

CHAPTER 53

PARENTS: SHOW YOUR TEENAGERS YOU CARE

It is Monday morning at the local high school in a midwestern town. As 15-year-old Susie walks to her locker, she is surrounded by her jubilant friends. They are all excited about the weekend just past. 'Oh, Susie, you should have been at the football game Friday night!' they exclaimed. 'We won! And the party afterwards — it was a real blast. WOW — some really neat guys were there from out of town!'

Distraught and depressed, Susie strolls to her first period class. 'Why is my life so dull?' she ponders. 'Why can't I have an exciting life like my friends? I don't want to break God's Sabbath, or go out with guys in the world, but Mom and Dad don't seem to understand that I need recreation and excitement. Since we came into the Church, our lives have become so dry, meaningless and boring. We seldom do anything as a family, and Mom and Dad don't want to bother taking me and my brothers to Church socials.'

Parents Have Great Responsibility

The above experience is not an uncommon scene in God's Church. Unknown to many parents, their teenagers harbor deep resentment and bitterness from being deprived of a normal life and regular social opportunities. Thus, some teenagers have negative attitudes toward the church, not because it's at fault, but because Mother and Dad have neglected their responsibilities.

Dual Role of Parents

Mark well this fact: whether or not our teenagers stay in the Church and remain true to God's way depends largely on how well we present God's Truth to them and relate it's benefits to their lives.

Because the world offers such tantalizing fun, frolic and glitter, our children are naturally drawn to its perverted influence. Therefore, we have a double responsibility of not only pointing out to them the evil of Satan's society, but also of providing the kind of wholesome activities that properly represent the BETTER way of God.

Every father knows that it is his duty to supply the basic necessities of life for his children — food, clothing and shelter. Likewise, every mother knows that she's responsible for providing nutritious meals, clean clothes, and a neat, attractive home. But, how many parents realize that in addition to providing these basic needs, they are also accountable to God for their children's social life — A RESPONSIBILITY EQUALLY AS IMPORTANT. Too many parents seem to have either neglected or overlooked this vital role. Thus, their kids may have become self-conscious, social misfits, lacking poise and confidence — and certainly lacking proper, healthy respect for God and the Church. '*Fathers, stop exasperating your children, so as to keep them from losing heart*' (Col. 3:21). (Williams Translation.)

A Sacred Trust

The apostle Paul states in 1 Timothy 5:8, '*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*' While this verse basically means caring for the physical needs of a man's family, in principle it also means providing for their social, cultural and spiritual development. God wants our teenagers to grow up as intelligent, balanced and well-adjusted men and women. Therefore, He levies on us as parents the sacred trust of providing a rich and fulfilling life for them so they become responsible individuals and an attractive light to the world. '*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*' (Ephesians 6:4).

It Isn't Too Late to Change

Some parents reason that because their children were already teenagers when they were called into God's Church, there is little they can do to win them over to God's way. Others who have been in the Church for many years may not realize they are about to lose their teenagers to the world

because they have been robbed of fun and excitement. It's time to awaken to the seriousness of your responsibilities and realize it's NEVER TOO LATE to change! You must understand that teenagers have natural social drives which cry out for fulfillment. Therefore, working with your teenagers should not be looked upon as a drudgery or burden or an impossible task, but as a wonderful new CHALLENGE. Granted, changing old patterns and approaches may require much sacrifice, time and prayer, but the end result will be abundantly worth it!

Where To Begin

You need to start by building a new relationship with your teenagers. This means sitting down with them and having a heart-to-heart talk. You might begin by reading and discussing this article with them and telling them you are making a new commitment as parents. Taking the initiative may seem awkward and embarrassing at first. But it's necessary to break the ice.

Have a round-table discussion, draw them out, and get them to talk about their feelings. Don't criticize or react negatively when they are honest. You want to know how they really think and feel about family life without fear of rejection or recrimination. You will want to get their total input as to how the situation in your home can be improved. Ask for suggestions on what activities they'd like to have. Stress the need to be fair-minded, but encourage open give-and-take.

Plan Group Socials

In these family discussions — of which there should be many — you and your children should plan small group activities with other teenagers in the Church. Include both boys and girls so that they have the opportunity to interact with the opposite sex in a proper wholesome environment. Remember, we're not advocating single dating. Nor do we encourage building cliques. It is important, therefore, for your children to be exposed to a variety of friends. The purpose for these activities is to give your young boys and girls an outlet in order to broaden their horizons, and to build their social skills.

Suggested Activities

Listed below are a number of ideas that you might work into your schedule as time, money and opportunity permit. These are activities that you personally can plan so as not to depend solely on the Church to fulfill your teenagers' social needs.

• SATURDAY NIGHT PARTIES

To minimize transportation problems, and the soaring costs of gasoline, this would be an ideal time to plan get-togethers. Thus, those who live in distant areas could plan to stay over from the Sabbath. Some types of activities you might consider are: card games, parlor games (Monopoly, Careers, Risk, etc.), sing-alongs, Bunco, Spoons, Charades, or limited dancing. Serve simple refreshments such as punch, popcorn and cookies, or let the guests chip in to help cut costs.

It is necessary to maintain proper supervision, but don't let your presence dominate the atmosphere. If the kids invite you to take part in the action, by all means do so — in fun and courtesy. But allow the kids to be themselves.

Occasionally, invite an out-of-town family with similar age children to spend the night. You could have a potluck dinner. Plan something special for the evening.

After you've approved a given activity, allow the kids to do most of the planning and preparation. With most teenagers, anticipation is just as meaningful as the activity itself. Whatever the case, lend your support.

• SPORTS & GAMES

This category could involve dozens of possibilities. You and your teenagers may want to compile your own list in addition to the suggestions that follow: volleyball, softball, croquet, basketball, badminton, soccer, dodgeball, four-square, etc. (If you don't have space in your backyard or immediate neighborhood for these games, check out a nearby park or school.)

Again, the emphasis is on group involvement so as to give your sons and daughters an opportunity for social mixing. Your direct participation in this type of outing may be especially helpful in bridging the gap between parents and youngsters.

• MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

Due to obvious factors of distance, time and expense, the following outings can only be held occasionally. But they are types of experiences that should be included somewhere in your calendar of events: Beach party, hiking trip to the mountains, overnight camping trip, all-day picnic, zoo, amusement park, etc.

Occasionally take in a special movie, play, concert, ice capades, museum, sightseeing, art gallery, skating, etc.

• SUPPORT CHURCH ACTIVITIES FOR THE TEENS

Throughout the year the Church will have several Y.O.U. functions. Make it a point to see that your children attend, if at all possible. Share transportation with other families.

Volunteer to chaperone occasionally, if needed. Let your kids know that you really care and are concerned about their happiness and welfare.

Plan Carefully

All the above suggestions may seem overwhelming and financially out-of-reach, but with careful planning and forethought a workable solution can be found.

If all parents in the Church were to cooperate and mutually share these responsibilities, no one family would need to suffer. Suppose Susie had 8-12 Church friends over for a Saturday night party. In turn, if the parents of each of these invited Susie for an activity, you can see that no hardship would be imposed on anyone too frequently.

To finance some of these more expensive outings, several children could launch a fund-raising activity. In all fairness, the teenagers should be made aware of the needs of the entire family and not make unreasonable or selfish demands.

Have Regular Talks

As mentioned earlier, it's imperative to have frequent talks with your teens in these crucial, formative years. It is vital to keep the lines of communication open in order to build a close family relationship. Hopefully your love and endearment will grow so strong that your children will want to come to you with all their personal problems and not feel compelled to seek the counsel of their peers. Be kind, patient and empathetic when they approach you with their hangups, fears and frustrations. Be a good listener — don't rush in with premature advice until you've heard their story.

Treat them with respect — and as individuals. Consider their feelings. Be generous with praise and compliments in those areas where they are making progress. Reinforce their good behavior by pointing out their strengths and successes. Gently correct and fine-tune their weaknesses. For example, if a son or daughter is expressing a bad attitude in a sports activity, or pouting when losing a game, bring this out during one of your talk sessions. Continually encourage them to venture out socially in order to grow in confidence, culture and self-esteem. Teenagers need exposure and experience to round out their lives.

The more opportunities kids have to interrelate with other teens, particularly the opposite sex, the more well adjusted they will be as youngsters and adults.

By the time they reach the age of dating, they will have become experienced in knowing how to conduct themselves in most situations in a mature and responsible manner.

Don't Delay

In conclusion, it's important to emphasize the seriousness of the charge that God has placed on us as dutiful, loving parents. It is incumbent on us to present God's Truth in the most APPEALING way possible. Whether or not our teenagers survive the pressures of this world and respond to God's call, may very well depend on how effectively we fulfill our role. Let's resolve to prove to our teenagers that we really care.'

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