> After the Civil War, Dwight L. Moody and a group of men transformed the Sunday school movement into a mission of evangelical Protestantism.<sup>74</sup> Christian education was further promoted by Horace Bushnell as a separate discipline.<sup>75</sup> When Arthur Wood realized that most of his church’s converts were young people, he emphasized that they should put their focus on winning young people to Christ.<sup>76</sup> Eventually, these efforts gave birth to youth ministry.

The mission of youth ministry is to walk alongside young people, with a supportive and caring heart for the sake of Christ.<sup>77</sup> In the postmodern world, young people have a deep longing for authenticity. Even though it seems that the young chase

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<sup>72</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 206.

<sup>73</sup> Crich Baptist Church: Derbyshire, UK, “Robert Raikes and the Sunday School Movement,” accessed April 24, 2015, <http://www.crichbaptist.org/robert-raikes-sunday-school-movement/>.

<sup>74</sup> David Maas, “The Life & Times of D. L. Moody,” *Christianity Today*, accessed August 10, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-25/life-times-of-d-l-moody.html>.

<sup>75</sup> David H. Jensen, “Playful Fathering: The Burden and Promise of Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*,” *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers* 1, no. 3 (Winter 2003), accessed August 10, 2016, [http://www.mensstudies.info/OJS/index.php/FATHERING/article/viewFile/192/pdf\\_7](http://www.mensstudies.info/OJS/index.php/FATHERING/article/viewFile/192/pdf_7).

<sup>76</sup> John H. Y. Briggs, *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes, GB: Paternoster, 2009), 538; see also Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 79-87.

<sup>77</sup> Borgman, *Foundations for Youth Ministry*, 3.

after success and power, they are not satisfied with earthly gains and tend to ask theological questions; but often they cannot get a satisfactory answer or proper guidance from adult Christians, and eventually they give up their spiritual pursuit.<sup>78</sup> For this reason, the mission of a genuine youth ministry has to involve evangelism, education, and life application of the learned theology.<sup>79</sup> Otherwise, youth programs only produce superficial outcomes and boast of their high attendance without delivering to youth true discipleship in Christ.

During this searching and developmental stage, young people need caring adults besides their parents to support them. However, in many churches, youth ministry is segregated as a “silo.” Silos are the tower on a farm for storing grains, and in congregations it means an isolated effort for different age-specific church groups or departments.<sup>80</sup> Youth ministry often is developed as a silo ministry, apart from adult and children’s ministry. It seems that each ministry has an independent mission and function and seldom interact. The original practice of intergenerational family and church in the past century as well as in the biblical era has been replaced by a so-called “Mickey Mouse Ear” model. This new model is especially common in megachurches and happens when the pastoral team cannot manage large congregations of different age groups. Although church members share resources and manpower, similar to the face of Mickey Mouse, individual ministries and programs—such as youth ministry, children’s ministry, discipleship classes, evangelism outreaches, worship

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 51-61.

<sup>79</sup> Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 77.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Cannister, *Teenagers Matter: Making Student Ministry a Priority in the Church (Youth, Family, and Culture)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 182-83.

team, and stewardship—are led by different committees and unique approaches.<sup>81</sup> There is little communication between ministries, just like the ears that grow from different sides of Mickey’s face. This is a big drawback for the development of a healthy youth ministry. The top challenge for youth after their high school graduation is friendship, loneliness, and finding a solid church. Many have been residing at the corner of children/youth ministry for their entire life that they simply do not know the church body itself.<sup>82</sup>

Palmer and Panchal claim that “young people struggle to belong and to be accepted and affirmed while at the same time working towards becoming individuals in their own right. The confusion, mixed in with expectations (of themselves and others), can lead to isolation, vulnerability and depression.”<sup>83</sup> Teenagers need to integrate with older believers in the Body of Christ, so they can have a role model in faith and share their own creative ideas with the more reserved seniors. It is found that when teenagers are well received beyond the boundary of youth ministry, they feel their significance in the church.

When teenagers assist in children’s ministry, they can begin to digest what they have learned all these years on Sundays and convert the learned materials into something that can bless the younger ones. Younger children delight in having big brothers or sisters who take an interest in them and build a relationship with them. This in turn serves to encourage the youth to contribute their gifts and learned Bible knowledge for the Kingdom of God.<sup>84</sup> Engaging youth as both ministry recipients and participants is a mutual way of faith-

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 100.

<sup>83</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 63.

<sup>84</sup> Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 98.

building and can give them a more realistic experience of how the Body of Christ operates. It is a win-win development for all age groups in the faith community. In *Sticky Faith*, Kara Powell and Clark suggest a 5:1 adult-to-child ratio—that is, five adults caring for one child. The church needs to make an effort to nurture such an intergenerational relationship. This bonding empowers the youth in their spiritual journey.<sup>85</sup> The church also needs to equip parents and adults with the knowledge, skills, and hearts for supporting and coaching young people.<sup>86</sup> In the bonding network with both the younger and older congregation within the church, young people can feel accepted and have a stronger sense of belonging, which is essential for them to establish roots in their spiritual development.

### Family-Church Partnership

Both family and churches are essential components for nurturing the faith of young people. Reggie Joiner promotes the “Orange” approach in which the orange color is composed by mixing two colors: red and yellow. Joiner uses red to represent home, while yellow represents church. He asserts that when the two influences are combined together, the impact is much greater than the sum of the two.<sup>87</sup> Madge, Hemming, and Stenson emphasize that families can have significant influence on the spiritual development of children, particularly through their own beliefs and attitudes.<sup>88</sup> Church leaders and counselors are also very influential in young lives. Therefore, similar to the orange concept,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 99-102.

<sup>86</sup> Phil Bell, *Team Up! The Family Ministry Playbook for Partnering with Parents* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc., 2015), 82.

<sup>87</sup> Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 23-24.

<sup>88</sup> Madge, Hemming, and Stenson, *Youth on Religion*, 156-157.

with family-church partnership, the impact on the child's faith development is magnified rather than having singular input from either side. When the strategies from both sides are aligned, they complement each other.<sup>89</sup>

Leslie J. Francis further claims that if both parents attend church, it is more likely that their children will attend as well. The noteworthy point is that children's church attendance is influenced more by their mother.<sup>90</sup> This may further impact their attitude and standpoint towards faith matters, as they emerge into adolescence. During that life stage, they may become skeptical and critical of Bible teaching they have received from their parents and church when they were young. They need to reflect, digest, and absorb the truth. As suggested by Nakkula and Toshalis, young people need the space to reflect and search for an answer on existential questions. Adults can support them to clarify their doubts during this searching process. In fact, skepticism may help them build their faith on solid ground.<sup>91</sup> Faith becomes something personal for them. In Sharon Parks' term, it is a "tested commitment."<sup>92</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis further note: "When an adolescent's faith becomes more cohesive than it is conflicted, when he finds comfort in more consistent expression of ultimacy rather than in explorations of varied possibilities, it is then that the

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<sup>89</sup> Joiner, *Think Orange*, 23-26.

<sup>90</sup> Leslie J. Francis, "Parental Influence and Adolescent Religiosity: A Study of Church Attendance and Attitude toward Christianity among Adolescents 11 to 12 and 15 to 16 Years Old," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 3, no. 4 (1993): 241-253.

<sup>91</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 220-221.

<sup>92</sup> Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 50.

person arrives at an adult faith.”<sup>93</sup> For these reasons, it is wise for parents to provide for their children this type of space and a bridge for soul searching.

Unfortunately, many parents neglect such a calling to nurture their children’s faith. Either they do not have the confidence to be spiritual leaders at home or they push this responsibility to youth pastors and counselors.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, pastors may put the blame on parents whenever there is any issue with the youth.<sup>95</sup> Since both parties are significant in the lives of adolescents, it is essential to have a tight partnership between church and parents. Church and community are called upon to support families in developing young people. Borgman offers an important reminder: “Many parents themselves were neglected or abused as children, perhaps damaged by war, trauma in the workforce, or breakdowns in society’s safety net.”<sup>96</sup> They need the support from the church to help them in building the faith of their own children. In recent years, more congregations have become aware that parent-church partnership is the essential key in developing a healthy children or youth ministry.<sup>97</sup> Suddenly, the concept of family ministry is emerging rapidly and has been at the center stage and spotlights of many Christian conferences and discussion forums.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 222.

<sup>94</sup> Bell, *Team Up*, 46.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>96</sup> Borgman, *Foundations for Youth Ministry*, 115.

<sup>97</sup> Bell, *Team Up*, 19.

<sup>98</sup> NAE: National Association of Evangelicals, “Children’s Pastor Conference 2016,” accessed August 11, 2016, <http://nae.net/event/childrens-pastors-conference-2016-chattanooga/>; see also Youth Specialties, “National Youth Workers Convention,” accessed August 11, 2016, <https://youthspecialties.com/nywc/>.

Churches need a shift in paradigm so as to implement an authentic family ministry. That is, the whole congregation needs to live as the interactive family of Christ, with each member willing to contribute in nurturing the growth of the young people among them, just as God commanded all the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6 to pass on the faith to the next generation. As the church equips parents to be spiritual leaders at home and provides appropriate devotional materials, parents can take up this spiritual assignment more passionately.<sup>99</sup>

In the baby dedication ceremony, the whole congregation makes a vow before God to commit to raise up a young life. One day, everyone who has made such a pledge has to stand before the judgement throne and give a full account to the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:10). For this reason, both parents and church must examine if they are living their promise of raising young ones with their best effort. Both have a role to play. Children need parents' help to establish a close bonding with God, while churches need to equip parents as the spiritual leader of their offspring. Parents have much more time and opportunity to teach and touch the lives of their children, but the church only has a few hours per week. Therefore, the role of churches should focus more on equipping parents than simply coordinating a fun-filled youth program.

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<sup>99</sup> Bell, *Team Up*, 19-21.



PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3  
PHYSIOLOGICAL AND NEUROLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF TEENAGERS

Psalm 119:105 reads: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” Yahweh’s law and His teaching are like a lantern that lights up the life journey of human beings, so they do not easily stray from the right path and end up in darkness and confusion. Frank Lothar Hossfeld, Erich Zenger, and Klaus Baltzer explain that “the burning (oil-) lamp is at the same time a metaphor for successful living, while the extinguishing of the lamp signals misfortune and death. . . . [it] indicates the twofold function of Torah. It gives orientation and puts everything in the right light.”<sup>1</sup> For this reason, parents seeking ways to support their adolescent children need to use the Bible as their “lamp” and reflect on God’s Word as their source of guidance. This is because God’s Word “assures the believer of a covenantal relationship with the Lord, gives ‘joy’ to the heart, and rewards those who persevere in doing right.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Lothar Hossfeld, Erich Zenger, and Klaus Baltzer, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011), 278.

<sup>2</sup> Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, gen. eds., *Psalms*, vol. 5 of *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 879.

Part Two of this discussion, comprised of Chapters 3 through 5, seeks wisdom from God’s Word regarding the physiological, psychological, and spiritual development of adolescents. Andrew Root and Dean assert that properly supporting adolescents during their development “demands that we see the adolescent from a contextual perspective, as one who is affected by multiple forces.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Part Two attempts to accomplish this task by leading Christian leaders and parents to consider more deeply their teens and their context from a theological point of view. Root and Dean comment:

You may look at some social scientific research to help you see why adolescents do the things they do . . . but reflection on our experience demands more if it is to be theological. It is here that the normative texts of the Christian tradition become essential. . . . Scripture is not God, but it is, after all, a normative set of assertions about the shape of God’s Ministry. We need Scripture and the Christian tradition to have a vision to see God’s action in and through our experience.<sup>4</sup>

Such words ring especially true in this present chapter, which touches on neuroscience to understand the impact of brain development in adolescents. Stanton L. Jones advises Christians to “extend their knowledge beyond the words of Scripture by exercising their reason and learning from experience (i.e., science), with both of these latter activities continually subjected to the authority of God’s special revelation.”<sup>5</sup> This is because God “is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever” (Psalm 146:6). In honoring God’s creation and studying the

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 42.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>5</sup> Stanton L. Jones, *Psychology and the Christian Faith: An Introductory Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1986), 31-32.

Scriptures, those who seek to support the healthy development of teenagers “may experience and understand more of his revelation.”<sup>6</sup>

In particular, this chapter explores the physiological development of adolescents. “The human life-span is built around the centrepiece of adolescence. . . . This is why the teenage years are the difficult years; it is because they are the important years. Teenagers deserve adults’ support in their uniquely human mental quest because they are simply more important than everyone else.”<sup>7</sup> They are “more important” at this stage, because they are the future shapers of society and as tomorrow’s adults will influence the next generation. Such physiological development during the adolescent years is a vital aspect of the human life journey. Navigating it well proves crucial due to many changes physically and neurologically within the body that can have a lifelong impact.

### **Bible Teaching on the Body**

According to James C. Peterson, Gnostics in the early era tried to minimize the significance of the physical body; however, “the body is real and does matter.”<sup>8</sup> In Psalm 139:13-14, the psalmist describes God’s creation of the human body in a beautiful way. He writes: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” God created heaven and earth—but He created human beings with many details and an amazing design. Each body part functions together with the others, like a

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<sup>6</sup> Chap Clark and Kara Eckmann Powell, *Deep Ministry in Shallow World: Not-So-Secret Findings About Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Bainbridge, *Teenagers*, 308.

<sup>8</sup> James C. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature: Ecology, Ethics, Genes, and God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 65.

piece of knitted art. God knows each human being. He cares and protects for individuals over their lifetime. For this alone, God deserves all honor and praise from humanity.

Hossfeld, Zenger, and Baltzer state in their commentary that even though the inmost being literally means the kidneys, it actually points to “the whole person from the core outward.”<sup>9</sup> When God created human beings (Genesis 2:7), He included both physical and spiritual components. When people are formed in their mother’s womb, God crafts them as holistic individuals in a wonderful way. In the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, scholars explain that the psalmist praised God for the two parts of a human creation: the spiritual element, which is the inmost being, as well as the physical part, which is knitted together in the maternal belly.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is useless to deny the significance, influence, and impact of an individual’s physical body when suggesting ways for parents to support the holistic development of their children. “The body is where we human beings live and interact with God and each other.”<sup>11</sup>

When Paul mentioned that believers have to escape from their body, he actually meant the flesh, which is the “embedded patterns of sinful perspective and choice.”<sup>12</sup> He did not literally mean that people should divorce themselves from their physical being. The blessing and gift of the God-follower’s physical being is indicated implicitly by the psalmist, who writes: “My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the

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<sup>9</sup> Hossfeld, Zenger, and Baltzer, *Psalms 3*, 541.

<sup>10</sup> Longman and Garland, *Psalms*, 962.

<sup>11</sup> Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:15-16). God has created human beings with a physical body and a mind, so they can carry out the purpose God has designed in and through their individual existence.<sup>13</sup>

Not only does God watch over His created beings every moment and everywhere, letting them enjoy His presence (Joshua 1:9), He also gives them the ability to have “a personal awareness of God’s gracious purpose.”<sup>14</sup> The psalmist confirms this in Psalm 139:14 when he says, “I know that full well.” Acknowledging and respecting one’s physiological development honors God’s beautiful creation of humanity. To comprehend this fully, it is necessary to dive into neuroscience. In *Changing Human Nature*, Peterson writes: “Human beings live where the physical and spiritual worlds meet. Material nature includes the human body. The human body includes the human brain. The human brain includes the human mind. The human mind can be open to spiritual life.”<sup>15</sup> With such openness to “where the physical and spiritual worlds meet,” it is the objective of this theological reflection to gain an understanding of physical growth—in particular, puberty and brain development—so parents can support their children’s holistic development and not just be lopsided in focusing on their spiritual maturity.

Only then can parents and Christian leaders guide youth into becoming mature stewards of their body. Since God is the creator of human beings, including the physical body, youth who follow God need to learn how to wisely use their body to accomplish His purpose and plan for their lives. The ultimate goal is to bring glory and honor to God and

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<sup>13</sup> Longman and Garland, *Psalms*, 962.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 65.

give praises to Him. This teaching is demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 6:19, which says that the “body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.” If a person’s physical body has such significant value, parents have to try their best to support the physical growth of their children in the full scope of a holistic development, so as to lead them to reach the purpose of God’s design in their young life and understand how the body is to house the Holy Spirit.

### Science and Faith

Science and Faith are commonly depicted as two opposite ends of the human spectrum, especially in today’s technologically advanced Western culture. In *Psychology and the Christian Faith*, Jones writes: “The belief that science should have little or nothing to do with religion is quite prevalent.”<sup>16</sup> With the advancement of Science, “many secular, anti-religious scholars have asserted their religion has always stood for dogmatic certainty, superstition, and authoritarian control, while science is on an open-minded, noble quest for truth, and thus that the two forces have been locked in conflict.”<sup>17</sup> It is even more alarming when scientists, and even passionate yet uninformed Christian leaders, segregate modern science from Christian belief. Jones observes how “many scholars today argue that all sciences are shaped by a multitude of non-scientific factors. This recognition in general terms leads to a ‘humanized’ science attuned to the extrascientific factors that shape it. An attempt to build a science on explicitly Christian presuppositions would produce a ‘Christianized’ science.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jones, *Psychology and the Christian Faith*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Stanton L. Jones, *Psychology: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 27.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, *Psychology and the Christian Faith*, 20.

However, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 clearly combats this premise. It states: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” Jesus died on the cross to redeem humankind from sins with His blood. Before dying, He told the disciples that He would prepare a place in heaven for them and would return one day for believers (John 14:2-3). During the transition period, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit to guide and protect them (Matthew 14:16). In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul urges believers to remember they are God’s possession and that the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing such inheritance. Jesus redeemed the whole Christian—body, mind, and soul. Marion L. Soards comments, “In 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, Paul indicates that the human body is a temple of the Holy Spirit such that it does not really belong to Christ-followers. Jesus used His blood to buy humanity at a high price that we have to honour and respect our body as it is owned by God.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the physical body is in the possession of Christ and believers are only stewards of such a tangible gift.

Consequently, they have the responsibility to protect, care for, and use the body to the full extent as designed by God for the honor and good of His Kingdom. To accomplish this, human beings need to be informed by Science’s findings and knowledge. Such learning can help them to take good care of the physical body, as it provides wisdom for how to handle sickness or related crisis. Science also provides input to humans for understanding how to keep the dynamics of the body in balance, so it will not be misused

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<sup>19</sup> Marion L. Soards, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 134.



or pushed improperly to the extreme against God’s original design. Science and Faith are in fact good partners in this regard and should be intertwined closely.

Conversely, it is unwise to presume that Science is only an objective activity unrelated to Christian faith or, even worse, something that stands in opposition to it. In Jones’ point of view, “science must be seen as a human task profoundly shaped by the prescientific and religious control—beliefs which we bring to the scientific task.”<sup>20</sup> Beliefs affect decisions and actions. From this perspective, modern scientists can appreciate the contribution of religious belief and humanistic science to the understanding of the holistic development of human beings.

Likewise, Christians also need to apply reasoning and insights gained from studying the Scripture to everyday life experiences. Being a faithful Christian does not necessarily imply a dogmatic attitude or automatic rejection of Science. Pagans believe that their gods are “jealous of their secrets and resentful of man as an inquisitive interloper, [but] the biblical emphasis is on man’s duty to apply his mind to the understanding of the natural world, as an expression of reverence for its Creator and in gratitude for the benefits that deeper understanding can bring.”<sup>21</sup> Yahweh in Christianity has no such resistance against scientific exploration of His creation.

In the Bible, there are a few significant examples that reveal God’s inclusion of the body as part of humanity’s natural exploration and preservation of life. In the Old Testament, God commanded Abraham to perform circumcision as an act of faith on his son

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<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Psychology and the Christian faith*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Ferdinand Howard Henry, *Horizons of Science* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978); see also Jones, *Psychology and the Christian Faith*, 35.

(Genesis 17:9-14). Beyond being an act of faith, this served as a link between symbolic and physical cleanliness. Scientifically, circumcision is also important. From the perspective of genital hygiene, some medical professionals find that “the warm, moist space under the foreskin is a prime breeding ground for bacteria, it can harbor sexually transmitted disease organisms. . . . this could contribute to infections in the man and his partner, and even to cancer.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, when God asked Abraham to perform circumcision as a covenant, it originally symbolized the spiritual cleanliness God expected from His chosen people. However, it related to physical hygiene as a physiological mark of development. In this way, both spiritual and physical, God shows His caring love to His people in protecting them from potential diseases. This intertwining of Faith and Science is now carried on in North American hospitals, who routinely carry out circumcision on newborn males.

The New Testament records another significant example of how God acknowledged the importance of the body: the great miracle of two fish and five loaves. In Matthew 14:13-21, when the great crowd of five thousand followed Jesus, He had compassion on them and ministered to their spiritual and emotional needs until late in the evening. However, His teaching occurred in a remote place; the crowd could not find food from anywhere nearby. Jesus realized the vital significance of providing for both the spiritual and physical needs of these people. By faith, He took the small amount of food offered by a boy and turned it into great quantity that fed five thousand people. Such an act of faith and kindness shows that the Son of God respects both the spiritual and physical needs of people. It further confirms that physiological factors are considered as

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<sup>22</sup> Harriet Hall, “Circumcision: What Does Science Say?” Science-Based Medicine, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/circumcision-what-does-science-say/>.

part of the basic need in faith matters. Such intertwining has not changed in the modern life of human beings.

It is vital to explore human existence in the dimension of Science as long as it is “continually subjected to the authority of God’s special revelation.”<sup>23</sup> Science can help the Christ-follower to understand human existence and not just rely on experiences. D. Siegel explains that “the benefit of this approach is that we can learn much more about what creates human experience than is possible with only everyday logic or self-reflection.”<sup>24</sup> This is particularly important for caregivers who seek to support teens during their critical years of development. Many adolescents experience challenges regarding interpersonal relationships and even have trauma or mental health issues. In order for parents to love and care for their children during the teen years, it is wise to use Science as a window to gain insights for “deepening our comprehension of subjective mental life and interpersonal relationships.”<sup>25</sup> This enables parents to support the physiological development of their children along with their faith development. D. Siegel even claims that “knowing how forms of communication directly shape a child’s developing brain can be essential in creating programs that are scientifically based and that can optimize the care of children.”<sup>26</sup> Consequently, the following sections discuss the physical development of adolescents—in particular during the puberty stage and specifically the brain development of teenagers, as these physiological factors directly impact their interpersonal relationships, emotions, and mental health issues.

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<sup>23</sup> Jones, *Psychology and the Christian Faith*, 32.

<sup>24</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, xv.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

## Puberty

Puberty is one of the important developments during adolescence. By definition, puberty “is a stage of development that spans an extended period of time (in humans and higher primates a period of years) and encompasses a large variety of morphological, physiological, and behavioral changes.”<sup>27</sup> For most teens, such transformations are so drastic that they may feel uncomfortable and need time to adjust to their new body. This is particularly true with respect to the process of sexual maturity. During this process, hormones and brain development exert a huge impact on their emotional state.<sup>28</sup>

There is a difference in the characteristics of puberty between boys and girls. In general, girls experience pubertal development a year or two earlier than boys. John Bancroft and June Machover Reinisch find that “early-maturing girls are among the first in their peer group to show signs of sexual maturation. . . . [whereas] late-maturing boys are likely to feel awkward because they are among the last in their peer group to lose their childlike appearance.”<sup>29</sup> These late-blooming boys usually fall behind in sports, which can require a strong and tall physical build.<sup>30</sup> Such characteristics may bring embarrassment and low self-esteem to such teens and lead to related emotional issues. Other rapid and awkward changes during puberty, such as body hair growth or breast development, also can introduce a sense of insecurity within youth.

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<sup>27</sup> Bancroft and Reinisch, *Adolescence and Puberty*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 53.

<sup>29</sup> Bancroft and Reinisch, *Adolescence and Puberty*, 90-91.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

In *Adolescence and Puberty*, Bancroft and Reinisch make the following observation:

[People give] higher social status to physically more mature individuals while expecting more responsible behavior from them than they do from same-age peers who are less physically mature. Conversely, the less mature individuals may experience less pressure for responsible behavior but have to cope with being treated like younger children, by peers as well as adults.<sup>31</sup>

This can cause teenagers to frequently look in the mirror and check their physical appearance. They might worry about their weight, height, appearance of acne, or other physical changes. This extreme self-awareness may lead them to “hours spent in self-admiration or self-criticism.”<sup>32</sup>

This self-consciousness can introduce unnecessary emotional problems. Amy Erdman Farrell notes that in contemporary culture where excess body weight is tied to many health risk factors, being fat is not only a physical health issue but also projects an image of being “lazy, gluttonous, greedy, immoral, uncontrolled, stupid, ugly, lacking in will power, primitive.”<sup>33</sup> Obesity, especially in teens, can give the false impression of being irresponsible and incapable of facing challenges or pressures.<sup>34</sup>

Most young people are shocked and feel lost while trying to handle the human development cycle,<sup>35</sup> which can cause them to lose sight of the truth. The truth is that the human body is a beautiful creation of God, regardless if it is tall or short, fat, or slim. This

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Amy Erdman Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 34.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>35</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 53.

is because every human being is made in the likeness of God. Genesis 1:27-28 confirms it and states: “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’” The great Creator did not specify human beings had to be a certain color, body shape, weight, or height in order to procreate or rule creatures in the universe, because “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Sadly, this is not the common view and opinion in today’s secular world. Since the drastic change during the puberty stage “disturbs the previous trust in the body and mastery of its functions that were enjoyed in childhood,”<sup>36</sup> parents need to remind their children of God’s truth. They can do this by offering encouraging and kind words whatever their teen’s body image may be at a particular stage of physiological development, reminding adolescents that they are still God’s precious creation and good in His sight, despite whatever changes might be happening in the moment.

Moreover, Paul reminds believers that “there are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another” (1 Corinthians 15:40). Since the heavenly body is an eternal one as compared to the temporary body on earth, it is meaningless for believers to put so much effort on such a temporary subject. This is true especially when Paul emphasized in 1 Corinthians 15:50-52 that such an earthly body will come to an end in the new heaven and earth. It is futile to emphasize the appearance of this perishable figure, while ignoring the immortal heavenly one which matters most in God’s Kingdom. No matter how good looking the earthly body may appear, one day it will be gone; it adds nothing to the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 53.

eternal worth. Paul writes: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. . . . For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

Peterson emphasizes that believers will have an imperishable body in heaven. He warns that the earthly body or “the flesh is to be consciously, consistently yielded to God. The body is a place to learn commitments, attitudes, and skills.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, regardless the external appearance of the body, adolescents need to learn to accept its image and bring out the purpose God has put in such a design. They have to learn about God’s perspective. This means realizing it is the heavenly body that matters in the eternal Kingdom of God and that the earthly one will perish one day. This requires the support, encouragement, understanding, and advice of their parents and Christian caregivers. It is the responsibility of parents and Christian adults to help instill a healthy attitude towards physical appearance and prepare teens to face this period of drastic change in their bodies.

### **Brain Development of Adolescents**

The human brain is the mysterious part of one’s whole being, because it is the central controlling system of the human mind. Besides being responsible for dealing with daily living, the brain also enables human beings to interact with God and have spiritual experiences.<sup>38</sup> For this reason, it is essential to understand how a brain functions in order to provide support to teenagers, especially in their spiritual development. This is particularly

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<sup>37</sup> Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 66.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

vital, because the brain is the least developed human organ at birth. Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt state that a baby's brain is less than half the size of an adult's brain. "Size is not the only thing that changes, all the internal wiring changes during development."<sup>39</sup> D. Siegel echoes their thought and observes that a human brain keeps growing, despite the common belief of its completion after childhood.<sup>40</sup> Hence, it is a mistake to assume that the teenage brain is wired or even functions in the same way as that of an adult.<sup>41</sup>

It is amazing that God, the great Creator of heaven and earth, loves human beings so much that He creates them in such detail (Psalm 8:3-5; 139:13-16). The composer of Psalm 8:3-5 agrees: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor." Every neuron and each neurological wiring within a human brain is the intricate and diverse artwork of God. When parents appreciate the marvel of God's work, they become more willing to support with love and understanding the drastic changes in their teenage children.

Jones defines neuroscience as observing "how the brain function[s] physiologically; Cognitive Science looks at how the human brain/mind processes information accordingly to its own functional rules and processes."<sup>42</sup> Since every single cell of a human body and

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<sup>39</sup> Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientists Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2015), 26.

<sup>40</sup> D. Siegel, *Brainstorm*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> F. Jensen and Nutt, *The Teenage Brain*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 120.



brain is God’s creation, it is necessary to understand neuroscience in order to develop a full appreciation of God’s creation and find the best way to utilize the brain as a person’s core controlling unit for achieving God’s purpose. Joel B. Green asserts that discoveries in the neuroscience field have no conflict with spiritual belief.<sup>43</sup> Through neuroscience, not only can people appreciate the detailed design of God’s creation, they can understand how the human brain enables an individual’s sense of spiritual matters and personal expression of emotions and desires towards God. Green’s thought is supported by Jones, who says that “the neuroscientific perspectives on human nature can be challenging to Christians. But when we have a proper understanding of humans as biological creatures, though not merely biological creatures, we have the capacity to draw from a rich body of understanding that can inform our understanding of our own humanity.”<sup>44</sup> Here is another area in which Christians need to respect Science as well as Faith. Such respect honors God because whether a material, physiological, or spiritual matter, all life stems from the same source: God the Creator (Genesis 1:1-2:7).

Hormones seem to be the main cause for the emotional and unexpected behavior of teenagers. During early adolescence, young people experience a sudden growth spurt. Researchers find that “sexual and other physical maturation that occurs during puberty is a result of hormonal changes.”<sup>45</sup> Teenage hormones lead not only to physical changes—such

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<sup>43</sup> Joel B. Green, *What about the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 46.

<sup>44</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 69.

<sup>45</sup> Stanford Children’s Health: Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford, “The Growing Child: Adolescent,” accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=the-growing-child-adolescent-13-to-18-years-90-P02175>.

as a need for more sleep, rapid increase in weight and height, development of pubic hair, changing body shape, and enlargement of testicles in boys and breasts in girls—hormones also can cause extreme mood swings at times. Scientists notice that “any rapid fluctuation in hormones is usually accompanied by irritability, recklessness, aggression and depression.”<sup>46</sup> These behavioral changes can introduce challenges to youth as well as others within their social circle. Emotional swings can cause unpredictability from one moment to the next. By analyzing the impact of hormones on adolescents, parents and caregivers can come to understand these sudden changes and thus respond in a more helpful way and have a better chance to offer appropriate support to their beloved teens.

D. Siegel reveals that adolescents are going through such major brain development during this stage that it has great impact on their whole behavior and personal life routine. He suggests using an inside-out approach to comprehend the reason behind a person’s reaction. He believes that “we can learn how understanding our own or others’ inner workings can help us understand the outer behaviours of ourselves and of others.”<sup>47</sup> His approach can help equip parents to understand their own physiological development better and to explore the inner world of their teenage children so as to support and care for them. This includes the most significant question that teenagers always ask, “Who are we?”<sup>48</sup>

D. Siegel asserts that the characteristics of teenagers can be summarized with the acronym ESSENCE. “ES” stands for “Emotional Spark,” “SE” represents “Social

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<sup>46</sup> BBC, “Teenage Mood Swings,” under “Science: Human Body and Mind,” accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/mind/articles/emotions/teenagers/moods.shtml>.

<sup>47</sup> D. Siegel, *Brainstorm*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Engagement,” “N” is “Novelty,” and “CE” stands for “Creative Explorations.”<sup>49</sup> In order to interact with adolescents appropriately during this critical period, parents have to “discover these hidden positive aspects of adolescence and work together as adolescents and adults to make them work for us rather than against us.”<sup>50</sup> Such collaboration is a wise way to turn an apparent enemy into a comrade who is aiming to achieve the same ultimate goal.

F. Jensen and Nutt echo this approach by stating that the frontal lobe of a human brain is responsible for analyzing, forming judgments, and decision making. However, they emphasize that this important organ is still under development in teenagers. Their brains are not at full function yet. Therefore, the authors offer this keen advice to parents: “You need to be your teens’ frontal lobes until their brains are fully wired and hooked up and ready to go on their own.”<sup>51</sup>

D. Siegel finds that a human mind “regulates the flow of energy and information. . . . Human connections shape neural connections, and each contributes to the mind. Relationships and neural linkages together shape the mind.”<sup>52</sup> This process enables a person to have emotions, reactions, and social connections. In return, when a person receives stimulations, the neurons and dendrites in the brain get larger and denser.<sup>53</sup> It is the weaving of experiences and a person’s physiological genetic factor that creates an integrated self.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>51</sup> F. Jensen and Nutt, *The Teenage Brain*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> F. Jensen and Nutt, *The Teenage Brain*, 69.

Psalm 127:3 reminds God's people that "children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him." Since children are a gift from God to parents, they are responsible to provide the best environment for their children in order to enhance positive experiences for healthy development. Parents also need to support their teenage children's decision-making process, as their frontal lobe development is still in progress. However, it is important not to neglect the fact that natural gene makeup is also a significant factor to the whole self. Consequently, parents need to have a balanced view between responsibility and guilt, especially in light of Romans 8:1, which states: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Although they are responsible for supporting the healthy and positive development of their teenage children, freedom and forgiveness in Christ (Romans 8:2) can relieve them of the "burdens of guilt generated by the belief that our actions are solely responsible for the outcome of our children's development."<sup>54</sup> Released from unnecessary guilt, parents can have a better chance to move forward into a healthier dynamic to develop a deeper relationship with their children as they seek to accompany them on this important stage of their life journey and provide other essential supports.

#### Insights Regarding Brain Development on Relationships and Emotions

Youth often are frustrated and experience relationship issues with family and friends. For this reason, it is important to understand a teen's mental process and how the brain works with respect to how relational patterns develop during adolescence.

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<sup>54</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, xv.

Experiences affect the wiring and structure of the human brain. In this way, brain functioning, the mind, and emotions are closely tied together in the relational process.

In *The Developing Mind*, D. Siegel states that the “mind regulates the flow of energy and information as it is shared within relationships and moves through the physical mechanisms of the brain, the embodied neural connections within the extended nervous system distributed throughout the whole body.”<sup>55</sup> This dynamic impacts how an individual interacts with other people and lays the foundation for interpersonal relationships. Although such a shaping process is a lifelong endeavor, it is especially important during early childhood.

A parent’s input may gradually modify a child’s inborn character. This is because “the minds of children learn to adapt specifically to the emotional communication they receive from their caregivers. Over time, such relationship-dependent patterns may become engrained as strategies that are employed in more general contexts.”<sup>56</sup>

Neuroscientists particularly find that “the root of many cognitive and behavioral differences that appear in middle childhood and adolescence are often already present by 18 months, and their origins, we now know, lie even earlier in the child’s life.”<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, it is important for parents to provide cognitive stimulation in order to boost their children’s learning ability. Children who communicate more frequently with parents tend to develop better language skills.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>57</sup> Putnam, *Our Kids*, 109.

In addition, a close relationship between parents and children can enable the brain to develop circuits that play an important role in the regulation of emotions.<sup>58</sup> Putnam summarizes that “the brain, in short, develops a social organ, not an isolated computer.”<sup>59</sup> It is important for parents to note that “emotion serves as a central organizing process within the brain. In this way, an individual’s abilities to organize emotions—a product, in part, of earlier attachment relationships—directly shapes the ability of the mind to integrate experience and to adapt to future stressors.”<sup>60</sup> Essentially, parents have a significant impact on their children in their entire life process through interaction and communication. This only intensifies throughout childhood and the adolescent period. Emotions help people be “people” and assist in the processing and expressing of feelings. Jones asserts, “It would seem that our brains may be fundamental to what it means to be persons but that we are more than the firings of our neurons.”<sup>61</sup>

God gives human beings this ability to organize feelings and thoughts in the brain. In a number of books in the Bible—such as Psalms, Isaiah, and Lamentations—the emotions of the authors are expressed vividly. If Christ-followers trust that all the Bible is inspired by God and that human brains are part of His beautiful creation, it becomes easier to accept God’s intention to give human brains the ability to process and express emotions and feelings. In essence, God has designed emotions to be a tool to express the inner state of a person. Without proper expression of emotions, it is difficult for those

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<sup>58</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 307.

<sup>59</sup> Putnam, *Our Kids*, 110.

<sup>60</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 61.

around an individual to really understand what is going in the mind and heart. A lack of human expression can lead to misunderstandings or cause people to feel abandoned while in an individual's presence, as there is no emotional connection or meeting of the minds. With healthy emotional expression, mutual understanding and trust can be established and gaps in communication can be bridged. Emotional expression as a tool has great impact on relationship building and responses in everyday life.

During puberty, the limbic system matures earlier than the frontal lobe. The former is for controlling emotions and feelings, whereas the latter is for decision making and responding. This may explain why teenagers tend to be more emotional and may issue inappropriate judgements and responses, particularly when their limbic system takes over and controls core processing.<sup>62</sup> D. Siegel warns that “emotions are central in the self-regulation of the mind. It is inevitable that at times emotional arousal will be too much for any of us to tolerate. At these moments, the flood of emotions without an effective recovery process will result in prolonged states of disorganization that are ineffective and potentially harmful to ourselves or to others.”<sup>63</sup> Without proper recovery, extreme emotions can lead to mental instability and extreme reactions.

In addition to brain development, the physiological development of hormones can play an important part in the emotional fluctuations of an adolescent. This often takes shape as mood swings, depression, or aggressive behaviors. Even though most youth outgrow such an emotional period, some young people continue to have depressive symptoms beyond adolescence. It has been found that “the cause of teenage depression could be

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<sup>62</sup> Wyatt, *Help Your Kids with Adolescence*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 288.

anything from a genetic predisposition or personality traits to crises of identity and difficulties in family relationships.”<sup>64</sup>

In light of such emotional dynamics, especially within the family context, Paul advises parents in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Parents have to be sensitive to the critical periods of their children, especially when emotions may be a significant factor that can damage the relationship. John Piper suggests parents go one step further than simply avoiding the stirring up of emotions in their children. He says that parents should “drain the low-grade, long-term frustration and anger that makes his [or here] soul shrivel into a small, hard, shell that has only two feelings: anger and emptiness.”<sup>65</sup>

Piper goes on to say that “in all that a father does to bring his children to maturity there should be a provision and a care that assures the child that, behind all the discipline and instruction, there is a great heart of love. This earthly father is working all things together for the good of his child. And so God’s character is being displayed.”<sup>66</sup> Parents have to understand the unique period of adolescence during which teenage brains are under the effect of racing hormones as well as the ongoing progress of frontal lobe development. Compassion is required to understand how and why teenagers may say or react in a way that is beyond their control. When parents properly understand their adolescent’s physiological development, instead of responding with anger or disappointment, they can

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<sup>64</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 53.

<sup>65</sup> John Piper, “More Thoughts for Fathers on Ephesians 6:4,” *Desiring God* (blog), June 20, 2007, accessed July 1, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/more-thoughts-for-fathers-on-ephesians-6-4>.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



learn to walk side by side with them during this emotional stage and guide them with the Heavenly Father's love, discerning when to overlook an impropriety (1 Peter 4:8) and when to respond with discipline (Proverbs 19:18).

#### Insights Regarding Brain Development on Religious Experience

Religious experience may seem very mystical and personal, but scientists have discovered that it is actually tied to basic brain development. Jones says that this scientific curiosity stems from a desire to explore “how various parts of the brain moderate, process, and structure religious experience.”<sup>67</sup> From his research, Jones suggests that “mystical or ecstatic experiences tend to involve those parts of the brain most deeply connected to emotion, namely, the temporal lobes and the limbic system. More common religious practices tend to be associated with activation of the frontal and parietal cortex areas.”<sup>68</sup>

As mentioned in Psalm 8, God has a detailed plan and purpose for creating the vast universe as well as humans. Even the tiniest part of a created being is designed with a specific function. Therefore, every detailed part of the human brain, whether the frontal lobe or the limbic system, is made to fulfill a certain functionality according to the blueprint of God's creation. On a certain level, the psalmist understands this and writes as a prayer to God: “My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:15-16). God has a special purpose even when He created each human being in

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<sup>67</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 119.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

the womb as an undeveloped embryo.<sup>69</sup> Activating the limbic system in order to get connected to the eternal God can provide meaning and help individuals to sense a special calling in life.

Parents can stimulate the limbic area of their child's brain in order to give them the positive experience of encountering God in a mystical way, especially when they are young. Proverbs 22:6 reminds parents to "start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Doing so can help children, so as they grow up they can benefit from the "implicit memory"<sup>70</sup> of their religious experience. Such a spiritual seed can be nurtured in young hearts until it blooms and bears fruit as they grow up. Since children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3), parents have the responsibility to enhance the spiritual experience of children and youth and to teach their teens to enhance their own limbic area as they enter adulthood.

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<sup>69</sup> Longman and Garland, *Psalms*, 962.

<sup>70</sup> D. Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 132.

## CHAPTER 4

### PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEENAGERS

This chapter concentrates on studying issues of the heart—essentially, the psychological development of adolescents. Young people need guidance and role-modeling from related adults as a scaffolding step. However, many parents in their hectic schedule cannot provide the social capital required by their children during their growth. Through the lens of Bible teaching and wrestling with the psychological struggles faced by teenagers, this chapter attempts to wisely reflect on how to deal with this challenge.

#### **Bible Teaching about the Heart**

At the very beginning of the Bible, Genesis 1:27 clearly states that human beings are made in the image of God. Not only did God carefully create each human, He also has a close relationship with humanity. This concept is reflected in many Bible passages—such as “What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention?” (Job 7:17); “The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3); “The Lord watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor

the moon by night” (Psalm 121:5-6). With this close relationship, God displays His feelings towards human beings. In Numbers 32:13, God states He is angry. In Jeremiah 8:21, God says He feels sad for Israel. The New Testament records how Jesus expressed the emotion of mourning, as He wept for Lazarus’ death (John 11:35). Jesus communicated love for children, as people put them in His arms to be blessed (Mark 10:16). Jesus even expressed great anger, when He cleansed the temple (Matthew 21:12-17).

Sometimes people mistakenly think that God has no emotions; however, “as in any relationship we can make him glad, blessed, sad, angry and this due to our behavior.”<sup>1</sup> In particular, God likes to express pleasure: “The Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory” (Psalm 149:4). However, He sometimes expresses the opposite, such as deep disappointment and fury in Ezekiel 7:8, when he declares, “I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you.” God can feel sorrow, just as much or more than any human being. In Jeremiah 9:1, God shares the following: “Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.”

Since human beings are created in the image of God, they also display all sorts of emotions. People are described as feeling frightened (Exodus 14:10; 1 Samuel 4:7; Luke 8:22-25; Acts 16:38), joyful (Psalm 126:2; 2 Samuel 6:14-15; Luke 1:58; Acts 2:46), and even angry (Genesis 40:2; Exodus 32:19; Luke 6:11; Matthew 26:31). Jones asserts that in the Old Testament many Bible characters demonstrate psychological elements connected to emotions. They express “particularly fundamental understandings of the nature of what

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<sup>1</sup> Anastasios Kioulachoglou, “The Sadness of God’s Heart for the Sin of His People,” *The Journal of Biblical Accuracy* (blog), n.d., accessed July 1, 2018, [https://www.jba.gr/Articles/jba2004\\_02.htm](https://www.jba.gr/Articles/jba2004_02.htm).

it means to be a human being. . . . Old Testament passages speak of emotions, motivations, beliefs, character and virtue, social institutions, and many facets of the human condition.”<sup>2</sup> As there is nothing new “under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9), parents can expect the same range of emotions from their adolescent children. Therefore, if parents are to support their teens, it is necessary for them to comprehend what the major human struggles are and understand how teenagers may be experiencing them psychologically. To do this, grasping the relationship between theology and psychology is vital.

### Psychology and the Bible

Angela M. Sabates believes that the field of psychology “has largely ignored any potential role of theological insights regarding human behavior.”<sup>3</sup> This is because psychology often falls within the realm of a humanities-based science and therefore faces the Science-versus-Faith dilemma. Sabates writes: “For many, science and faith are not asking the same questions, so they should be considered independent entities.”<sup>4</sup> Psychology is a sensitive subject, as it touches on human factors which at times are difficult to be proven through scientific investigation.

Conversely, Christians can feel uncomfortable to adopt what Science teaches, especially when Science claims that psychological responses and human feelings are

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<sup>2</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Angela M. Sabates, *Social Psychology in Christian Perspective: Exploring the Human Condition* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

simply related to how a brain functions.<sup>5</sup> When culture is brought into the mix, there is added struggle in integrating the experience of faith, theological doctrines, and the practice of psychology. However, some accept a broader view of theology and psychology, one that promotes integration. Sabates' comment reflects this perspective. She writes: "Science and faith can inform one another, thus an understanding of how they might relate can increase our understanding of both."<sup>6</sup> Evaluating this broader view begins with properly understanding both secular psychology and Christian psychology.

### Secular Psychology

In the secular world, there are different approaches to psychology. A popular one is social psychology, which is "the scientific study of human social interaction, including our perceptions of one another and of social situations. This field is concerned with understanding a broad range of features, including how we persuade one another, how individuals interact within groups, what circumstances lead to both productive and destructive social behavior."<sup>7</sup> This approach emphasizes comprehending the influence of interface within a community. Another popular approach is self-psychology. This track focuses "on the ideas of how notions of self and self-concept can be understood as cognitive organization and process, enabling persons to maintain their identities in

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<sup>5</sup> Scott W. VanderStoep, ed., *Science and the Soul: Christian Faith and Psychological Research* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Sabates, *Social Psychology in Christian Perspective*, 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

interactive contexts.”<sup>8</sup> Play therapy is another modern methodology. This approach integrates play and psychotherapy to help children with psychological issues.<sup>9</sup> This has become necessary, because nowadays many young people face the challenges of depression and anxiety. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) often is used to treat these conditions and other mental illnesses.<sup>10</sup> Cognitive-behavioral therapy seeks to train the patient to respond in a rational way.

One approach that is gaining much attention is positive psychology. This avenue uses “psychological theory, research, and intervention techniques to understand [and enhance] the positive, adaptive, creative, and emotionally fulfilling aspects of human behavior.”<sup>11</sup> This means to view any situation through an optimistic and affirmative lens. This is so popular that it has been included in the curricula of elementary schools as well as secondary education. William C. Compton and Edward Hoffman see it as “a scientific approach to the pursuit of happiness and well-being.”<sup>12</sup> When looking from a positive perspective, adolescents can be delivered from the bondage of depression as they leave behind negative thoughts and opt to embrace positive thoughts. They do this by

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<sup>8</sup> Cote and Levine, *Identity, Formation, Agency, and Culture*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Robbie Adler-Tapia, *Child Psychotherapy: Integrating Developmental Theory into Clinical Practice* (New York: Springer Pub., 2012), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 63.

<sup>11</sup> William C. Compton and Edward Hoffman, *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Flourishing* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013), 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

“exploring [their] human strengths and virtues.”<sup>13</sup> This approach sheds light on how God’s truth in His Word can shed light to inform psychological research and approaches.

### Christian Psychology

Since Christ-followers acknowledge themselves as creations of God, it is better for them to employ the approach of Christian psychology, which applies theology and Jesus’ teaching together with the application of psychology. Robert Campbell Roberts and Mark R. Talbot view Christian psychology as “a matter of ecclesial self-defense against a subtle undermining of our spirituality, an unannounced degradation of that constitution of soul we call eternal life.”<sup>14</sup> Roberts and Talbot wave a red flag at isolating the two tasks. They believe that Christian spirituality may be undermined subtly or taken over by secular therapy and culture. They write: “It obscures the fact that the psychotherapies of the twentieth century, the personality theories behind them, and the various popular person-constructs with which they seed our culture and offer to reshape our souls are alternatives to Christian spirituality.”<sup>15</sup>

In practical ministry, people often expect pastors to have a comprehensive view of human nature, so that they can support and coach them towards its ideal. To do so, Christian clergy often have to rely on both Christian theology and secular psychological

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<sup>13</sup> Sabates, *Social Psychology in Christian Perspective*, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Campbell Roberts and Mark R. Talbot, *Limning the Psyche: Explorations in Christian Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



research in order to have a balanced view of God, the world, and individuals.<sup>16</sup> This is because Christians live in a secular world, despite their spiritual identity.

Religious scholars advocate a psychology that is “intentionally and thoughtfully directed toward being compatible with the Christian faith.”<sup>17</sup> It wisely stresses that Christians have to realize their standpoint on personality theory, so that they will not be easily dragged by the current culture.<sup>18</sup> Jones warns that “before one moves to adopt concepts and practices from a secular field, one should first think critically about those concepts and practices from a Christian perspective.”<sup>19</sup> Such an approach is a defense mechanism to guard Christians against undue influence, but Christian psychology still has to open more to integrate fluidly yet cautiously with secular psychology.

It is essential to understand the biblical perspective on a topic of the heart and view any psychological concept or actions through this lens. Jeremiah 17:9-10 teaches the following: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? ‘I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.’” This indicates that there is a close link between heart and deeds. The heart “combines will, intention, disposition, and feeling. It may express the deepest devotion. But the heart can be twisted and devious. Imagery of the heart is a way of speaking about ourselves at our deepest, our inmost level. We speak of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *Psychology and the Christian Faith*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Roberts and Talbot, *Limning the Psyche*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 90.

‘the secrets of the heart,’ those thoughts and feelings we keep hidden.”<sup>20</sup> When God searches the human heart, He exposes what lies down deep inside. Deeds are often an external expression of the heart. By observing a person’s action, their intention can be revealed. However, at times there are hidden agendas that might not be easily detected. While psychology is a methodical way to help in analyzing inner thoughts, ultimately God is the only one who can completely examine and heal the human heart.

Psalm 51:10 lends itself to a healthy approach to Christian psychology. It reads: “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” It is impossible for human beings to create a clean heart by themselves. According to this verse, “only God can regenerate a heart and renew a spirit.”<sup>21</sup> God sees into human hearts, and He knows every person. Christian psychology helps individuals of faith to engage in “a transformed inner attitude characterized by a ‘pure heart,’ a ‘steadfast spirit,’ and a ‘willing spirit.’” These characteristics are indications of enduring change and transformation that provide the firm foundation for continuing relationship with God.”<sup>22</sup> Since human beings have been created in the image of God, there is a hard-wired desire for people to have a spiritual relationship with Him. Gerald Wilson notes that “awareness, confession, and restitution are not lasting unless accompanied by an inward spiritual change. To find the roots of sin is not to solve it, but it can help us see the grounds for the distorted choices and decisions we make and can aid us in building the resolve to break this chain of negative consequences by

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<sup>20</sup> Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 712.

<sup>21</sup> Gerald Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1 of *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 782.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 776.

making different choices in the future.”<sup>23</sup> With such an understanding of both secular and Christian psychology, parents can have a better chance of supporting and guiding their teenage children through the stormy season.

The Bible provides much advice on managing emotions, relationships, and social factors. Jones states that the “Wisdom Literature such as Proverbs offers concrete guidance for proper human development, for parenting, for the development of moral character, for shaping social relationships, and other topics.”<sup>24</sup> The command of nurturing the next generation in Deuteronomy 6 and the fruit of the Spirit specified in Galatians 5:22-23 are good examples to demonstrate this point. They advocate for parents to teach young ones to fear God by obeying His decrees and commands and to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, so they will develop the fruit of the Spirit—such as love, joy, peace, and self-control. Based on these Bible teachings, people can apply God’s Word to their everyday life and social interactions.

In addition, the decrees and the Ten Commandments specified in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 reveal “God’s intent for human action that help us understand what it means to be human.”<sup>25</sup> After leaving Egypt and heading towards the Promised Land, “Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them” (Deuteronomy 5:1). God asked Moses to give the commandments and decrees (Deuteronomy 5:1-21) to the Israelites as emotional and psychological guidelines to guide actions and decisions in both spiritual

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 782.

<sup>24</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

and daily life, so they would not be led easily astray by the sinful Canaanite culture and their idol-worshipping practice. In Deuteronomy 8:1-4, Moses urged them to observe the commandments and decrees faithfully in the Promised Land:

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

The Lord listed both the blessings for keeping the commandments and the curses for disobedience, instructing them to pass on this vital information to the next generation (Deuteronomy 11:8-32). This instruction applies also to today's believers. This is, in fact, the essence of human psychology.

### **Psychological Development of Adolescents**

Psalm 127:3 reminds parents that children are gifts from the Lord. In general, when individuals receive a present, they are excited and treasure it—and when the gift is from God, even more so. When the Lord puts a child into the hands of parents, both father and mother have the responsibility to protect, support, and guide the young one (Proverbs 22:6; Matthew 19:14; Deuteronomy 6:6-9). However, as mentioned in Part One of this paper, today's new generation is under the influence of many factors: postmodernism, globalization, multiculturalism, individualism, and consumerism in a world of media and high technology amidst a performance-driven culture. Scott M. Kopp stresses that “the normal developmental problems that we all encounter through adolescence have been affected and increased by the postmodern worldview.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Scott M. Kopp, *Postmodernism and Youth Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), xiv.

Despite the fact that North America has a relatively stable environment for the development of young people, many adolescents still seem confused, irritated, and rebellious in today's world. Clark addresses a valid question towards disappointed and frustrated parents and teachers: "Is it possible that what we as adults see as a rebellious generation is really a uniquely vulnerable population living out the necessary reaction to being set to sea rudderless, adrift without a compass?"<sup>27</sup> In today's secular world, the one gift Christian parents can give to their teens is to help them establish their inner emotional core through a foundation that blends biblical and psychological insights as adolescents seek identity, engage in autonomy, and experience a sense of belonging.

#### Identity: Biblical and Psychological Insights

A parable of vine and branches is taught by Jesus. He says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). While Jesus reminds believers to focus their lives on Him, each individual is recognized as a unique branch to be connected to the vine, which is Christ Himself. Although interacting as part of a community established by Christ, believers still need to establish their own personal identity (the branch). In essence, the vine gives identity and creates an environment for it to thrive. The process of searching for identity is most active during the adolescent period.

The question of "Who am I?" often is asked by young people during this stage of life.<sup>28</sup> Searching for one's identity is part of the developmental process. Young people

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<sup>27</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, xix.

<sup>28</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 21.

experiment different possible selves.<sup>29</sup> They frequently shift their beings to test the boundaries of their environment, so they can figure out who they really are instead of being confined within a certain stereotype. This process is vital to adolescents, because they are essentially finding themselves. Nakkula and Toshalis assert that “youth in the achieved identity status may be less anxious about who they need to become and more settled into who they are. This allows for an elevated level of self-reflexivity and a higher tolerance for criticism of one’s behavior and decisions.”<sup>30</sup>

As adolescents desperately seek their identity, they may even turn to media for seeking a potential self. Root finds that “young people passionately devote themselves to these stories [such as *The Hunger Games*], because they have used them to understand themselves and their world. In that sense these books become deeply authoritative for kids because they provide lenses to see and act within the world.”<sup>31</sup> Young people even participate in online discussions, as they process their joint experiences. Some examples are the chatrooms for *Toy Story*, *Hunger Games*, and *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Through these experiences, teens assemble the puzzle pieces to discover who they really are. In addition, “adolescents particularly are not only interpreting things for themselves, but to show the intensity of the hermeneutical blood that runs through them, they are almost constantly wondering how they are viewed by others, how others interpret

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Root, *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 25.

them.”<sup>32</sup> They are sensitive about their self-image and how it is decoded by the people around them. Root makes an insightful statement about the significance of the internet to teenagers. He writes: “Today, access is more important than memory; we surrender our memory over to gigabytes. we now seek assistance in constructing meaning, in helping us answer, Who am I, and what should I do?”<sup>33</sup>

While adolescents are testing the boundaries of each of their multiple identities, they need a safe space to try them out and then share the experiences with caring and mature adults. Doing so gives them a chance to debrief and obtain valid feedback. Experimentations in a healthy environment provide significant support in their process of identity searching.<sup>34</sup> Elkind says, “Identity formation requires a kind of envelope of adult standards, values and beliefs that the adolescent can confront and challenge in order to construct and test out her own standards, values and beliefs.”<sup>35</sup> If such a space or person is not available, adolescents may search for confirmation from other sources. If these sources are unhealthy, teens can be led into chaos and spiral downward into a risky pit.

However, as a stable identity is formed, they have a better chance to face challenges well in various social contexts.<sup>36</sup> Since children do not know how to handle life properly, God has given them parents to guide and love them, to provide them with a structure that

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>34</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 37-38.

<sup>35</sup> Elkind, *A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child*, 197.

<sup>36</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 23.

leads into maturity. Parents are meant to be trustworthy companions to walk with children during this critical developmental stage and to connect them into a healthy community.

Scripture teaches that families play a significant role in shaping children. This is evident in the Book of Proverbs, where children are guided to be obedient to their parents (Proverbs 13:24; 22:6, 15; 29:15, 17). The Bible also teaches parents to discipline children with love (Colossians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 18:5-6). There is a balance and mutual participation in the process, a partnership that is meant to form between parents and children that matures as the latter navigate adolescence.

In addition, communities are meant to play a role. Jones emphasizes that “communities, of course, are also charged to reinforce such commitments and assist in the training of children.”<sup>37</sup> Communities do this by caring, mentoring, and encouraging the young people among them. Clark and Powell echo this sentiment in *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*. They write: “The Bible makes it clear that we need one another to function as God intends. When a philosophy of raising children (and adolescents) ignores the need for a greater community beyond the nuclear family during the discipling process, youth lose out on God’s plan for their development.”<sup>38</sup> There are many examples in both the Old and New Testaments that illustrate the importance of community in building up the healthy identity of an adolescent.

In Joshua 1:1-2, after Moses died, the Lord appointed his aide to be the new leader of the Israelites; but this only happened after Joshua had been under the mentorship of Moses for forty years, while in the wilderness, and guided in his actions. For example,

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<sup>37</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 138.



Moses assigned Joshua to lead the army in their battle against the Amalekites while his mentor, Moses, supported the battle with prayer on the mountain (Exodus 17:8-16). Moses also sent Joshua as one of the twelve spies to explore Canaan (Numbers 13:1-16). When Moses went into the tent to meet God, Joshua faithfully stood outside the tent and waited (Exodus 33:9-11). Joshua was highly influenced in his close relationship with his mentor—so much that Moses helped to build both his identity and leadership in a positive and strong way. The community accepted Joshua in his development and then later, as he stepped up to be their new leader.

Besides Joshua, King David also had a mentor: Samuel. He was picked out by Samuel as the anointed king in the presence of his family (1 Samuel 16:1-13). When David committed the sin of adultery, another prophet, Nathan, was sent by God to rebuke him. He repented and sought to teach his son, Solomon, better ways, so he could more faithfully manage being a wise king (2 Samuel 12:1-25). All of this happened within the faith community. All of this reflects the ancient Israelites' concept of their identity, as defined by their membership in a particular group with a specific ethnic and spiritual heritage. It also shows the significance of having some mature believers as mentors for supporting their development on the journey.

Community and identity development were also important in the New Testament. Matthew 1:1-17 takes great pains to record Jesus' Jewish identity by listing a detailed genealogy. Similarly, Paul claims to be a "Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5), also demonstrating "a self-concept that is intimately related to group identity,"<sup>39</sup> as defined by his community's theology. Furthermore, in 1 Timothy 1:2, Paul extends the

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<sup>39</sup> Sabates, *Social Psychology in Christian Perspective*, 65.

presence of community to include the Body of Christ and even addresses Timothy as his son. Not only did he have an intimate relationship with this young man, Paul also encouraged and gave him advice in person and through letters, particularly 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy. Besides having Paul as his close spiritual mentor, Timothy was also blessed to have a faithful mother, Eunice, and his God-fearing grandmother, Lois. They nurtured his spiritual development from childhood into his adulthood (2 Timothy 1:5). All of this shows that every person is an individual branch but remains connected to others in the community. These branches stem from the vine, who is Jesus (John 15:5). Believers are one in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), but each person has a unique identity as well as a group identity (1 Corinthians 12:4-25). The group assists individuals to discover who they are.

This biblical understanding informs parents. They must come to comprehend the distinct identity of each of their children so as to respect a child's God-given uniqueness. Employing this lens in raising their children can free them from needing to be perfect and foster an environment in which it is easier for teens to explore and establish their identity. Understanding their identity can lead adolescents to seek purpose in their life within a community as well as in the Kingdom of God.

#### Autonomy: Biblical and Psychological Insights

Parental guidance has been recognized as an important factor for teenage development. Despite the many sources of influence—from school and church, media

and the world of “friends”—parents are still the most influential among them all.<sup>40</sup> Most parents take the responsibility of guiding and guarding their children when they are young, and usually children follow what they are told. It is reasonable to expect parents to set rules and discipline their children accordingly. Since parents have more life experience, it is tempting for them to think that they always know what is best for their children. This can cause them to impose their desires or opinions on them, without realizing that they are stepping over a personal boundary at times.

However, as children reach the adolescent stage, things gradually change. They start to ask for more freedom and autonomy from their parents. Palmer and Panchal notice that “it is during adolescence that teenagers may question their upbringing, religion, their parents’ political beliefs and other values that they used to hold. They may begin to rebel against previously unquestioned norms, by refusing to go out with the family and possibly developing elaborate religious or political beliefs of their own.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, if parents can handle this let-go process appropriately at a good pace, “it provides a context for negotiating autonomy and for transforming the nature of parent-adolescent relationships to allow greater adolescent independence and personal control.”<sup>42</sup>

However, this can make parents feel uncomfortable or alarmed. Such parents may use Proverbs 6:20 to make themselves feel better and justify controlling actions, as it says “My son, keep your father’s command and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” While God rightly instructs children to obey parental teaching, for the good of the young, human

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<sup>40</sup> George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church’s #1 Priority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 22-24.

<sup>41</sup> Palmer and Panchal, *Developmental Coaching*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Amsel and Smetana, *Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities*, 147.

beings (especially parents) naturally have a controlling tendency. However, the Bible teaches that no one should exert control over other people, as it stands in contrast to God's grace (2 Peter 3:9; Galatians 5:13). In the Old Testament, many tragedies were caused by improper actions over and against other people. For example, Cain over Abel (Genesis 4:8-16) resulted in the first murder in human history; Rebekah over Jacob influenced him to cheat his father and brother, which led to deadly family division (Genesis 27:5-46); and Sarah over Hagar forced her maid into sex with her own husband, triggering so much strife and jealousy that Hagar was banished from the community with nothing (Genesis 16). All of these examples led to tragic consequences. It seems that when a Bible character with a stronger personality or more authority oppressed a weaker one, the situation often spiraled into a broader problem (Genesis 37:12-36; 1 Samuel 18-19). Such undue control leads to deep rage or bitterness within the oppressed victims and has a negative impact on their potential development. This stands in contradiction to God's love and His original design for individuals (Genesis 2:8-17; Psalm 8:3-9). Kimmel writes: "God never intended one person to control another. He didn't wire us to respond well to it."<sup>43</sup>

Parents have to remember that their children do not belong to them (Psalm 127:3). God has put children in their home for parents to guide them, not to control them. Consequently, it is essential for both parents and children to respect a healthy mutual boundary, which is a thin line, between the two parties. When one side crosses over that boundary and starts exerting control over the other, it is referred as undue control. For example, many parents force their children to take Science and Math courses for pursuing

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<sup>43</sup> Kimmel, *The High Cost of High Control*, 14.

professional careers and discourage them from developing their writing or artistic skills, even if their children's talents incline more to these other areas.

Parents may get confused, when they read between Proverbs and Ephesians. These Scriptures state: "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them" (Proverbs 13:24), and "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The two verses seem to contradict each other. Parents may wonder if they should go with a strict parental approach or opt for a more lenient one. The difficulty comes when Christian parents try to exercise discernment, walking a fine line between the two, as they attempt to keep a balanced dynamic.

Paul advises the faithful father to "manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect" (Timothy 3:4). However, there is a big difference between controlling children and keeping them under control. When Jesus was on earth, He had every right to control people because He was God incarnate, but He never exercised such a privilege. Jesus allowed people to make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes, and He encouraged them to take responsibility for any consequences from these choices.<sup>44</sup> Jesus even did this with respect to faith matters (John 18:15-32; 21:15-19; Mark 10:28-45).

Similarly, in the spiritual arena, parents can share their point of view on the subject, but they need to give space for their adolescents to explore and air their doubts freely in a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 162.

safe environment. This can encourage the development of a “sticky faith” in them.<sup>45</sup>

“Sticky faith” refers to a lifelong Christian faith that matures with a maturing youth in a holistic way. The faith walk develops and endures internally and externally, personally and communally.<sup>46</sup> With this ongoing spiritual journey, their faith is actively growing and life-engaging, aimed at building a close relationship with God and other Christians.<sup>47</sup>

It is normal for parents to desire the development of their children’s full potential but often wealth, fame, and power are on their wish list.<sup>48</sup> Such attitudes can easily push teens to the extreme for high achievements in academic and extracurricular activities. Clark warns, “We should celebrate who our kids are in the midst of their involvement more than their accomplishment and skill.”<sup>49</sup> In Luke 17:33, Jesus taught something similar to His disciples: “Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.” Jesus advised people to leave behind what seems valuable to the world in order to pursue something of higher value in the eternal Kingdom of God. This is a matter of priority, especially when the two are in conflict with each other. If earthly matters come first, one may ignore God’s calling or teaching and lose the chance of receiving an everlasting life or receiving heavenly rewards. When parents aim for encouraging a “good life” for their children, they have to consider the implications of God’s Word in the longer term instead of simply focusing on earthly values only in the immediate moment.

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<sup>45</sup> Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 72-74.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Tim Kimmel, *Raising Kids for True Greatness: Redefine Success for You and Your Child* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), x.

<sup>49</sup> Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 63.

God's design is for human beings to develop a healthy relationship with one another and enjoy mutual intimacy and freedom, especially within a family (Ephesians 5:22-33; 6:1-4). With His full power and position as God, this is what Jesus modeled. He demonstrated what it meant to be a leader, who serves others humbly (John 13:1-17; Mark 10:45; Philippians 2:5-8). Even in the Old Testament, this is God's exact approach, as He relates to human beings. For example, He gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites and instructed them with details on how to lead a holy life (Deuteronomy 5:1-21), but He also gave them a free will to make their own decisions (Deuteronomy 8). Throughout their history in both the Old and New Testament, they often chose the wrong way (Judges 2:19; Exodus 32:1-29; 2 Samuel 11:1-27; Joshua 7:1-26). However, this never caused God to take away their choice or exert undue or excessive control over their free will.

On the contrary, He responded with consequences and compassion. There is a repeated pattern throughout Exodus and Judges of how the Israelites cried out to God for help whenever they encountered challenges. However, when God delivered them from hardship or evil, they chose to ignore God's teaching and fell back into the trap of rebellion and complaint (Exodus 12:1-14; 15:1-24; 16:1-12; Judges 2:1-13, 16-19; 13:1). God did not hesitate to exert His discipline on the "stiff-necked Israelites." Even so, God did not control the Israelites strictly, demanding that they follow His commandments; rather, He permitted them to learn through trials, disappointment, and failures (Exodus 16:1-20; 32:1-35; 33:11; Judges 3:7-9; 14-16). God let them learn where the boundaries were and what He desired, but the action they took was still their choice.

Jesus also employed the same approach. As both man and God, He does not exert any undue manipulation on human, so it is unsettling to see how parents can think using an

authoritarian style to control their children is proper. In John 6:1-14, Jesus demonstrated and exemplified provision and grace to His disciples and the multitude through the miracle of two fish and five loaves. He was not thinking just in the short term but rather sought to train them to endure in the long term, when He no longer would be around to always provide for them. Jesus allowed the disciples to flounder through answers to His questions. He was teaching them to think, to become people who considered both God and their present worldly context with wisdom. It was to prepare them for receiving the Great Commission in Matthew 28:10-20 and Acts 1:8, so they could learn not only to feed the physical hunger of people but also their spiritual helplessness.

Jesus employed grace and a framework for learning as His approach for making spiritual children into spiritual men. Kimmel says, “Selfish control is the antithesis of grace. It will not only undermine the good qualities you are trying to build into your children, but it will also blunt God’s efforts in their hearts.”<sup>50</sup> In essence, God provides a good example of scaffolding. When parents choose this same healthy path, they become “adults [who] scaffold the development of children by providing a framework the children can use to grow in their environments. Healthy, happy people who can connect well with others, see others’ perspectives with tolerance, and care about their world are possible with the right foundation.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it is important for parents to let go of their children gradually with support and guidance.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>51</sup> Hall, *Raising Kids in the 21st Century*, 2.



## Sense of Belonging: Biblical and Psychological Insights

Young people need caring and supportive adults around them to serve as a form of social capital, which is found to have great impact in shaping their development. This may include parents, extended family, school teachers, and a faith community comprised of peers and older young adults who are further along in their developmental journey. Adults more advanced in age, who have life experience, also offer valuable social capital. Putnam finds that “social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids”<sup>52</sup> and that their lives “are made more productive by social ties.”<sup>53</sup> During this developmental stage, the support and guidance of caring adults, especially their parents, are important to them. Parents form the first base of such a social circle, and for this reason they have significant and long-term influence on their children. In today’s culture, people can mistakenly think that adolescents are mostly influenced by their peers and that parents have only minimal impact on them.<sup>54</sup> However, this is not true. George Barna finds that adolescents are under great influence from their role models, and parents are supposedly playing that role.<sup>55</sup> In their article for the *Journal of Adolescence*, Maja Deković and Wim Meeus observe that “the quality of the parent-child relationship affects the adolescent’s self-concept, which in turn affects the adolescent’s integration into the world of peers.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 296.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 84.

<sup>55</sup> Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, 24.

<sup>56</sup> Maja Deković and Wim Meeus, “Peer Relations in Adolescence: Effects of Parenting and Adolescents Self-concept,” *Journal of Adolescence* 20, no. 2 (April 1997): 164, accessed October 18, 2018, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197196900743>.

Furthermore, psychotherapy claims that a “client’s symptoms most often have origins in childhood. That’s not always from child abuse, but perhaps from medical issues; or a parent with disabilities, depression, or even addictions issues. Some parents may have been separated from their children because of work or immigration. Clients may have experienced school stressors.”<sup>57</sup> It is beneficial for parents to seek to eliminate these disturbing factors when children are still young so that troubling issues will not be extended into adulthood. Robbie Adler-Tapia says that “improving the overall health of younger children before their behaviors become rooted in certain patterns could potentially prevent them from being affected by certain risks.”<sup>58</sup> While parents may need to be separated from their children due to job responsibilities in order to provide for them, spiritually and psychologically conscientious parents can minimize the negative effects of this separation by having regular communication with their children through phone calls, messaging, and quality in-person time together. Any time spent together offers a good opportunity for enjoyable interaction, mutual bonding, warm caring, and spiritual nourishment.

Besides the biological connection, parents are responsible for providing a sense of family belonging during their children’s physical, emotional, social, financial, and intellectual development from infancy until adulthood. Establishing a healthy framework and approach can provide a model for teens to handle situations when parents are not around. Hall states that “adults can teach and promote this healthy state of belonging beginning in the children’s early years, and continue throughout their development. Social skills such as reasoning about decision-making and compromise can be taught to children

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<sup>57</sup> Adler-Tapia, *Child Psychotherapy*, xi.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

so that they are aware of their personal responsibility for their own behavior and family expectations.”<sup>59</sup> This helps adolescents to think and react independently, even when their parents are absent.

In the Wisdom Literature, King Solomon says, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). It is essential for human beings to have a certain level of social and emotional support, so they can cope with daily challenges in life. This is particularly true for young people since they have to deal with a range of major physical, emotional, and social changes. They need their parents, who are usually the closest and most influential adults in their lives.

Also, as mentioned in Part One of this discussion, it is helpful to have a 5:1 adult-to-child community that provides youth with a web of safe environment so they can experience and experiment in life and faith; these caring adults walk side by side with them at this critical stage.<sup>60</sup> In particular, it is beneficial to Christian youth if both parents and church partner together to nurture their growth. In *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, Clark and Powell write: “Children and adolescents need their parents to protect, nurture, and guide them in all areas of their lives, including their spiritual growth; but at the same time, God’s people throughout history have expressed their faith as a community where

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<sup>59</sup> Hall, *Raising Kids in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 67.

<sup>60</sup> Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 99-102.

there is a common bond and a shared story.”<sup>61</sup> As advised by King Solomon, when young people fall, a solid supportive network can help them to get back on their feet.

In addition to receiving support from parents and trustworthy adults, young people often need a peer group of their age on whom they can rely. This is especially significant as young people search for their identity. Gary Ezzo and Anne Marie Ezzo explain, “They use peers to help establish and then validate what they believe.”<sup>62</sup> Some parents are concerned that their children will absorb negative influences from hanging around a bad crowd. However, this fear need not become a deterrent. Parents can help children to evaluate their choices. They can teach adolescents to “walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm” (Proverbs 13:20). If a teenager makes friends who fear the Lord, he or she “grows wiser and wiser, [and] gains a large stock of spiritual knowledge and experience. . . . this holds good both in natural and spiritual wisdom, a man of any capacity at all will improve by keeping wise company; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. . . . [and] shall become like them; be a fool as they are, and grow still more and more foolish.”<sup>63</sup> This may explain the root cause of overprotective or controlling parents. They fear their children may fall into the trap of negative friendships and suffer harm, as described in Proverbs 13:20.

However, even mistakes can offer moments of learning. Peter offers one such example. In Luke 22:54-62, after Jesus was captured, Peter followed him closely to the

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<sup>61</sup> Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 139.

<sup>62</sup> Gary Ezzo and Anne Marie Ezzo, *Reaching the Heart of Your Teen: Basics of Communication between Parent and Teen* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1997), 115.

<sup>63</sup> John Gill, “Proverbs 13:20,” in *John Gill's Exposition of the Bible Proverbs 13:20*, accessed June 1, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/proverbs-13-20.html>.

high priest's house but dared not let people know his relationship with Jesus. He was surrounded by a bad crowd who was against Jesus. When he was questioned by some, if he was related to Jesus, he was frightened and denied it three times. He felt very guilty for such a reaction, even undeserving of Christ's love. However, after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared before the disciples, He turned Peter's failure into a teaching moment. Then He asked Peter to take a significant leadership role in feeding His sheep (John 21:15-19). Peter went on to preach to a crowd of thousands, who accepted Jesus as Lord (Acts 2:14-41). By the same principle, parents have to give freedom to their children, especially in making friends. When they fall, it is important to let them learn from their mistakes. When they repent, parents have to accept their return with grace as that may be a critical turning point in guiding them back to the right path.

This can pave the way for what Susan Alexander Yates suggests to caregivers of adolescents. She advises wise parents to turn their teenage children's desperate need for peer support into something advantageous. Parents can initiate discussions so their children can learn how to differentiate trustworthy friends from the bad crowds. They also can intentionally encourage the development of positive friendships.<sup>64</sup> Another suggestion for parents is to choose a healthy environment or neighborhood in which youth can find and develop friends. All of this leads to a better chance of life-giving relationships for teens. David G. Myers states that "parents influence their children in areas such as manners and political and religious beliefs, but not in other areas, such as personality. Language and other behaviors are shaped by peer groups, as children adjust to fit in. By choosing their

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<sup>64</sup> Susan Alexander Yates, *And Then I Had Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Spire/Revell, 2010), 131.

children’s neighborhoods and schools parents can exert some influence over peer group culture.”<sup>65</sup> Parents can open the door to positive peers and foster a context in which relationships with their children can flourish freely.

G. Ezzo and A. Ezzo find that children from a healthy interdependent family likely will choose friends who have similar values as those of their family. “This creates positive peer pressure. When there is harmony between the core beliefs of parents and teens, then both seek similar values in other families and friends That is why, ultimately, peer pressure on a child is only as strong as family identity is weak.”<sup>66</sup> If parents want their children to form positive friendships, the family has to first develop healthy values within the house. Children will be influenced, perhaps subtly, and seek friends of a similar mindset. Proverbs 18:24 teaches that “one who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” This verse points out that “friendship is a good plant; but it requires cultivation to make it grow. There is a kind of factitious friendship in the world, that, to show oneself friendly in it, is very expensive, and in every way utterly unprofitable.”<sup>67</sup> Conversely, true friends reap great benefits from each other and have the potential to become so close that they are considered “family.” When teenagers are embraced by supportive parents, caring adults, and positive friends, they are more likely to develop a healthy sense of belonging. This can assist them to emerge smoothly into adulthood.

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<sup>65</sup> David G. Myers, *Psychology*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Worth, 2010), 170.

<sup>66</sup> G. Ezzo and A. Ezzo, *Reaching the Heart of Your Teen*, 115-116.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph S. Exell, “Commentary on Proverbs 18:24,” in *Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary*, accessed June 1, 2018, <https://www.studylight.org/commentary/proverbs/18-24.html>.

## CHAPTER 5

### SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEENAGERS

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses constantly reminds the Israelites to teach their children to keep God's commandments and to do so from generation to generation. This chapter examines this Old Testament teaching in detail and approaches it from the perspective of a spiritual parent who now has access to the New Testament as well. Amidst the turmoil of hemorrhaging faith in today's young generation, it is necessary to draw insights from God's Word to reverse the situation.

#### **Bible Teaching on Spiritual Parenting**

The holistic nature of a person includes physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects. To respond to God's grace and His creation, Jesus taught His disciples in Luke 10:27, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27). While there are many laws in the Torah related to life and conduct, they can be summarized into two major sections in the Ten Commandments: "laws regulating conduct in man's

relationship to God; laws regulating conduct in man's relationship to his fellowman."<sup>1</sup> By obeying the first set of laws, human beings show their love to God. Such love empowers a natural flow to love other people.

When adolescents are emerging into adulthood, they have to fulfill the fundamental quest of spiritual matters in order to interact fruitfully with other human beings in love and respect. Parents who desire to support their children's spiritual development must enhance their understanding of the relationship between youth and faith as well as the roles of both parents and church for supporting their spiritual growth, especially when understanding sin and grace. In today's world, young people struggle with hemorrhaging faith.<sup>2</sup> In light of this struggle, it is vital for parents and Christian leaders to understand how to lead adolescents on their quest through doubts into strong spiritual faith that makes sense in a contemporary context.

### Significance of Faith to Youth

Adolescence is a journey for young people to explore their dreams and hopes as well as search for their identity, and this includes spirituality. They want to discover new things without the influence of their parents so as to confirm their own findings.<sup>3</sup> They feel that "knowledge is not something that gets passed down from the top to be taken in by those on the bottom. Knowledge is something you play with, something you interact with,

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Summers, *Commentary on Luke: Jesus the Universal Savior* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1975), 135.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1 of this discussion for further details regarding the concept of hemorrhaging faith.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Jones, *Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2003), 26.



something you construct meaning with.”<sup>4</sup> The fluid nature of such a search can make religious leaders feel uneasy, but young people will express their faith inclination in their own way.<sup>5</sup> Many youth hesitate to identify themselves as religious and tend to “claim to be spiritual.”<sup>6</sup> This is particularly prominent when young people are under the influence of postmodernism. P. J. Watson finds that “for the church, postmodernism is both good and bad news. The good news is that in today’s postmodern world people no longer generally presume that faith matters are by nature ‘irrational’ and that modernist philosophy and science are ‘rational’ . . . . Postmodernism is also bad news because the church cannot embrace a pluralism of incommensurable rationalities as normative.”<sup>7</sup> With such a view, today’s youth may not have a standpoint on faith matters, although they accept spirituality.

Green raises an insightful question. He asks, “What makes a human genuinely human?” The key difference between an animal and a human being is the “human possession of a soul.”<sup>8</sup> This means that even though a person has three parts—namely body, mind, and soul—it is the soul that has a more significant role than the other two components. When God created humanity, He designed spiritual beings (Genesis 2:7) so they could connect to Him. Having a soul raises humanity above other creatures of God. Jones provides biblical support for his view. He writes: “The teaching of Genesis 1 is that

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<sup>4</sup> Root, *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry*, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Madge, Hemming, and Stenson, *Youth on Religion*, 120.

<sup>6</sup> Kopp, *Postmodernism and Youth Ministry*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Watson, “Transition Beyond Postmodernism.”

<sup>8</sup> Green, *What about the Soul?* 7.

man ‘became’ a living soul, not that a ‘soul’ was coupled to his body as an extra part.”<sup>9</sup> He sees the “soul as proof that humans are not mere animals.”<sup>10</sup> This is crucial from a perspective of humanity dignity, the holy nature of a person’s existence. Green agrees and says, “Christians have derived from the existence of the soul their affirmation of the human capacity to choose between good and ill as free moral agents.”<sup>11</sup> However, science is in doubt about the existence of soul.<sup>12</sup>

Since contemporary culture often places Science and Faith at opposite ends of the spectrum, the adolescent process of discerning through a personal maze of doubts may not necessarily be destructive. Root and Dean agree and assert the following:

Faith that has become certain is no longer (by definition) faith; it has become idolatry, where we no longer seek out a living personal God but make this God into a frozen idol. The truth, then, is that there can be no relationship at all when it is based on certainty. . . . Faith is about trust. And for trust to be trust, it must always live with doubts.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, it is vital to give space for young people to express doubt and to search for truth.

If a soul is a significant component of a human being, then spirituality should not be watered down by secular studies. Jones observes, “Religion and spirituality at times can be derivative of or secondary to other psychological processes, but generally

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<sup>9</sup> Jones, *Psychology and the Christian faith*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Green, *What about the Soul?* 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 195.

speaking, religion and spirituality are fundamental and primary human characteristics because we are made to worship the one true God.”<sup>14</sup>

At times, non-believers have the impression that religion is “old, rigid, impersonal, and destructive. But the Christian faith suggests something entirely different: that human beings are staggering around in the blindness of sin and that God reveals himself and his truth decisively, inviting us to embrace that truth.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, soul searching plays a significant role in the holistic development of human beings, especially for young people. Nakkula and Toshalis stress that “as faith anchors us and provides meaning, it gives shape to our identity. This is especially important to adolescents who are newly able to conceive of multiple and sometimes competing roles within themselves and strive to locate a consistent ‘me’ within varying and demanding allegiances.”<sup>16</sup> Faith provides a sense of security and anchors one who is searching for identity. Consequently, parents have the responsibility to develop the spiritual growth of their children and guide them in the pursuit of spirituality enlightened by God (Deuteronomy 11:18-21), especially during the confusing and critical adolescent stage.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 explains clearly why and how parents need to pass on their faith to the next generation. This passage happened forty years after the Israelites had left Egypt, and Moses was on his death bed. Moses knew he would not have much time left to be with the Israelites. This new generation was born in the desert, so they did not have personal experience of God’s miraculous salvation, such as the ten plagues in Egypt

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<sup>14</sup> Jones, *Psychology*, 124.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>16</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 206.

(Exodus 7:13-12:36), crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14:1-31), provision of water (Exodus 15:22), and provision of manna and quail (Exodus 16:1-18). In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses was eager to restate God's commandments and teachings before he was about to leave this world. He earnestly reminded the Israelites that they needed to pass their faith and teachings from generation to generation, so their families and offspring could continue to receive God's blessing as His chosen people (Deuteronomy 6:1-3). Moses instructed them, "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

This is what Jesus later references in the New Testament as the greatest commandment of all in Matthew 22:34-40. In the Ten Commandments, the first four are about relating to and honoring God while the last six are about relationships with other people. Consequently, the Ten Commandments are summarized by the two greatest ones mentioned by Jesus: love God and love neighbors. Duane L. Christensen writes that the "living God has now entrusted to us his commandments in order that we may keep them, and that we may teach them to our children. In so doing we will prosper."<sup>17</sup> Although youth may be in doubt about faith during the skeptical and searching years of adolescence, parents still must endeavor to obey God's command and pass on the faith baton whenever, wherever, and however it is possible.

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<sup>17</sup> Duane L. Christensen, "Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9" In *Deuteronomy*, vol. 6A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger et al. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 136.

## Sin Concepts for Youth

To support the spiritual development of their adolescent children, parents have to first understand young people's views about sin and the doubts that they often encounter. It is common for adolescents to have a misconception about sin. For example, they might think that "sin is only their actions of sinning. They fail to recognize that all humanity is under the shadow of sin, no matter how good or bad."<sup>18</sup> It is vital for teens to learn the basic reason why Jesus died on the cross, that "if you are human, you live in the reality of sin, the reality of brokenness. Sin is the name used to describe the state of the broken relationship, at its most fundamental, between God and humanity."<sup>19</sup>

Not remedying this misconception easily leads to a common Christian malady, as described by Dallas Willard. He writes: "The Christian message is thought to be essentially concerned only how to deal with sin: with wrongdoing or wrong-being and its effects. Life, our actual existence, is not included in what is now presented as the heart of the Christian message or it is included only marginally. . . . The current gospel then becomes a 'gospel of sin management.'"<sup>20</sup> People mistakenly believe they will be saved as long as they can manage their life well and stay away from wrong-doing. However, the reality is this: "We are not sinful because of the bad or wrong things we do; we do bad, wrong and (sometimes) evil things because we live in a reality of sin." In *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, Root and Dean go on to explain what happens when this theological misnomer combines with the task of leading teens into spiritual maturity. They write: "Too often in youth

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<sup>18</sup> Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 147.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 41.

ministry we confuse adolescents by making sin a riddle to solve and a problem around which to maneuver rather than a tragic reality of brokenness that is both detrimental and unavoidable.”<sup>21</sup>

Human beings have two forces inside that pull them between leaning towards ungodly things and observing God’s laws. Paul discusses this at length in Galatians 5:16-17. He mentions that there are two forces, namely flesh and spirit. He refers to this dynamic as a conflict and internal war. He prescribes the remedy for the Christ-follower (Galatians 5:16, 18) and says the believer’s focus should be on the spirit, so as to be led by and walk in the Spirit to get away from the desire of the flesh.

Root and Dean define sin as “the tragedy of death and estrangement from God that we must bear. And we talk about sin with young people by acknowledging its inescapable reality in the world, and then sharing together in the hope of a human God who bears this tragic reality with us and promises us life beyond it.”<sup>22</sup> However, youth often equate confession of sins with being reminded of painful failures in their pursuit of self-identity. This may explain why they prefer to hide their wrong doings and suffer the isolation,<sup>23</sup> although the truth is that their sins are “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Even Adam and Eve did this, when they hid after sinning (Genesis 3:8-11). Adolescents need to learn that their natural emotional responses as human beings in a fallen world are normal. It may be a new experience for them personally, but it is nothing abnormal to the broken human condition.

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<sup>21</sup> Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 148.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

According to Ellen Charry's "Positive Theology" article in the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, holiness is a "trajectory of growth in Christ into union with God."<sup>24</sup> This means that even though human beings cannot become perfect in own effort, due to God's grace through Jesus' provision of redemption, holiness becomes accessible. This is affirmed through Jesus' promise in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Jesus' grace covers human sins. With the encouragement of Christ's love, believers can move towards holiness in the process of sanctification; after all, the final sin remedy already has been accomplished with Christ's blood on the cross. Therefore, to share the Gospel with young people is not to compare them to the good standards of other people, so as to make them feel guilty and slam them with the need to accept Christ. Instead, it is necessary to let them realize that all human beings have sin that cannot be manipulated, dealt with, and healed through their own effort.<sup>25</sup>

Parents and caring adults of young people can learn much from the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24). It is a strong illustration of God's forgiving love, regardless how bad or disappointing a person might be. In the story, when the younger son asked for his share of the inheritance, the father—who had so much life experience—could expect that the money would be wasted by this son. He might even have known the younger son would fall into the worst pit of his life. However, this father neither stopped nor begged the errant son to stay, nor did he run after him to track him down and haul him back from where he had gone. He just let his son go to reap the fruit of the bad choices he was making.

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<sup>24</sup> Ellen Charry, "Positive Theology: An Exploration in Theological Psychology and Positive Psychology," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 292.

<sup>25</sup> Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 151.

The father likely hoped that the pain of this costly lesson might cause his son to come to his senses, regret his decisions, and return. Luke 15:18 is the turning point of his son's life direction.

However, many parents are not willing to wait for such a turning point and let their children experience failures and challenges in the meantime. They either nurture them within a bubble or bail them out when consequential troubles from their bad choices arrive. Through such actions, parents short-circuit the learning process of their adolescent children. Teens and young adults do not learn the concept of consequences and may repeat the same mistake again and again. This does greater harm, and the pain from this pattern can prove even more costly than simply allowing the adolescent to suffer the ache or agony from an initial mistake. Those exercising over-protecting and controlling parenting styles<sup>26</sup> likely engage in this parenting mistake and set up their offspring for much potential suffering in the long term.

While waiting for the son to come back to his senses (Luke 15:20), the father in Jesus' parable persevered in hope and love. To apply this today may mean parents have to put their prodigal adolescent in God's hands and simply pray. The father in the story waited patiently for his dearly beloved son to return one day. In Luke 15:19, the prodigal thought that his father would definitely cut him off as a son. He just hoped that his father would accept him as a mere servant. As the son returned, although dressed in ragged clothing and foul odors from rearing pigs, the father ignored his condition. The reason why "he was able to see the younger son when he was still a long way off means that the father was watching for his son, waiting for him, longing for him. The father runs to him, embraces him, loves

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<sup>26</sup> Discussed in further detail in Part One of this paper.



him and gives him gifts.”<sup>27</sup> His long-awaited hope fulfilled caused him to gather his robes, an undignified thing to do in that era, and run to embrace his son. From this Bible story, parents need to reflect and learn. When their children make mistakes, it might be more beneficial for parents to let them taste the natural fruit of consequence. When the prodigals return and repent, parents have the opportunity to accept them with unconditional love, just like the father in the story. The dynamic of this biblical example closely relates to Christ’s salvation. God’s story interweaves with human stories. Kopp observes, “Salvation History is our story. It explains our relationship with God and the history of our love affair with our creator. Without a trust in this story, children will be without a guide on their path.”<sup>28</sup> In this way, parents often become the vibrant and memorable vehicle through which their children come to understand, appreciate, and take part in the love story of the Heavenly Father.

### Doubts of Youth in Faith

As children emerge into adolescence, they turn from being a concrete thinker into one who has the capacity for abstract thinking. This new ability gives them power to explore and raise many questions that may not bother them before such a stage. As they encounter new things and ideas every day, they may think that the Bible is “a boring, dusty book that’s on an ancient world unlike their own.”<sup>29</sup> Christian parents or youth workers

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<sup>27</sup> All About God Ministries, “Parable of the Prodigal Son”, *All About Jesus Christ* (blog), accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/parable-of-the-prodigal-son-faq.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> Kopp, *Postmodernism and Youth Ministry*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Root, *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry*, 67.

need to apply engaging approaches in order to arouse the interest of young people to explore biblical truth.

However, many Sunday school teachers still follow traditional methods. These methodologies only take into account how a student possesses head knowledge and do not help a student interpret, search, or apply what has been taught. Sunday school teachers employing such an approach use knowledge as the base of their authority in class, but “in an Internet age, the powerful have been stripped of their role as knowledge controllers. In an Internet age knowledge has become flat; anyone can possess and disseminate knowledge.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, it is not the accessibility that is important but the intrinsic desire for searching and reaching out to faith matters.

In the postmodern world, the Bible is no longer recognized as “as a guide for life or the deposit of truth.”<sup>31</sup> The Bible is not a simple self-help manual providing direction in making decisions, nor is it merely instructional to a person who seeks what to do. Neither is it a comprehensive history book. It is the divine Word showing what God has done and participates in enabling human beings to experience the redemptive reality of God. It offers insights on how to encounter God, despite worldly challenges, and shows human beings how to respond to God in actions, with emotions, and through authentic and transparent relationship with Him. In order to arouse the interest of young people to search for truth from the Bible, parents and Christian leaders need to take care not to give them the impression that the Bible is a book with frozen principles. Instead, it has to be interpreted

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>31</sup> Kopp, *Postmodernism and Youth Ministry*, 26.

as God's story and explored in how their own personal story can interweave with this grand story in the Kingdom of God.<sup>32</sup>

Most Christian parents want their children to accept and follow their faith. They may try different ways to nurture the spiritual development of their children. However, if they force religion onto their children or induce an over-churched schedule on them, it can lead to the opposite outcome. Children need to own their faith, not just adopt their parents' beliefs. Sometimes when children are over-exposed to church activities or attend a Christian school, without their parents or caring Christians helping them to move Bible teachings from their head down to the heart, Christianity seems to be a faith that promotes a "Gospel of Sin Management."<sup>33</sup> All children must go through the process of moving from believing their parents' faith to embracing a faithful spiritual walk with Christ on their own. Some teens have to touch the wet paint before they believe the sign. They do not want to accept the faith at its face value. They need to see God's love personally and receive His forgiving grace firsthand.<sup>34</sup>

If young people are not equipped to interpret the Bible but just possess head knowledge, it is likely they will find that knowledge gained does not relate to the experience they have with the surrounding world. Eventually, they will give up their effort to pursue deeper faith. Supporting adults need to understand that "the personal relationship with God that characterizes Christian maturity is not a matter of consulting formulas and 'doing what they say,' but of living out an attachment to a God of a certain gracious character and seeing

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<sup>32</sup> Root, *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry*, 57-63.

<sup>33</sup> Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Tim Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel: Trading Heartache for Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 47-48.

all humans as ones for whom God has acted in Christ.”<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, Roberts and Talbot say, “Christian wisdom is not merely a product of academic exercise, nor passed on primarily in classrooms and lecture halls. It is also a disposition of the heart, of the distinctively Christian personality; and it is passed on through those practices of church life that nurture the whole soul.”<sup>36</sup> Root reminds parents and teachers of the ultimate goal: to nurture young people spiritually. This does not involve simply instilling head knowledge; rather, it means to “invite them into the action of interpretation.”<sup>37</sup>

Often it is through their skepticism that young people search and solidify their personal faith. This keeps them from relying blindly on books or gossip or even well-meaning texts from their parents and pastors. Parks called this a “tested commitment.”<sup>38</sup> As Nakkula and Toshalis interpret Park’s theory, they note that “when an adolescent’s faith becomes more cohesive than it is conflicted, when he finds comfort in more consistent expression of ultimacy rather than in explorations of varied possibilities, it is then that the person arrives at an adult faith.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, it is wise for caring adults to provide youth with such a space for searching and a bridge to cross over from self to faith.

### **Parental Role in the Spiritual Formation of Youth**

In Psalm 139:14, the psalmist writes: “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” All human beings are

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<sup>35</sup> Roberts and Talbot, *Limning the Psyche*, 170.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Root, *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 84.

<sup>39</sup> Parks, *The Critical Years*, 222; see also Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 84.

created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The word “fear” means “reverence and awe,” and the term “wonderful” is from the root word of *pala*, which means “to be different, striking, remarkable—outside of the power of human comprehension. They are often used by Psalter to describe the acts of God, in particular His actions in the history of the ancient Israelites.”<sup>40</sup> Every young person is distinguished and valued as God’s creation physically and mentally. Parents can feel honored that God has trusted such a work of art in their hands.

Psalm 127:3-4 reflects this from a generational perspective: “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth.” All the blessings received are from God (Psalm 127:3-5); and in particular, children are one of the best among them, a free gift reverently and carefully crafted by God. It is a sin if parents abandon such a precious gift or ignore their duty as a faithful and loving parent (Psalm 127:3-5; Deuteronomy 6:6-9). With such a gift in their hands, parents have to be mindful of how to raise a child.

However, they are also reminded that they are but stewards assigned by God to protect and guide these precious gifts on their earthly journey. In essence, children never belong to anyone but God (Psalm 127:3). He has given diverse and unique gifts to be used for His glory (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). No matter how much parents love their children, they have to observe their adolescent’s God-given strength and bent and train them in the way according to God’s special design (1 Corinthians 12:4-14)—and sometimes this does not conform to parents’ own expectations. The ultimate goal is to lead their children to walk in the path of the Lord.

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<sup>40</sup> Nancy de Claisse-Walford, et al., “The Book of Psalms” of *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 965.

Many children from Christian homes learn to attend church from the time they are young. They have been treasured by their parents and caring adults. Parents have equipped them in multi-dimensional ways. However, faith is a matter of personal choice and cannot be inherited through indirect linkage. There are only children of God but no such thing as “grandchildren of God.” Unless children experience God firsthand with a close personal encounter, they will not own a faith that sticks throughout their life. Parents may love them and want them to walk in the way of the Lord, but youth walk on a tightrope.<sup>41</sup> Despite the risky and lonely journey of adolescents who search for faith, parents can be an umbrella or the horizontal rod that aids in their balance. Parents can encourage, cheer, guide, and point them to move in the right direction, helping to focus their eyes on the goal of eternal life.

In fact, young people who are seeking in faith do not need someone to answer all their questions. Instead, they just need an environment in which to feel safe, to express their doubts, and to seek God freely. Root and Dean warn that “when we cannot believe, others believe for us, and that faith is not a possession or achievement, it is a gift from God. Thus, confirmation is not the end of a road or a final exam but the welcome and continued encouragement to keep seeking God.”<sup>42</sup>

Parents are important in the faith formation of their children. Luke 14:26 states: “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” Jesus’ words may seem to exclude parents in their children’s faith journey, but this would be a misinterpretation. The real meaning of Jesus’ message is that “our call to be his disciples

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<sup>41</sup> Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 50-51.

<sup>42</sup> Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 196.

must be so central to who we are and how we live that no one else will get in the way of that commitment.”<sup>43</sup> Madge, Hemming, and Stenson affirm that “families are very important in young people’s lives and play a significant role in the development of their religious views and behaviours.”<sup>44</sup> Young people may pick up faith from observing the role-modeling of their parents in everyday life. Support, life values, and family discussion can enhance the transformation of faith instead of pressuring toward conformity.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, parents need to create a safe place where communication about faith matters can freely flow.

When children are the stage of adolescence, they are searching for self-identity and confirming personal commitment. They may become skeptical regarding the Bible teaching they have learned since they were young. They need to test what they have taken for granted and reorganize their learning into a faith that they can claim as their own. Parents are to provide a safe harbor during this stormy season for them to experiment and confirm their faith. Madge, Hemming, and Stenson observe, “While many suggested that religion was not important in choosing friends, it seemed in practice that probably the majority of friendships (particularly enduring friendships) were between those with faith position and cultural understanding in common.”<sup>46</sup> With this in mind, parents can plough and loosen the soil of their children’s heart to get it ready for developing this type of healthy relationship.

Nevertheless, some youth still may turn away from faith regardless the great efforts of parents and youth workers. Madge, Hemming, and Stenson report that many

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<sup>43</sup> Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 136.

<sup>44</sup> Madge, Hemming, and Stenson, *Youth on Religion*, 156.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

youth attend church without a true belief in God. They join religious activities just to keep harmony within the home or to maintain tradition and satisfy their family; they do not have a genuine personal commitment to Christianity.<sup>47</sup> This is why the stage of adolescence is so important.

Teens start reflecting on their own commitment to faith. In this process, they may become rebellious. When Christian children rebel in faith, people around them may not accept errant teens with grace. This can lead to a bad reputation and embarrassment for their parents. Kimmel says that “most parents unconsciously feel that their children’s behaviour is a report card on their effectiveness as parents.”<sup>48</sup> Both the rebellious child and parents might feel the pressure of being judged by legalistic standards. Kimmel reminds parents that “legalism is one of the most toxic mind-sets any Christian ministry can embrace. . . . Does it make any sense to declare war on these things in their lives when they are only the outward symbols of the inner turmoil?”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, if parents also put on glasses with a legalistic lens to view their rebellious teens, they will drive them further away. Sometimes parents have to give their children the freedom to reflect on religious matters and let them claim a personal faith after mediation, testing, and mistakes.

The Bible gives good advice to parents and caring adults on how to nurture the faith development of the next generation. God says to “train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, KJV).<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>48</sup> Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>50</sup> *Holy Bible: King James Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 2004).



Hebrew word for “train” comes from the root word of *palate* in the ancient Hebrew world.<sup>51</sup> When midwives received a newborn baby, they put mashed dates onto the top palate of the infant as they believed this might trigger their sucking instinct for the mother’s breast milk. Applied in this Bible verse, it means that parents are commanded to stimulate their children’s appetite for spiritual teaching, so they will stay on the path that the Lord has set for them according to His timing and plan. It is vital to nurture them as much as possible in the Word of the Lord.<sup>52</sup> In *Faith Begins at Home*, Mark Holmen suggests using the acronym “TRAIN” as a reminder. “T” stands for “Time,” “R” for “Repetition,” “A” for “Acceptance,” “I” for “Integrity,” and “N” for “Never ending.”<sup>53</sup> These five points are well illustrated by Deuteronomy 6:1-9, which highlights that parents have “to make ‘faith-talk’ a part of [their] everyday vocabulary”<sup>54</sup>

The Israelites were instructed to spend “Time” teaching their children about God (Deuteronomy 6:7). They had to “Repeat” it again and again whether they were sitting, walking, lying down, or getting up (Deuteronomy 6:7). Moses was speaking to all the Israelites, young and old, male or female, rich or poor, with no discrimination (Deuteronomy 6:2). By the same token, today’s parents are to walk in their footsteps and also need to “Acept” their children with no favoritism. The parental role model of

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<sup>51</sup> Ted Hildebrandt, “Proverbs 22:6a: Train Up A Child?” *Grace Theological Journal* 9, no. 1 (January 1988) 3-19, accessed September 30, 2018, [https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/otesources/20-proverbs/text/articles/hildebrandt-prov22-6train-gtj.htm](https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/20-proverbs/text/articles/hildebrandt-prov22-6train-gtj.htm).

<sup>52</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, “A Better Way to Train Up a Child,” The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Charles Swindoll, accessed June 1, 2018, <https://www.insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/a-better-way-to-train-up-a-child>.

<sup>53</sup> Mark Holmen, *Faith Begins at Home: The Family Makeover with Christ at the Centre* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005), 74-83.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

“Integrity” in everyday life is important. It demonstrates God’s teaching to children—just like tying a symbol on the hands, foreheads, doorframes, and gates (Deuteronomy 6:8) engages awareness in the whole person, body, mind, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). The ultimate goal is to not break the chain of “Never-ending” faith from one generation to the next (Deuteronomy 6:2).<sup>55</sup> Therefore, parents as social capital need to “TRAIN” their children in godly disciplines according to God’s command in Deuteronomy, so they will follow God’s teaching and not go astray.

### **Church’s Role in the Spiritual Formation of Youth: Insights on Adoptive Young Life Ministry**

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 was a significant message given by Moses to the Israelites and is valuable today as well. Moses announced that Yahweh had “commanded him to teach the people. His goal was not mere memorization but a permanent fear of God that will inspire them and their descendants to obedience and yield the desired result of long life.”<sup>56</sup> Daniel Isaac Block describes Moses as leading them into “covenant commitment rooted in the heart, but extending to every level of one’s being.”<sup>57</sup> The Israelites had to repeat God’s teaching persistently, wherever and whenever possible. Similarly, today’s adults have to take every opportunity to teach the next generation passionately about God’s Word.

Besides parents, the faith community is also very significant in the spiritual formation of young people. This means “being able to trust others who [have] shared similar beliefs and values, and learn from those who were more knowledgeable, were

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<sup>55</sup> Holmen, *Faith Begins at Home*, 74-83.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Isaac Block, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 177.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

important aspects. Overall, belonging to a religious community could make young people feel safe and supported within the community and give them a sense of identity and a reference group.”<sup>58</sup> With the local church playing such an important role, Tony Jones warns that “when we water down the message of Christ, or when we try to market the church so that it looks like a shopping mall or a university or a counselling centre—or when we pretend that we’re no different than a hundred other social organizations—we’re not being the church.”<sup>59</sup> Instead, the church has to be a concrete community offering support and comfort to feed human needs in a world that is filled with suffering and fear.<sup>60</sup>

Although the faith community has great desire to convert non-believers, it should not view them as a project requiring manipulative tactics. Instead, non-Christians are mainly touched and attracted by the love and support they receive from a church. This only encourages their search for faith.<sup>61</sup> This intersects the critical stage when a child moves from obligatory church attendance to personally owning faith. Kopp advocates that “to help teens in this time of transition, the church not only needs to provide caring adults to mentor and guide them; it also needs qualified youth ministers trained in the demands of the present culture to provide meaningful and appropriate experiences for today’s teens.”<sup>62</sup>

What Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:6, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow,” illustrates this point well. “Farmers were keenly aware

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<sup>58</sup> Madge, Hemming, and Stenson, *Youth on Religion*, 105.

<sup>59</sup> T. Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, 90.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 194.

<sup>61</sup> Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Kopp, *Postmodernism and Youth Ministry*, xv.

that their own contribution to a successful harvest in any given year was rather minimal compared to the vagaries of nature, which were seen to be directly in the hand of God.”<sup>63</sup> Similarly, when compared to God’s role, humans’ roles are nothing of consequence. In applying the insights drawn from 1 Corinthians 3:6, parents are better compared to the soil, because they provide the basic stable environment for the development of their children. Other sources of social capital surrounding their children’s lives—such as school, church, community, extended family, and peer groups—are also factors that contribute to the soil but are more comparable to fertilizer, contributing to the growth of a plant. The parental soil should be loosened to make the field (the hearts of their children), ready to receive spiritual seeds and valid life values at any time and to allow for other nourishing resources, such as water and fertilizer, to slip into the soil and nurture growth. In the end, it is the sun and light that make the plant flourish and grow. That is, the Heavenly Father lets children grow in His own timing, plan, and mercy, with the assistance of soil (parents) and water (other caring adults around).

God, parents, and church or community function just like the three legs of a stool. Each requires the presence of the others for the stool to stand, as all participate in balance and partnership. Therefore, if parents desire to see fruit from their children’s spiritual growth, besides providing good soil at home to encourage the growth, they also have to partner closely with God and the Body of Christ.

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<sup>63</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Corinthians I*, vol. X of *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 73.

PART THREE  
FAITHFUL ACTION

## CHAPTER 6

### GOALS AND PLAN TO EQUIP PARENTS

Using theological reflection and insights gained through Bible teaching as well as research, this chapter sets forth goals and plans to equip parents and analyzes their implication on parenting. The chapter concludes with some practical strategies. It also develops a series of systematic parenting courses that can be used in local churches.

#### **Theological Implication of Holistic Parenting**

Human beings are created in the image of God and are comprised of body, mind, and soul (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:14; Luke 10:27). Therefore, if parents desire to support their adolescent children, they have to respect and understand the development of all three areas to gain a balanced view. The Bible indicates that a person's physical body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Part Two of this discussion has explained how and why there is no conflict between Science and Faith, so Christian parents can inform their support of the physiological development of their teens based on scientific information. Puberty and neurological development are two major changes that occur during adolescence. Despite their clumsiness or unattractive appearance during this stage, teens need parents to accept and love them as valuable treasures given by God. This means that parents have to be extra

patient, kind, and encouraging. Employing godly character in this way can lead teens to learn to respect their mind, body, and soul and employ them according to God's design.

With drastic changes in the adolescent brain, especially in the frontal lobe, teens tend to be more emotional and indecisive. However, there is a positive side of such changes: being energetic, innovative, and explorative. This is God's way of transitioning teens into adulthood. When parents accept such changes as part of the developmental stage, they can take advantage of these positive traits and downplay the unfavorable attributes as merely temporary. For teens, this effort on the part of parents is received as robust love and support, which contributes to a healthy-parent child relationship. It also provides a context conducive for parents to instill positive life values into their children, while also aiding the development of an adolescent's brain circuits.

As biblically and theologically discussed in Part Two, both God and human beings express different types of emotions. Consequently, there is no inherent or necessary conflict between Christian psychology and secular psychology. They can inform each other, provided that the Christian remains alert against undue or unhealthy influence from the world. Parents can freely benefit from both trends of psychology to understand the development and struggles faced by today's youth. Heart issues have to be supported by love, patience, and understanding. As youth seek out their identity, parents are uniquely positioned to become their primary mentor. This means slowly releasing them into independence and teaching them how to grapple with tough decisions. Just like any adult, sometimes teens will make mistakes—but these, too, are opportunities for moments of Christian teaching. If parents opt to exercise excessive control, this can damage family relationships or develop distorted characters. Parents need to let go and respect their

adolescent children as individuals created in the image of God. Instead of demanding that youth follow a path to pursue a “successful” life packed with wealth, fame, and power, Christian parents have to train their children in the way of the Lord. By offering them a warm and safe home environment and helping them connect with a supportive community or peer group, parents can provide their children with a web of social capital and subtly instill a healthy sense of belonging in them in which healthy autonomy can freely develop.

God created people as spiritual beings with a soul that has a special sensitivity to connect with the Creator. Parents are commanded repeatedly by the Bible to stir up their children’s spiritual appetite for God and teach them to obey God’s Word (Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 11:18-21). Very often adolescents do not like to accept what is passed down to them but prefer to explore their own path. During this searching stage, parents have to be patient and supportive, giving them space to search and establish a personal faith. Some young people may have a misconception about sin, thinking that confession means admission of failure. Particularly in this area, they need love and assurance from caring adults to lead them back to the right path. In this way, parents and the local church can partner to offer fertile ground for teens’ spiritual development (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:6).

### **Suggested Parenting Strategies to Support Adolescents**

Amid rapid global changes, many parents find it frustrating and stressful when trying to nurture their children in this postmodern world. As discussed in earlier chapters, cultural clashes and gaps in technology further pull parents and children apart, especially during the critical stage of adolescence. Some parents use a high-controlling approach to discipline their children or demand that they pursue a seemingly successful path within



today's competitive and performance-driven culture. However, this further widens the gap in the parent-child relationship, causing a frustrated parent and an adolescent who feels lost and abandoned. Consequently, it is necessary to adopt an appropriate parenting approach that leads to a win-win solution. Providing a supportive and safe home environment for a teen first starts with parents' self-care, followed by parental awareness of adolescent development. Partnership from church and community can further support parents in nurturing their teens.

### Parents' Self Care

When people desire to help others during emergencies, they first have to ensure their own safety. By the same token, when parents aim to nurture their children well and walk side by side with them on this life journey, parents have to ensure their own well-being before they can support their children. Parents need to examine and reflect if they are maintaining a balanced lifestyle and not just focusing on their children or career. If parents desire healthy and holistic development for their children, positive role-modeling is very effective. This means that if Christian parents want their children to have a strong spiritual life, they cannot simply demand it. They must maintain a close relationship with God and engage in dedicated discipleship with Christ. This means engaging in daily devotionals, employing prayer and the Word when seeking answers to life's challenges, loving the Lord with mind and body and soul, and treating others the way God instructs in His Word.

While life can bring crisis, financial burdens, marital discord, career disappointments, health issues, and overwhelming schedules, parents must allow teens to witness how to weather such storms. Some parents may lack energy, the mental or

emotional capacity to face such life events, or be so hurt from their own family-of-origin experience that they feel defeated, stressed, or embarrassed to see their teenage child struggle. If this is the case, then parents can seek support. Besides seeking God for wisdom and comfort, parents can seek help from their spouse, close friends, counselors, or therapists who offer consolation, encouragement, and advice during difficult times. In this way, parents' well-being and the awareness of their own self-care is the starting point for good parenting.

### Parents' Understanding of Youth Development

During adolescence, young people need positive social capital and scaffolding to support their holistic development in body, mind, and soul. They desperately need caring adults to accept them with grace and patience, instead of receiving over-reactive responses with a judgemental tone. In order to love and support teens, caregivers have to step into adolescent shoes to understand their situations and their struggles from a teen's perspective.

However, many parents complain that their adolescent children tend to shut them out. Often this is a way young people try to hide their hurts and confusion from adults. Turning parents away may not necessarily mean that they do not desire to be connected with them. Parents need to understand what they see on a deeper level, that adolescence is a stage in which young people need to seek autonomy and self-identify.

Parents need to learn to recognize drastic changes in their teen's brain development and hormone fluctuation during puberty, in order to avoid misunderstandings and thoughts that their children despise them or no longer desire to communicate with them. In Christian families, the issue of hemorrhaging faith further puts fuel on the burning fire between the

two generations. However, educating themselves about youth development can pave the way for healthy parent-child bonding during the stormy adolescent phase.

A lack of healthy parent-child bonding easily leads to conflicts, misunderstanding, and a cycle of rebellion. In addition to gaining an understanding of the developmental process, seeking out recent research or making an effort to absorb a basic sense of technology can provide a glimpse of the inside and outside world their teen is facing—all before they leap to conclusions and cast blame on seemingly rebellious, ungrateful children. All of this comes together to form a strategy for compassionate parenting, which can be aided by the many parenting books and online websites that offer articles, e-books, videos, and other resources.<sup>1</sup> Parenting workshops also are sponsored by many organizations—such as community centers, schools, clubs, and parenting associations.<sup>2</sup> There even exist professional parenting coaches, who can help and mentor parents.<sup>3</sup> All of these resources are readily available, either free or at a nominal cost.

While external assistance exists to help equip parents to be more supportive and understanding of their teens, many of these resources are only random or piecemeal provisions of short-term support and lack a systematic approach that offers a holistic view

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Biblical Parenting, accessed November 20, 2018, <http://biblicalparenting.org>; Kara Powell, “Blog,” accessed November 20, 2018, <https://karapowell.com/blog/>; Paul Tripp, “Getting to the Heart of Parenting,” accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.paultripp.com/getting-to-the-heart-of-parenting>.

<sup>2</sup> Toronto Chinese Christian Parenting Association, accessed November 20, 2018, <http://tccpa.org/>; Reconnect Family Ministry, accessed November 20, 2018, <http://www.reconnect.hk/eng/index.php>; City of Toronto, “Toronto Parenting Programs,” accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/children-parenting/children-programs-activities/child-family-programs-and-groups/parenting-groups-and-services/>.

<sup>3</sup> Biblical Parenting Coaching Program, “We Can Help You Change Any Child at Any Age with Any Problem,” accessed November 20, 2018, <http://www.biblicalparenting.org/change/default.asp>; Positive Parenting Solutions, “Parent Coaching,” accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.positiveparenting.com/parent-coaching/>; Nicole Schwarz: Parent Coach, “Parent Coaching,” accessed November 20, 2018, <https://imperfectfamilies.com/parent-coaching/>.

and self-reflection. Here is where this present project intersects the field and suggests a curriculum and steps of implementation for a series of systematic parenting courses.

### Partnering with Community

Ecclesiastes 4:9 offers this wisdom: “Two are better than one.” This verse particularly applies when nurturing young people. Besides parents, adolescents also need the support and friendship of other caring adults. Such community partnership can provide young people with a safety web of trust, advice, support, encouragement, and joyful fun. Such a support network exposes teens to the broader Body of Christ and extends their circle and capacity for insights and experiences beyond their own parents. For Christian families, there are two major groups that offer such a web of partnership to walk with them during this formative journey. They are the faith community and a 5:1 community, with five supportive and caring adults for every developing teen.<sup>4</sup>

In many churches, there is a subtle barrier between parents and the youth pastor. Both parties love teens but their styles and approaches may seem quite different. Phil Bell states that some youth pastors find that parents over-protect their teens. Even when the pastors try to reach out to the parents in the midst of their busy ministry schedule, they may still receive criticism from parents.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, parents sometimes find youth pastors to be disorganized, rude, or self-centered simply because many are still young adults themselves. Consequently, it is necessary to bring the two parties together, as both are vital and influential to young people. They need to begin seeing each other as being on

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<sup>4</sup> Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 99-102.

<sup>5</sup> Bell, *Team Up!* 9-10.

the same team, because they are partners in the life of the developing adolescent. While youth workers have a strong desire to nurture youth, they have to admit that they only can interact and exert impact on a teen for a few hours per week, while parents exert influence both implicitly and explicitly twenty-four hours a day. While youth workers are the fertilizer to a plant, parents are the soil providing the basic nurturing ground (1 Corinthians 3:6). Therefore, it is necessary for the church to equip parents to be effective spiritual leaders at home so as to expedite the spiritual development of young people.

By the same token, parents have to respect and appreciate the solid support of youth workers from the faith community. Although they are not the parents, a youth worker puts in valuable time and effort all to support their offspring. Therefore, parents need to form a good relationship and extend appreciation to the pastoral and youth ministry team. One way for parents to do this is to serve as volunteers in a church's young life development ministry, so as to extend their parental love to other young people who may not be receiving it in their own home. Another way is for parents to seek to understand what youth are being taught in church and why. With this knowledge, they can follow up with teens and discuss these same topics at home or encourage them to apply the teachings in daily life.

Since many youth workers are young adults who may not know how to interact professionally with parents, to remove such a barrier parents can be the first ones to extend gratitude and friendship to these young adults. Parents also can take the initiative and suggest family-church partnership to the pastoral or youth ministry team, so they can begin appreciating parents for their role (if this is not happening already). With a close partnership between church and family, young people in the faith community are greatly blessed.

Another group that can support the development of young people is the 5:1 community suggested by Powell and Clark in *Sticky Faith*.<sup>6</sup> The adults can be from different age groups, so as to provide support and insights from various perspectives. This intergenerational relationship can give young people a basis for spiritual development and a healthy sense of belonging in a Christian circle. Parents must be on the lookout for caring, reliable, faithful adults who are willing to invest in the life of their offspring and invite them as potential partners in nurturing their children. They must show appreciation to this group of caring adults and work closely with them to help promote an integrative, healthy web around their child.

### **Systematic Parenting Courses**

A series of five systematic parenting courses is proposed in this thesis. Each course contains five related lessons on a focused topic. The suggested length of each lesson is two hours. Besides lecturing, the lesson content includes a variety of activities and formats aimed to inform parents with knowledge and to encourage transformation of the heart. The setup and details will be discussed further in Chapter 7, while the Appendix offers a comprehensive outline of Courses 101 through 105.

The first five chapters of this thesis have presented the significant areas of which parents have to be aware—namely, the challenges faced by today’s teenagers and their parents as well as the development of an adolescent’s body, mind, and soul. Through the lens of biblical teachings, this discussion has affirmed that parents who desire to nurture their children have to understand and respect their holistic development. It all culminates in

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<sup>6</sup> Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 99-102.

this series of systematic parenting courses. The series leads parents step by step to become aware of the challenges faced by today's teens and their parents; to understand holistically the body-mind-soul development of adolescents; and to learn how to develop potential solutions through a biblical lens that might be appropriate for their specific situation. By gaining knowledge and insights on how to support their children, these systematic parenting courses seek to help parents aid their teen to emerge smoothly into adulthood.

“Course 101: Overview of Parenting Adolescents” gives an overview of the vision and mission of parenting through the lens of Scripture and reviews challenges faced by parents and their adolescent children. In both the Old and New Testaments adults, particularly parents, are commanded to teach the next generation in a warm and safe environment how to honor God and follow His commands. Therefore, the first lesson proves very important in establishing the ground principle that being a spiritual parent is God's command and not an option. The next lesson of the course raises parents' sense of urgency to understand their teenage children at a deeper level. Informing them of the needs and challenges youth face in different arenas attempts to stir up parents' interest in learning more about adolescence from a teen's perspective.

At times, the root problems actually stem from the parents themselves. Often experts or workshops guide parents to focus on teenagers' issues and ignore those that parents face. For this reason, the third and fourth lessons of this course discuss challenges parents face in their household, society, and faith community. The course then offers instructional material for parents' self-care. This includes a general understanding of their own attachment models and how to use mindsight tools for controlling their emotion in

times of great stress and anxiety.<sup>7</sup> It provides an opportunity for parents to engage in self-discovery and identify any baggage they may carry over from their family of origin. By realizing their attachment model, they can seek a possible remedy or at least remain aware of its implication on their parenting style. Overall, it is hoped that parents will respond to God's calling to be a supportive spiritual parent to adolescent children and understand challenges from both sides.

“Course 102: Parenting to Support the Psychological Development of Adolescents” aims to guide parents to gain an understanding of challenges faced by adolescents in their external world as well as their internal world, by dealing with issues of the heart. The first lesson in this segment leads parents to understand the external world, especially postmodernism, which exerts great impact on today's young people. Then the lessons look at the inside world of adolescents, highlighting youth thinking in a new way and their keen search for autonomy, identity, and a sense of belonging. For each area, suggestions are made to parents on how to help young people on this journey—specifically, the provision of social capital, scaffolding, coping with stress,<sup>8</sup> and even borrowing Jesus' example for facing different types of temptations.<sup>9</sup> Insights from a few movies are discussed, such as *Toy Story*.<sup>10</sup> Overall, it is hoped that revealing the psychological challenges faced by

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<sup>7</sup> Siegel, *Brainstorm*, 144-199, 39-64.

<sup>8</sup> Elkind, *All Grown Up & No Place to Go*, 195-214.

<sup>9</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (Hong Kong: Logos Book House, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> *Toy Story*, directed by John Lasseter, produced by Ralph Guggenheim and Bonnie Arnold, screenplay by Joss Whedon, Andrew Stanton, Joel Cohen, and Alec Sokolow (Pixar Animation Studios, 1995).



adolescents will develop empathy and urgency within parents, help them give compassion and spiritual attention to these young folks, and even recall their own poignant teen years.

“Course 103: Parenting to Support the Physiological Development of Adolescents” gives parents a basic overview of brain development and puberty during adolescence. With such knowledge, parents can better understand the implication of physiological developments on young people. The course first looks at changes caused by puberty (appearance and mood swings) to comprehend how these changes may impact a teen’s self-image and emotions. The goal is for parents to gain deeper understanding, develop compassion, and become more patient with children. The course then examines internal development of the adolescent brain. Since most parents may not be familiar with brain features and functions, this course uses four lessons to discuss at a slower pace brain development and its impact so as to give parents some basic knowledge without being too overwhelming. This covers physiological changes that may impact a teen’s daily life and discusses possible problems, such as addiction and mental illness. It offers some suggestions to parents for navigating this critical time.<sup>11</sup> Overall, it is hoped that parents will develop an awareness of physiological changes and potential problems, so they can be better prepared when the symptoms appear. When parents have a basic concept of the implication of these changes in teens, they are likely to be more empathetic, patient, and supportive—and perhaps even remember their own adolescent struggles.

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<sup>11</sup> F. Jensen and Nutt’s *The Teenage Brain* is used as a resource for these suggestions.

“Course 104: Parenting to Support the Spiritual Development of Adolescents” covers the research and findings of the Hemorrhaging Faith Report.<sup>12</sup> It also reviews factors that may hinder or motivate a youth in searching for faith and analyzes the root problems why so many Christian teenagers rebel in faith. This course suggests ways for parents to provide their adolescents with a healthy and safe environment for spiritual development. Finally, it discusses faith rhythms at home—such as family devotions,<sup>13</sup> family rituals during special seasons or celebrations, and parental blessing of children. This course provides parents with practical tips on nurturing their children’s faith. “Parenting from the heart”<sup>14</sup> and “creating ten spiritual soils (environments)”<sup>15</sup> are offered as instructional material to help parents gain understanding and knowledge. Overall, it is hoped that parents will sense the urgency of their children’s faith exit and be motivated to become a spiritual parent determined to nurture teens in fertile spiritual soil at home.

“Course 105: Partnership in Parenting” aims to encourage parents to develop partnerships with the church, community, and other Christian adults to support the holistic development of their adolescents. The course first starts with a panel discussion by inviting experts from different areas. It may include speakers such as a professional educator, youth worker in the social community, researcher from the school board, church pastor, and school principal. The goal is to give parents an opportunity to gain an

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<sup>12</sup> Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 12-26, 110-115.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Holmen, *Faith Begins @home Devotions* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Tripp, “Getting to the Heart of Parenting.” See also G. Ezzo and A. Ezzo, *Reaching the Heart of Your Teen*.

<sup>15</sup> Michelle Anthony, *Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today’s Families* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010).

overall understanding of the environments and authority with whom young people may interact in their daily life. The 5:1 community<sup>16</sup> is offered as instructional material to help parents establish a supportive and caring adult group for their children.

Other lessons focus on family-church partnership. These aim to help parents look at family ministry from the perspective of church leaders. It includes an interesting exercise in turning the tables and asking parents to play the role of the pastoral team and church's youth workers. Parents have to draft a proposal to plan some family ministry events. With this exercise, parents can be equipped to support and host such events in the future. Most importantly, it allows parents to step into the shoes of youth workers and realize their challenges or possible solutions in launching family ministry. This can lead parents to become more appreciative and empathetic towards the church team. The overall goal is to encourage creative family-community partnership.

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<sup>16</sup> Kara Powell, *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family: Over 100 Practical and Tested Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 95-113.

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

This chapter discusses the setup of the systematic parenting courses and an implementation plan. The purpose of this course series is to provide parents with a deeper understanding of their children's holistic development as well as the struggles both parents and children face. It challenges parents to digest the learned materials and transform them into actions and a favorable parenting approach that can benefit a participant's family. Consequently, it is necessary to cast the vision and prepare both the parents and the church to get ready as partners for supporting the next generation. Through different channels of post-implementation evaluation and receiving feedback, the materials and formats of the course series can be refined further to suit the needs of participating families.

#### **Implementation Plan**

In order to make parents realize the urgency of engaging in a systematic course approach to parenting, it is necessary to first stir up their appetite for being equipped as a godly parent. It is necessary to plough and loosen the soil to get them ready for receiving the seed through pre-ministry work. This "pre-ministry work" can take shape as inviting

knowledgeable and faithful speakers to preach on parenting topics in a few Sunday worships, providing parenting articles, and hosting a few stand-alone parenting workshops (perhaps after a Sunday service). This can start to arouse the interest of parents, as they begin to gauge their own personal need.

The next step is to gather a few active parents to be allies in organizing and promoting a pilot course. Timing is crucial. It is important to pick a period within the school and church calendar that does not conflict with summer vacations, the holiday seasons, or the very beginning or end of a semester. These tend to be hectic weeks for families. Initially, the courses could be offered as a pilot test during weekday mornings for stay-at-home mothers (for example, every Wednesday morning between 10:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., when children are at school).

As the starter class, Course 101, especially the first lesson, has to be engaging to the parents. It must be a positive experience, so that positive feedback and peer encouragement can spread among other parents. After the first course is completed, it is important to provide parents with a brief break, for about a few weeks. This is to allow them to process what they have learned and perhaps to start contextualizing the knowledge gained to see how it might apply within their own family. It is hoped that parents might begin to see where their present parenting style might need to be adjusted. This break is also for any holiday or busy seasons, so there are no calendar conflicts as the next course begins.

The next four steps involve repeating the previous one. This involves hosting Course 102, providing for a short break, hosting Course 103, allowing a break, and so on. This systematic approach might seem slow. However, each course experience contains five

lessons, with breaks and holiday seasons in between, so it could take roughly a year to eighteen months for a parent to complete five full courses.

At the end, it is important to celebrate with parents and honor the learning and transformation that have occurred throughout the full series. This may mean hosting a big graduation ceremony and community dinner. It also may include a commissioning ritual to bless participating parents as God-sent missionaries to their adolescent children. Such a blessing can be very encouraging to parents to step out and risk further actions at home or church. When the pilot test is completed successfully and teaching materials have been fine-tuned based on evaluation and feedbacks, the second wave may be offered either during Sunday school or as a midweek evening course so that working parents can attend the course.

The number of participants in a course can range from twenty to thirty people. This is large enough to allow for dynamic perspectives from a variety of families yet small enough to foster intimacy. It is important for parents to feel comfortable sharing their family's struggles in a trustworthy environment. Therefore, ideally, a course should have at least fifteen participants to allow for diversity but should never exceed thirty-five, in order to minimize a participant's potential anxiety or shyness about sharing personal stories in a large-sized community.

Each class meeting lasts about two hours. It is even better if the time frame can extend a bit more to allow more time for discussion, interaction, and reflection. Every class contains the same basic components: prayer, providing knowledge, and discussion in small groups. The class starts and ends with prayer to invite the active presence of the Holy Spirit and to ask for God's wisdom and love to dwell with the group. Each lesson includes a brief

five- to ten-minute review recapping the previous lesson, so parents can solidify and reconnect with what they have learned earlier. The lecturer may spend roughly forty-five to sixty minutes teaching content that provides new knowledge that parents currently need. There are also some special presentations, such as playing a movie video like *Inside Out*.<sup>1</sup> Handouts with detailed notes are compiled into a binder for distribution during the first meeting for each course. Students are encouraged to take notes to supplement their learning.

Each lesson always includes a time of at least thirty minutes for small group discussion. This component is very important in a parenting course. Some thought-provoking questions are posted on the screen during this discussion time.<sup>2</sup> It is recommended to have four to five people in a small group, with the same membership in each group throughout the course, to encourage mutual trust and rapport. Group members should be switched in the next course to allow fellowship and networking with parents from other groups. It is also advised that the same group of parents attend all five courses to help foster deeper relationships as the series progresses. No new parents should be added in the middle of the course series.

By having consistent members within a small group throughout one course and the same participants for the whole series, parents can slowly grow more comfortable discussing their views on the topic in a trustworthy atmosphere, which is fostered as they share their own family situations. By doing so, they can find that they are not alone in facing challenges at home. Through the discussion, they may realize that the issues they have encountered in their parent-child relationship are quite common in other families.

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<sup>1</sup> *Inside Out*, directed by Peter Docter (Disney/Pixar, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for sample discussion questions.

Such affirmation can help parents feel a sense of relief and help them to risk further to share their frustrations. Having a safe place to vent negative emotions can create space to think of positive ways for resolving the problems they currently face. If time allows, each group can send a representative to give a one-minute report on their discussion so that fellow groups can learn from one another.

A smaller group setting combined with consistent attendance by participants eventually builds a more intimate sense of community among participating parents. This helps to encourage them to rely on one another for mutual support or prayer between class meetings. They may grow to be a group of active volunteers for hosting future family events in the church. After completing all five courses, parents might desire to continue to meet up regularly as an ongoing parental support group. When the series is repeated, some participants may be invited back to serve as small group leaders to facilitate the discussion in small groups. This also can help to develop a group of key leaders for supporting family ministry in the church.

In many lessons throughout the five-course experience, brief video clips are also included. Each relates closely to the specific topic of focus. These video clips aim to stimulate parents' thoughts or stir up their hearts toward an urgency for supporting their children.<sup>3</sup> One of the most significant videos usually is played in the first lesson of Course 101. It is about a cougar fiercely chasing after a bear cub on the mountain.<sup>4</sup> When the cougar almost grabs the cub as its meal, the little one stands up to fight back. Unexpectedly, the cougar turns away and spares the life of the cub. It then shows the mother bear behind

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<sup>3</sup> See the Appendix for a complete list of videos within each course.

<sup>4</sup> "Cougar and Bear Cub" (video), accessed November 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTtIAQOodak>.



the cub, roaring fiercely at the cougar to move away from her offspring. This type of video clip encourages parents to connect with the protective emotional instinct they feel for their child. The video is a metaphor for how the world and Satan are like that fierce cougar trying to attack our children at any moment. Parents have to protect their teens against such attacks. If parents give up on their children, thinking that they are rebellious and hopeless, Satan will take this chance to snatch their children away. When learning that the Heavenly Father does not give up on any rebellious man or woman, parents can persist in hope to not give up on any of their children.

While all the lessons are shown in the Appendix, two particular lessons are worthy to highlight here. One is the first lesson of Course 105, when a group of experts is invited as panelists. These guests will be given fifteen minutes each to share from their area of expertise, relating to adolescent development. For example, a research director from the Toronto District School Board can share findings from the “2011 Student Census on Grade 7-12 Students’ Emotional Well-Being.”<sup>5</sup> Parents may be very interested when the panelist touches on professionally prepared facts, which may not be readily accessible to the public. After the individual presentations from different speakers, the remaining forty-five minutes are for a question-and-answer session to allow panelists to respond to specific inquiries important to parents. Speakers can answer a specific question and provide different angles and responses, according to their field of expertise, which offer participants deeper insights and a more balanced view.

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<sup>5</sup> Toronto District School Board, *2011-12 Student & Parent Census 2* (July 2013), accessed November 23, 2018, <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/2011-12CensusFactSheet2EmotWellbeingPart1.pdf>.

The other interesting activity is to let each small group present a proposal for hosting a family event. During Course 105, parents are given the details of this assignment in the first lesson, so they will have a few weeks to work with their partners in the small group for preparing the presentation. Although the commitment level and participation level may vary, some parents may take the proposal seriously and bring it to their pastoral team or church board to actualize it.

For each course, there are two basic types of assignments: journaling responses to reflection questions and a final paper or group project (e.g., creating a family ministry proposal). The reflective assignments guide parents to reflect on the learned materials and link them to their children and family situations. Since these questions tend to be more sensitive and personal, it is important for parents to process their answers more privately. The journaling assignment also gives parents time and space to think through the questions and provide honest sharing. This serves more as a reflective journal of their parenting journey and transformation throughout the five courses. The participants are given the option of submitting the journals to the lecturer if they desire advice, feedback, or words of encouragement. The weekly journal is expected to be about one to two pages. The final paper is expected to be longer, because it is the final assignment that integrates the course content comprehensively. In some courses, such as Course 105, the final assignment is a group project that encourages interaction and joint effort among parents for digesting and applying the course materials in parenting or ministry.

After the course, the church can keep its momentum by offering a few family initiatives. For example, the graduating class can continue as a parental support group that gathers regularly for sharing and prayer, integrating more parents as they graduate from the

course. A library with family and parenting resources can be set up to encourage parents' further pursuit on the subject. Parents also can be encouraged to serve as a volunteer in the youth ministry or support a youth in a 5:1 community. Selected parents may be invited to facilitate small groups in the new parenting course series. A joint family worship for all age groups and regular family events can be hosted, so that the church can continue towards an authentic family-based model, bringing blessing to both parents and children.

### **Post-Implementation Evaluation**

Evaluation will happen on two levels to assess the content of the parenting series and the effectiveness of its structural experience. This will occur after implementing the systematic parenting series as a pilot test, upon the completion of each course and also at the end of the final meeting in Course 105, The series is evaluated in ways. One assessment is a basic course evaluation, to be completed at the fifth lesson of each course. With a ranking scale of “1” to “5” (with 5 being the highest score), it asks the participants to rate the effectiveness and relevancy of the course.<sup>6</sup>

The goal of the course is to help parents to gain an understanding of the development and challenges of adolescents in three areas: physiological, psychological and spiritual. Collectively, the surveys seek to discover if parents feel more equipped to provide a loving and supportive environment for their teenage children, in partnership with community. There are two questions to evaluate if the overall course content is solid and relevant to participants in their parenting.

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<sup>6</sup> The evaluation sheet can be found as the final element in the Appendix.

The instructors of the course are also a significant contributing factor to the success of this course. Not only do they have to know the subject and the course content well, they have to be able to present the materials in an interesting and organized format. It is especially challenging with Course 103, when medical and scientific terms about the brain development have to be presented clearly in simplified layman terms, so participants without any background or education in biology may still understand and stay interested. It will be more effective if the instructors have a warm personality and an open-minded attitude, because many parents coming to this course have experienced hurts and confusion in parenting. They will be able to absorb the materials better if they feel safe to share their personal challenges in a secure and receptive environment. For this reason, the survey also asks parents to rate the instructor and his or her presentation of the material.

The evaluation then moves into the rating of class activities and home assignments. Since small group discussion is a significant component of this course, it is important to understand if it has achieved the goals as designed. In some discussions, the groups have to work together for a project or a presentation. The question asks if such activities enhance the learning and understanding of the learned materials. Since video clips and movies are being used in the courses, either for stirring up their thoughts or for small group discussion, it is essential to ask participants to rate their relevancy as well. The evaluation also has to confirm if the reading materials enhanced parents' knowledge base.

Some areas cannot be assessed using a rating system. Therefore, at the bottom of the evaluation, there are four open-ended questions. Participants are asked to specify the topics and materials that are most beneficial to them as a participant, to provide feedback on which subjects helped them most in their family or their ministry, and to indicate why.

Since participants are given a reflective question every week, it is important to see if these questions and exercises led to any personal insights. A portion of the survey also reflects this. Each course needs honest input for areas of improvements, so it is listed as one of the open-ended questions asking for feedback so that the next course can be revised accordingly. Even though this course series covers an overview of parenting in an extensive scope, there may still be other areas or topics in which participants feel interest or think might be helpful in their parenting. Therefore, there is a space for them to put down a wish list of topics for future courses. Participants may have comments on areas that are not listed above, so the final question gives them the opportunity to list any further insights or feedback they would like to contribute to the evaluation. This evaluation will be given to the participants in the final class of a course. In order to receive proper input, participants will be given at least five to ten minutes to complete it.

Besides formal evaluation, authentic and intuitive feedback can be obtained through ongoing observation. During the course, the lecturers will need to evaluate their delivery as well as the course content by the facial expression of the participants. If participants look bored, the materials will have to be modified to be more relevant to them and be presented in a more interesting and engaging way. If participants look puzzled, the lecturers will need to slow down or use alternative ways to explain concepts. Sometimes the content may be too overwhelming or technical, so certain contents should be simplified. This may especially be valid in the section on brain features, so lecturers have to observe closely the feedback and facial expression of their students on this subject. If participants look interested in the topic, the lecturer can use this interest to delve more deeply into a topic.

This type of ongoing observation is a form of interaction, which can be very powerful and effective.

Other informal evaluation includes reading the reflective journal of the parents. Some parents may desire to submit their personal reflective journal to the lecturer for further advice or they may simply want to have an empathetic person to understand their struggles. From their honest sharing, the lecturer may understand how much the parents have gained an understanding on the topic or whether they are applying insights in their family life. Feedback also can be obtained through informal interviews, feedback gathered impromptu while gathering in fellowship, during home visitation, or providing caring calls to the participants as a follow-up. The input through both the formal and informal evaluation, feedback, and comments—whether positive or negative—can inform the refining of teaching materials, format, and course style so that more parents can reap the benefits of this parenting series.

## CONCLUSION

Since parents are considered the most influential factor in their children's development, this paper has sought to analyze the current context of North American parents and their teenage children so as to recommend ways parents can support the holistic development (body, mind, and soul) of their adolescents. Both parties have their own struggles and challenges. Young people in North America are supposedly happy and energetic, as they grow up in such a stable and resourced environment. However, due to rapid changes in the world and side effects caused by postmodernism, many adolescents feel the burden and pressure in their internal and external worlds. Although advanced technology, media, globalization, and multiculturalism are supposed to be strong assets for young people, to stretch beyond the boundary of geographical and cultural limitations, these dynamics have caused conflicts between the two generations.

While today's youth are digital natives and seek media as a social connection and to help form self-identity, parents are mainly mere users of digital devices. Such differences exert pressure on the parent-child relationship. In addition, a competitive world under a performance-driven culture adds fuel to the burning fire caused by individualism and consumerism. Often under the influence of high-controlling parents who demand excellent academic grades and high achievements in activities, today's youth frequently are in blind pursuit of a materialistic life. This mentality can lead to distorted character and even depression.

Due to changes in their brain and body, adolescents experience insecurity and frustration during their pubescent developmental stage. They feel embarrassed about their

body changes and clumsiness. They often become emotional and impulsive due to the underdevelopment of the frontal lobe, as compared to other parts of their body. Parents often find them rude and rebellious. Their new way of thinking gives them the ability for abstract thinking. However, the way they express it can offend parents who see their children as turning rebellious, just because they keep asking questions to test their new way of thinking.

Amidst all of these dynamics, young people frantically search for autonomy, identity, and a sense of belonging. This searching introduces pressures that can mount into a great burden on their young lives. They need caring adults to support them during this critical stage, but many parents are weighed down by their own pressures. Most do not have close relatives nearby to support them in daily life and child rearing. With the high demands of financial needs, generational gaps in technology, limited family time due to both parents working, and other overwhelming responsibilities, many parents feel frustrated and helpless. They desire to help and support their children, but they often have little to no time due to hectic schedules or simply lose confidence in being a good parent.

When God created families, He intended for them to have love, patience, and warmth. However, many young people do not feel this spiritual and emotional support from their parents. Instead, they feel lost, angry, depressed, and abandoned. Parents, on the other hand, feel clueless on how to help their children to transition through this critical stage of life. Christian parents can feel even more upset when they witness their children turn away from a faith they have been following since a young age. They do not understand the needs of their children and do not know how to provide a nurturing ground for the holistic development of their adolescent children.



During my thirty years of experience as a church leader, children's pastor, and now a consulting pastor serving different churches and teaching in seminary, I have delivered many parenting workshops and teachers' training. I have walked with parents through difficult times with their teens. Over the decades, I have noticed that some parents kept attending my workshops repeatedly, even if it was on the same topic. When I asked these parents why, they told me issues still existed in their parent-child relationship. While the parents were greatly inspired by the materials, they reaped little benefit from their learning.

As I further reviewed my seminar content and reflected on how to improve its delivery, I suspected that parents need a more systematic course series instead of random standalone workshops. Such one-time workshops, often delivered by a great variety of speakers, can point parents in different directions—with no single unifying direction or organized approach, with no strategy developed to help their specific situation. This sparked the idea of designing the series contained in this project and set forth in the Appendix.

Many helpless parents realize that they need external help in parenting their adolescent children. They love their children and desire to nurture them in a healthy environment, so they try their best to attend parenting workshops that fit in their busy schedule. However, if these workshops are without a coordinated theme or approach, parents may not know how to transform head knowledge into daily practice. When they encounter crisis in parenting their adolescent children, they may not be able to recall what they have learned. They may feel more frustrated than those parents who never have attended any seminars because they think their extra effort in getting equipped is futile. In addition, when young people do not resolve family conflict within their family of origin,

they may not receive the support that is required for their holistic development. The adolescents of yesterday have become the parents of today. If no change happens, when today's adolescents reach adulthood and have their own children, they may use a similar approach. The problem of having unhealthy teenagers can affect generations to come.

While this series has yet to be piloted in its entirety, certain portions of it and even full lessons have been tested in a variety of environments in recent years. I delivered a few courses with lessons in a Chinese seminary to a group of mothers on Monday mornings for a duration of three years. They shared with me excitedly that their family had been transformed when they applied at home what they had learned in class. Another group of parents to whom I delivered another course with multiple lessons took the initiative to prepare and present a family event proposal to their church's pastoral team, which yielded a fruitful outcome.

Comparing these two groups of parents led me to the idea that a systematic parenting course series could give parents the help they need. Through this methodology, I have seen how parents absorb the material in bite-size segments. Reviewing previous class materials, small group discussions, and their reflective journals further encourages them to find ways to put the learned materials and handy tips to work in real-life parenting situations. The parents who have been the recipients of this knowledge during the creation of the systematic parenting series contained in this project have developed a deeper understanding of their children's challenges. It has allowed them to look at the challenges faced by their children from a different perspective—body, mind, and soul. It has guided them to offer a safe harbor at home for their teenagers' development and increase the chance that these adolescent children will emerge into adulthood more smoothly. The

improvement in their own parent-child relationship has been a great testimony to other parents as a catalyst for desiring to be equipped as well.

When parents within the Body of Christ have a general understanding of the development of their youth, this provides a strong base for family ministry. Not only is a warm relationship fostered between parents and children, but these adults can extend their support and love to children of other families in the congregation—ultimately forming a 5:1 community. When non-Christian parents witness the warmth of these church families, they may be attracted to the church for this training. Although preaching faith explicitly may not be welcome among these non-believing families, Proverbs 9:10 states that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Wisdom and understanding with respect to youth is part of this, thus subtly instilling a spiritual seed among these non-believers in the most intimate place in their hearts: love and hope for their children. In this way, the potential for this systematic parenting course series is twofold—ministering to families within a church and also reaching out beyond the congregation into the non-believing community.

## APPENDIX

### CURRICULUM FOR “PARENTING TO SUPPORT THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS” AND EVALUATION SHEET

#### **COURSE 101: OVERVIEW OF PARENTING ADOLESCENTS**

**Text Book:** Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

**Recommended Reading:** James Penner et al. *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church* (Ontario: EFC Youth & Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, 2011).

#### **Lesson 1 (Mission and Challenges for Nurturing Adolescents – Part 1) 60 min.**

- Scriptural View
  - Jesus blessed little children (Luke 18:16)
  - Vision of nurturing adolescents (Proverbs 22:6)
  - Human is created as spiritual being (Genesis 2:7)
  - Pass the spiritual baton to the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)
  - Family-church partnership (1 Corinthians 3:6)
- **Video:** “Cougar and Bear Cub” (video), accessed November 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTtIAQOodak>
- Challenges Adolescents Faced in the World
  - Digital natives
  - Tiger parenting
  - Self-esteem trap
  - Success vs. True greatness
  - Abandoned generation

#### **Small Group Discussion**

**30 min**

1) Reflect honestly if your parenting style has traits of tiger parenting? If so, what are they? Why?

2) Do you agree with the idea of an abandoned generation? Why or why not?

**Home Assignment:** Reflect on your view of success and true greatness in parenting.

#### **Lesson 2 (Mission and Challenges for Nurturing Adolescents – Part 2) 60 min**

- Challenges Adolescents Face in Faith
  - Over-churched schedule
  - Hemorrhaging faith
  - Jesus’ jacket
  - Gospel of sin management
  - Performance-driven Christian culture
- Basic Needs of Adolescents
  - Autonomy
  - Identity
  - Sense of security
- **Video:** “Ducklings vs. Stairs” (video), accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHy6bBKu0j4>

#### **Small Group Discussion**

**30 min**

1) When you hear that 40-50 percent of kids from good families and churches tend to drift from their faith after graduation, what thoughts or feelings arise in you?

2) Do you agree with the idea of an over-churched generation? Why or why not?

**Home Assignment:** What do you think the “Gospel of sin management” is? What signs of that so-called “Gospel” do you see in your child’s life? How about in your own life?

#### **Lesson 3 (Challenges Faced by Parents) 60 min**

- Parenting in Household
  - Permeable family
  - Clash of cultures & Gaps in technology
  - High-controlling parenting style
- Parenting in Society
  - Financial and time burdens
  - Missing support from close family and community
- Parenting in Faith Community
  - Shifting reliance to Youth Ministry
  - Loss of confidence in nurturing the spiritual development of youth

**Small Group Discussion** 30 min

- 1) Do you feel the pressure of clashing cultures and gaps in technology?
- 2) Do you think support from close family and community are that important in child rearing?

**Home Assignment:** What does your child most need from you right now, given where they are in their faith journey?

**Lesson 4 (Parents' Self Discovery)** 60 min

- Frustration in Parenting
- Parent's Self-Discovery
  - Implication of family of origin on parenting
  - Implication of human attachment models on parenting

**Small Group Discussion** 30 min

- 1) Exercise: Mindsight Tools #1 from Daniel Siegel's *Brainstorm*, 39-64.
- 2) What is your experience with this mindsight exercise?

**Home Assignment:** Complete the Questions for Reflection on Attachment from Daniel Siegel, *Brainstorm*, 163-167.

**Lesson 5 (Mission for Parents)** 60 min

- Mission for Spiritual parenting
- Spiritual Rhythm at Home
- Family Interaction and Bonding
- Honest Dialogue in a Safe Environment
- Partnering with Church and Community

**Small Group Discussion** 30 min

- 1) What encourages you about the statement that you are one of the most important influences in your child's life? What concerns does this statement raise in you?

**Final Paper:** With an understanding of challenges faced by both children and parents, can you nurture your children in a balanced way that is beneficial to both of you?

**COURSE 102: PARENTING TO SUPPORT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS**

**Text Book:** Polly Young-Eisendrath, *The Self-esteem Trap* (New York: Little Brown, 2008).

David Elkind, *All Grown Up & No Place to Go* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1984).

**Lesson 1 (External World of Adolescents – Part 1)** 60 min

- Impact of Postmodernism
  - Belief
  - Role of adolescents
  - Family model
  - Parenting style
  - Sexuality
  - Media
  - Self-identity

**Small Group Discussion** 30 min

- 1) When you hear about the outside world that is impacting today's youth, what is your feeling and thought?
- 2) Which postmodern factors do you think have the most impact on young people?

**Home Assignment:** Knowing the impact from postmodernism, is there anything you can do to help the teens around you?

**Lesson 2 (External World of Adolescents – Part 2)** 60 min

- Growing Process (Erikson's theory; Differentiation and integration)
- Permeable Family
- Peer Shock
- Vanishing Markers

**Small Group Discussion** 30 min

- 1) Discuss a case study from *Understanding Youth* by Nakkula and Toshalis, 21-39, on identity formation.
- 2) Movie / Case Study - How do identity formation and autonomy influence the thinking and behavior of the characters? How can you apply this in parenting?

**Home Assignment:** Who or what are your kids looking to in an effort to answer the "Who am I?" question? What's healthy about those sources, and what is potentially harmful?

**Lesson 3 (Inside World of Adolescents – Part 1) 60 min**

- Youth Thinking in a New Way
  - Abstract thinking
  - Egocentric / Self-awareness
  - Video: meChurch, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGEmIPjgVI>
- Autonomy
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> individualization
  - Tight-rope model

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

1) Are there any insights you've gained from the video? Any comments on self-centeredness?

2) What are the pros and cons for adolescents in developing abstract thinking?

**Home Assignment:** Watch the video "Toy Story 1" and observe the impact of identity on the main characters.

**Lesson 4 (Inside World of Adolescents – Part 2) 60 min**

- 4 Types of Stressors
- Helping Youth to Cope with Stress
- Identity and Jesus' Role Modeling in Resisting Temptations
- Insights from Movies (e.g. *Toy Story 1, 2, 3; Inside Out; Up*)

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

Movie - What insights have you got from the story, especially from the struggles of the two main characters (Woody and Buzz) regarding identity formation??

**Home Assignment:** Have your children experienced any stress? Which type of stressors? How can you help them cope?

**Lesson 5 (Inside World of Adolescents – Part 3) 60 min**

- Sense of Belonging
- Social Capital and Scaffolding
- Suggestions for Supporting the Psychological Development of Adolescents

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

1) Are there any insights on "sense of belonging," when reflecting on how you grew up?

2) Do your children belong to any community group to give them a sense of belonging? If not, how can you support them?

**Final Paper:** Regarding concepts you have learned about the outside and inside world (psychology)

of youth, how do these apply to the youth that you have encountered? How can you help and support them?

**COURSE 103: PARENTING TO SUPPORT THE PHYSIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS**

**Textbook:** Frances E. Nutt & Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2015).

Daniel J. Siegel, *Brainstorm* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2013).

**Lesson 1 (Overview of Physiological Development of Adolescents) 60 min**

- Puberty
  - Impact on mood swings and impulsion
  - Impact of changing appearance on adolescents: Self-image
- Changes in brain circuits
  - Impact on mind development and interpersonal relationship
  - Characteristics due to brain changes (ESSENCE)
- Inside-out approach
  - Benefits of Parents' Understanding of Physiological Development
  - Overview and basic activities for parents to practice mindset
  - Parents to develop empathy and tame own emotions

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

1) What are some of the words that come to mind when you think back on your own teen years?

2) Do you observe changes due to puberty and brain development in your child? Which ones?

**Home Assignment:** Which puberty and brain development changes have the greatest impact on your child? How can you support him or her during this period?

**Lesson 2 (Overview of Brain Functions) 70 min**

- Facts of a Brain
- Transmission of a message
- Brain Development and Integration

**Small Group Discussion 20 min**

Any insights gained from understanding the complexity of the human brain?

**Home Assignment:** Watch the movie "Inside Out". How do you express emotion? How does your child express emotion?

**Lesson 3 (Implication of Physiological Changes on Teens' Daily Life) 60 min**

- Focus and Attention
- Learning
- Multi-tasking
- Sleeping
- Risk-taking

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

*Have you observed any changes in your children's daily routine? Any change in your attitude towards such changes?*

**Home Assignment:** *Name one of the physiological changes in your children that may upset you. Why? How can you handle it in a positive way?*

**Lesson 4 (Addiction of Adolescents Due to Brain Development) 70 min**

- Soft-core Addiction
- Hard-core Addiction
- Digital Addiction

**Small Group Discussion 20 min**

*When you realize that addiction is closely related to physiological development, any comments?*

**Home Assignment:** *Do you think your child has one of more of the addictions discussed in class? How might you help?*

**Lesson 5 (Mental Illness Due to Brain Development) 60 min**

- Eating Disorder
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- How Parents can support teens

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

*1) Are you aware of any young people around you who have developed one or more types of mental illness?*

*2) How can caring adults provide support to them?*

**Ritual:** *Use a pipe cleaner to twist the shape of a human being for representing your child(ren), put the figure in your palms. Reflect on negative impacts due to physiological development on the child. Lift up your child(ren) in prayer on your knees.*

**Home Assignment:** *Based on what you have learned in this course, how does it apply to your and your children? How can you help and support them?*

**COURSE 104: PARENTING TO SUPPORT THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS**

**Textbook:** Kara Powell & Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

Michelle Anthony, *Spiritual Parenting* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010).

**Lesson 1 (Hemorrhaging Faith) 60 min**

- Hemorrhaging Faith Report
- Cultures Faced by Today's Youth
  - Postmodernism
  - Radical autonomy
  - Identity formation
  - Religion
  - Consumerism
  - Time pressure
  - Information explosion
- Nature of Emerging Adulthood
  - Life transition
  - Distraction
  - Lifestyle choices
- Four spiritual types
  - Engagers vs. Fence sitters vs. Wanderers vs. Rejecters
- Barrier or Motivators in Spiritual Formation of Adolescents
  - Parents, God, & Community
  - Teaching

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

*From the Hemorrhaging Faith Report finding - Any comments on young people's concerns or view of church/community?*

**Home Assignment:** *From the Hemorrhaging Faith Report - What spiritual type is your child? How can you help?*

**Lesson 2 (Rebellious Adolescents from Christian Family) 60 min**

- Types of Spiritual Rebellion
  - Rejection
  - Indifference
  - Lack of enthusiasm
- Root Problems of Rebellions in Faith Matters
  - Feel lost and confused
  - Angry at God
  - Mad at parents
  - Strong personalities
  - Mental issues
  - Bondage of sin
  - Spiritual pilgrimage

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

*In your opinion, which root problem(s) are the most significant ones leading to the rebellion of youth?*

**Home Assignment:** *Are there child(ren) or teens whom you know who are rebellious in faith? What types of spiritual rebellion do they have? What is the possible root problem? How can you help?*

**Lesson 3 (Spiritual Parenting) 60 min**

- Spiritual Blindness of Teens
- Apple Nailing Parenting
- Parenting from the Heart
- Discipline with love

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

*1) In your own words and examples, explain what “apple nailing” parenting is?*

*2) Any suggestion for disciplining children but with love?*

**Home Assignment:** *If your children are being blind spiritually, how can you help? When they make mistakes, do you adopt the “apple nailing” approach or discipline with love? What are the differences between the two approaches?*

**Lesson 4 (Spiritual Soil – Part 1) 60 min**

- Definition of Sticky Faith
- Creating Ten Spiritual Soil (Environments)
  - The Environment of Story Telling and Faith Conversation
  - The Environment of Identity
  - The Environment of the Faith Community
  - The Environment of Service
  - The Environment of Out of the Comfort Zone
  - The Environment of Responsibility

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

*Pick a spiritual environment from the discussed ones and give suggestions on how to cultivate such spiritual soil*

**Home Assignment:** *Which type of soil is missing in your home? What is the root problem? Any suggestion to fix the problem?*

**Lesson 5 (Spiritual Soil – Part 2) 60 min**

- Creating Ten Spiritual Soil (Environments)
  - The Environment of Course Correction
  - The Environment of Love and Respect
  - The Environment of Knowing
  - The Environment of Modeling
- Family Altar / Family Rituals / Giving Blessings to Children

**Small Group Discussion 30 min**

*Is this the first time you’ve heard about family altar, family rituals, or blessings to children? If not, which have you practiced?*

**Final Paper:** *Based on the class materials covered in each lesson, what are the insight(s) you have gained? How can you apply them in your parenting?*

**COURSE 105: PARTNERSHIP IN PARENTING**

**Textbook:** Phil Bell, *Team Up!* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2015).

Shimi Kang, *The Dolphin Way* (Toronto: Penguin, 2014).

**Lesson 1 (Wide Angle Perspectives on Parenting) 120 min**

- Panel Discussion (with panelists from a wide variety of expertise)
- Presentations by individual speakers (5 speakers)



<b>Lesson 2 (Partnership with Christian Families)</b>	<b>60 min</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition of 5:1 community</li> <li>• Benefits of 5:1 community</li> <li>• How to establish a 5:1 community to support children</li> </ul>	
<b><u>Small Group Discussion</u></b>	<b>30 min</b>
<i>What is 5:1 community in your context? Any testimony?</i>	
<b>Final Paper:</b> <i>Have you ever tried to establish a 5:1 community for your children? If not, any plan to initiate one? Have you ever tried to support another teen? If not, any plans to start?</i>	
<b>Lesson 3 (Partnership with Church)</b>	<b>60 min</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Family-Church Partnership</li> <li>• Barriers in Establishing Family-Church Partnership</li> <li>• Gaining Parents as Partners</li> </ul>	
<b><u>Small Group Discussion</u></b>	<b>30 min</b>
<i>Does your church embrace the true concept of “Christian Education” and “Family Ministry”? Why or why not?</i>	
<b>Home Assignment:</b> <i>It has been claimed that kids typically are segregated from the rest of the church. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being “very true”), how true is that of your church? Why did you choose that number?</i>	
<b>Lesson 4 (Develop Family-Church Partnership – Part 1)</b>	<b>60 min</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biblical Model of Family-Church Partnership (based on Deuteronomy 6)</li> <li>• Capturing and sharing the vision of partnership in church</li> <li>• Preparing the Stakeholders</li> <li>• Communicating Regularly and Implementing Strategically</li> <li>• Providing Resources to Parents</li> <li>• Equipping Disengaged Parents</li> <li>• Helping Parents in Hard Times</li> </ul>	
<b><u>Small Group Presentation</u></b>	<b>30 min</b>
<i>Small Group #1 - Plan a series of family events (at least 4: Jan – Dec). Include time, format, promotion, manpower.</i>	
<b>Home Assignment:</b> <i>1) In what ways does your child feel connected to your church? If you could wave a wand and change something about the way your child connects to the church, what would you change?</i>	
<i>2) Do you agree that intergenerational relationships are very important to kids’ faith development? Why?</i>	
<b>Lesson 5 (Develop Family-Church Partnership – Part 2)</b>	<b>60 min</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synchronized Team (Family and Church)</li> <li>• Understanding Family’s General Needs and Schedules</li> <li>• Involving and Encouraging Parents</li> <li>• Creating Family Events and Promotion</li> <li>• Hosting Joint Family Worship</li> <li>• Scheduling to Fit Family’s Hectic Routine</li> <li>• Establishing and Celebrating Important Milestones (Life and Faith Milestone)</li> <li>• Building a Networking or Support Group for Parents</li> </ul>	
<b><u>Small Group Presentation</u></b>	<b>30 min</b>
<i>Small Group #2 - Plan for church celebration of any 4 life milestones. Include format and content.</i>	
<b>Final Assignment:</b> <i>Prepare a comprehensive proposal to be presented and discussed with your church pastor for developing a family ministry and include the details of planning a joint family worship for the whole congregation.</i>	

## Parenting Course Evaluation

Please take a few minutes to complete this brief evaluation. Circle the number indicating your feedback.

		<u>LOW</u>			<u>HIGH</u>	
1.	This course met the learning goals specified in the syllabus	1	2	3	4	5
2.	The instructor knows the subject / materials well	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The presentation is clear / organized / interesting	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The small group discussions / projects enhance my learning	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The reflective paper / home assignments lead to personal insights	1	2	3	4	5
6.	The textbook is helpful and relevant for the subject	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The video clip is helpful and relevant for the subject	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The course content is solid and relevant to my parenting	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The course content helps my family / my ministry	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Which topics or materials are most beneficial to you / your family / your ministry? Why?					
	<hr/>					
11.	Any area that needs improvement?					
	<hr/>					
11.	What other parenting topics would you like to include in the next course?					
	<hr/>					
12.	Please describe any insights you have experienced as a result of taking this course.					
	<hr/>					
	<hr/>					
13.	Any other feedback you would like to give?					
	<hr/>					

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