

To You & Your Children
Trees & Pillars
Psalm 144:12

NOTES

You won't find the word "teenager" in the Bible, but you will find ample information and instruction about young men and women—sons and daughters still living at home who are becoming adults. The Lord is for His people in every age of life, but He gives us particular vision and hope for our youth.

Summary of the Text

King David prays that the Lord would deliver him from foreign enemies who speak lies, whose right hand is one of deceit (v11). This is a psalm about waging war (vv1-11) in order to obtain and enjoy peace (vv12--15). He prays for deliverance so that our sons will be like plants grown up *in their youth*: strong, thriving, and rooted (v12). We would not expect young men to look like old growth redwoods, but David does look for discernible godliness. He is being realistic, and it's a far cry from a wait-and-see-how-they-turn-out approach. His prayer for daughters is that they would be as pillars, sculpted in the palace style (v12). Pillars are columns that uphold a building, an essential function accompanied here by royal beauty. Daughters are structural parts of the household, church, and nation. Eve was named as the mother of the all the living, and daughters bear the weight of the building, making it beautiful as they build (cf. Prov. 9:1). It's hard to think of a higher view of young men and women.

Parenting in Peace

We don't live by faith and then parent by works. This is David's prayer, one that he knows he can pray according to God's promises: "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7). This is why Abraham circumcised, and we baptize, our kids. It's not because we are great or insightful parents, but only because of God's grace and promises. Who is sufficient to preach these things? Only Christ (2 Cor. 2:16-17). We need His truth and grace, and not the techniques of an "expert." In Him we have the peace that David prayed for, and so can trust the Lord to act through our fallible and flawed efforts.

A Contrary Vision of Teenagers

The way adults regularly speak about teenagers is not only sub-biblical and unlike David's vision, it's also rude. This is not to say there aren't challenges (with every age), but the golden rule applies here to these neighbors of ours. How would you like it if you heard kids complaining about people in their 40's or 50's? Parents must not complain about the plants and pillars, and should speak well of their kids both in front of them and behind their backs. This is always the case but especially at this time of life when our culture tries to drive a wedge between parents and children. The biblical vision is for all of us to love and enjoy one another more and more as we all get older. So we talk to them about anything and everything. We confess sin and demonstrate repentance. We read Scripture and pray. We let them know we're proud of and respect them. We provide for and support them sacrificially. We connect all the time and make sure nothing is getting in the way of them growing in the Lord and being in fellowship with us. You want to know what is going on at school, among friends, on the team and so on because God entrusts these plants and pillars to you.

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Particular Temptations

Little kids scream and throw tantrums when they are angry in sin, so it's nice and obvious. The challenge to parents at that time is to keep disciplining and not give up. God is teaching you. When they're teenagers, trouble is not as obvious, at least the source of it. The kid's temptation is to hide it, and the parent's is to look the other way. It's more difficult because the complexity of issues are deeper, so parents need to be faithful in their own walk with Christ, pursue their son or daughter, and be willing to ask for help. *This is why we worship in community together.* All parents need encouragement, prayer, and accountability, just like their kids. Teenagers are learning habits that will likely remain for many years if not their entire lives, so teaching gratitude, humility, honesty, and integrity is critical. Jim Wilson points out saturation love is where your kid has received your love full to the brim, which results in security. Saturation love comes through quantity time plus quality time plus undivided attention. Little kids climb all over parents for attention. Teenagers are too big and are going through enormous bodily changes, often feeling awkward, and sometimes looking like they don't need or appreciate affection. This is a false impression and parents should be sure to not cut back on any of it. It's different than having them on your lap, but you still need to show physical affection, give verbal encouragement, and bestow spiritual wisdom on your teen. Obviously! This builds trust and establishes the context for necessary correction.

Cut with the Grain

"The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head" (Prov. 20:29). Young men are strong, and so their strength should be spent productively. Hard work, godly competition, courageous risk-taking, and healthy conflict among peers are all good outlets. Young women are creative, eloquent, and beautiful, so they should use their talents to glorify God and edify others. In these years kids are becoming men and women and will be attracted to one another. As a parent you want to be the trusted source of information. Don't just talk about the way our bodies work, but how God designed us to be emotionally and sexually intimate and fulfilled in the covenant of marriage. If you don't talk to your kids about these things, other people will—ignorant peers and a confused and exploitive culture. Before the internet was on all of our phones, the desire of men to lust after women and for women to be lusted after was on every magazine rack. Now you can text, post, send pictures and go into any room in the world with a camera. Know about it, but more importantly, know and disciple your kid. What happens to men who indulge pornography? Why do girls want to be desired? Why was the book of Proverbs written to young men? Have you read the Song of Solomon? All of these issues become relevant in the teenage years. Know how to answer and how to find answers.

From Control to Influence

Small children live in a totalitarian state: go here, put this on, eat this, pick it up, smile, say thank you. This is delightful and temporary. Control gives way to influence. You are showing them how to receive and be driven by the gospel, how it's better to give than receive. These people will live forever and be taking care of you sooner than later.