

Dazzle Your Teen



By *Tedd Tripp*

Teenagers need grand and glorious things in their lives. They are idealists and need grand and ennobling things for which to live. But parents too often focus on the dos and don'ts of daily living together and fail to point teens to the truly great things in life. If we are to be successful in influencing our teens in a godly manner, we must keep things (even the struggles) in their place and focus on the big picture that God gives us. Struggles of both teens and parents look different and play out differently when we keep them in perspective.

In this article, we'll consider ways to give our teens biblical ways of understanding and interpreting their world. We will put the big picture of God's glory in front of them.

Give Your Children a Vision for the Glory of God We're Made for Worship

Our teenagers go into the world every single day to find things to marvel at. They are on the lookout to be impressed by something. They love to be dazzled by things in their surroundings. But not only our teens, we were *all* made to be dazzled. We're made to stand back and gape, to wonder and be overwhelmed by the glory and goodness and greatness of *God*. We're uniquely designed to respond to this awesome glory with worship, adoration,

**Tedd Tripp is Senior Pastor of Grace Fellowship Church in Hazleton, Pennsylvania.*

reverence, and being awestruck with God's glory. We're made for worship.

What happens when people who are instinctively and compulsively worshipers fail to worship God? We simply worship something else in His place. We get impressed by things, people, and experiences in creation. We get dazzled by idols. But the glory of God is displayed through the things that God has made. People—teens included—are without excuse when they exchange the truth of God for a lie (Rom. 1:19-21). They honor, praise, and marvel at created things rather than the Creator. They (and we) worship idols instead of the one true God.

What Rules Teens? God-substitutes!

My wife and I took our two granddaughters to a Chinese restaurant one day. As we were leaving the restaurant, one of them saw a statue of Buddha and asked, "Grandpa, who's that fat boy?" That gave us an opportunity to talk about idols. But our kids do not worship statues of Buddha. Their idols are more subtle. They worship idols of the heart. Consider these common examples.

Pride and performance. Teens want to run faster, jump higher, throw the ball with greater accuracy, and score higher than others on SAT's. Some teens exhaust themselves trying to excel, trying to be the best at something. They love the accolades and praise that comes with excellent performance.

Pleasure and sensuality. Teens love the

rush of doing new things; going new places; finding heart-throbbing, adrenalin-pumping excitement. “Extreme sports” is an expression of that craving for the rush of something new, extreme, exciting, and thrilling. There is a direct connection between the drive for sense experience and pleasure and the culture of boredom.

Possessions. Teens are packrats. They collect stuff. They polish their stuff and display it. They want assurances that no one will touch their stuff. They’re oriented toward a life that consists of the abundance of personal possessions.

Fear of Man. Teens want approval and acceptance by others. Being cool, being part the “in” crowd is of major importance. They often take their cues off the opinions of others.

Our teens do exactly what Romans 1 describes. Either they know the wonder and glory of God and are dazzled by His beauty or they bow before enticing idols.

To find the idols in your own life, ask yourself these questions: What rules me? What makes life worthwhile? What gives me so much joy and comfort that it pushes God into the background? The answers to these questions identify the idols of *your* heart. Parents and teens stand on common ground when it comes to the battle for the heart.

Our Calling as Parents

In heaven we will be glorified *finite* creatures—not infinite like God—only God can be infinite. The infinite God in His infinite glory will dazzle us. Every single day throughout eternity we will see new revelations of the wonder of God. There’s greatness in God that can’t be fathomed. He can’t be measured. That’s what the psalmist talks about. We are called to commend the works of God to the next generation by asking, “Have *you* seen how glorious and marvelous God really is?” Listen to the words of the psalmist:

Great is the LORD and most worthy of
praise;
His greatness no one can fathom.
One generation will commend Your works
to another; they will tell of Your
mighty acts.
They will speak of the glorious splendor of

Your majesty, and I will meditate on
Your wonderful works.
They will tell of the power of Your
awesome works, and I will proclaim
Your great deeds.
They will celebrate Your abundant
goodness and joyfully sing of Your
righteousness.
The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
The LORD is good to all;
He has compassion on all He has made.
All You have made will praise You, O
LORD; Your saints will extol You.
They will tell of the glory of Your kingdom
and speak of Your might,
so that all men may know of Your mighty
acts and the glorious splendor of Your
kingdom.
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom;
Your dominion endures throughout all
generations.
The LORD is faithful to all His promises,
and loving toward all He has made.
The LORD upholds all those who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look to You,
and You give them their food at the
proper time.
You open Your hand and satisfy the desires
of every living thing.
The LORD is righteous in all His ways
and loving toward all He has made.
The LORD is near to all who call on Him,
to all who call on Him in truth.
He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him;
He hears their cry and saves them.
The LORD watches over all who love Him,
but all the wicked He will destroy.
My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise His holy
name forever and ever.
(Psalm 145:3-21)

You probably need to read this psalm again, more slowly. Underline everything about God. What’s left is how to respond to what you have underlined!

Your teenagers are hard-wired for worship. They go out everyday looking to be dazzled. One of your most important tasks as a parent is

to give your teens this big picture of the glory of God. That's your job description: one generation will commend God's works to another.

Think of these words from Psalm 4:6-7 "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD. You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound."

Think about the time when these verses were written. The psalmist lived in an agrarian culture. The people of that time had no ability to preserve the harvest in its freshness and no ability to extend harvest times or to rush harvest. They would have fresh produce for only a short time. They lived the rest of the year on food they had dried, salted, or stored in pots. Can you imagine the joy of their harvest time?

We still have some sense of the joy of harvest time in our own lives. I go into my garden in August and pick a nice, vine-ripened Beefsteak tomato. I cut it in thick slices, put it

Part of our calling every day is to hold out for our teens the delights that they were made for—the delights of knowing God. As we see teens try to fill their appetites, we need to help them understand *the* greatest delight. We need to draw them into our confidence and share with them times when we have known the wonder of God's presence and the glories of delighting in Him. Do you share the soul-satisfying joys of savoring the presence of God? Do you ever talk about God's presence with your teen, first person. Honest? (That's different than a lecture or exhortation!)

Teenagers need to hear this message all the time: We have a glorious God. Life is found in knowing Him. Life is not found in the abundance of possessions, satisfying your appetites, having a string of successes, or all those other things. The greatest joys you can possibly experience as a human being are those joys found in the presence of God. In eternity you will still expand your understanding of those

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on thick crusty homemade bread, then add lettuce and some real mayonnaise. There's nothing like a tomato sandwich in the summer! You cannot make a sandwich like that out of those hothouse tomatoes they sell the rest of the year. We sense, even in our culture, the joy of harvest time. Can you imagine how heightened that joy was in David's day? "O LORD, You have filled my heart with greater joy than when grain and new wine abound."

The greatest joys we can experience are found in knowing and loving God. The deepest delights and the most satisfying pleasures and joys that we can imagine are found in knowing and loving God. David speaks of true and lasting joys in Psalm 16:11. "You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand."

Our teenagers search for pleasure, for something to delight them. They look for something that will be exciting and dazzling,

eternal pleasures found in Him. The greatest beauty, the highest value, the deepest satisfaction, the longest lasting joy, the most satisfying delights, the most fulfilling pleasures, the most wonderful friendships, the most satisfying experiences are not found in going places, doing things, and owning things. They are found in knowing God.

The psalmist also speaks of men who attacked him.

Arise, O LORD. Confront him, subdue him!

Deliver my soul from the wicked by
Your sword,
from men by Your hand, O LORD,
from men of the world whose portion is
in this life.

You fill their womb with treasure;
they are satisfied with children,
and they leave their abundance to
their infants.

As for me, I shall behold Your face in

righteousness;

When I awake, I will be satisfied with Your likeness. (Ps.17: 13-15)

Do you see the word picture in this psalm? The psalmist says, "I'm in the midst of this terrible situation. These people, whose pleasures and rewards are in this life, are coming against me. They leave their treasures for their children as in inheritance. But one day I'm going to awaken in the presence of the God and I'll be satisfied."

How much in life really satisfies? How much promises satisfaction without really satisfying? The soul-satisfying pleasures that your teenagers crave are ultimately found in knowing and loving God. Parents and teens stand on common ground. As we see our children seek satisfaction everywhere else, we have a wonderful opportunity to hold out for them the one God that truly satisfies.

In Psalm 27, David is confronted with extreme difficulties and distractions: evil men are bent on destroying him, armies besiege, foes attack, war breaks out. He is the strategic target of the enemies in the battle!

What's the temptation for most of us? "Lord, get me out of this! Help! Remove me from this situation!" But what does the psalmist say? "One thing I ask of the LORD, that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple" (Ps. 27:4). In God there is true joy, peace, and comfort. In God there is true safety even in the midst of all these foes.

We Live in a Fallen World

Our teens face hard things. Teens know what it's like to be gossiped about, dissed, excluded, betrayed, rejected. They face rejection and attacks from people because they live in a fallen world. They get serious sports injuries. They fail to get into a school play, to make the team, to get accepted by their first choice college. They live with parents who let them down and siblings who are selfish. But even greater than to escape from these troubles is to know God. To know God in the midst of all the turmoil of life, to know God, to be a person who dwells in the presence of God, to be a person who is set on a rock by God, to be a person who is above the fray and above the

storm because you are bound in this relationship with God—that's what you're made for. Everything within you that wants life to make sense and be filled with meaning is ultimately designed to center on God. The psalmist describes God with beautiful word pictures. Listen to the richness of these words.

Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens.

Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,

Your justice is like the great deep.

O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.

How priceless is Your unfailing love!

Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of Your wings.

They feast on the abundance of Your house.

You give them drink from Your river of delights.

For with You is the fountain of life;
in Your light we see light."

(Ps. 36: 5-9)

We need to help our children to learn how to feast on the abundance of God. Our consistent message for our teenagers is always, "Don't exchange the truth for a lie and worship created things rather than the Creator. You're made for God. Life is found in knowing God. Life is not found in the abundance of possessions. It's not found in going places and doing things. You were made for God. And that God is beautiful, safe, generous, dazzling."

Interpret Life in Reference to God

Your teenagers long for something that answers the question, "What is life worth living for? What matters?" They long for a cause that is beyond simply slogging it out day by day. You and they, as God's people, have available the one authentic thing—that for which we are made—a view of the glories and excellencies of God.

Modern evangelicalism rarely talks about the glory of God. Salvation simply becomes a saving transaction when we pray the "sinner's prayer" and we get our tickets punched for heaven. But the heart of the gospel is not just that we get to go to heaven when we die. The heart of the gospel is this glorious God. The proclamation of salvation is the proclamation of the glory of God (Ps. 96:3). Life is found in

understanding who I am as His child, redeemed by Christ. I am made for Him. I will find fellowship and meaning in life as I find Him. The heart of the “of the kingdom” is the King. That’s the most important truth that your teenagers need to understand. Those big truths are worth living for and sacrificing for. There’s a reason to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. Great things about God will move our kids to nobility. They will become people who live extraordinary lives because they have gotten hold of the wonderful God.

Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matt.13:44). That treasure absolutely dazzled him. “Nothing else in life matters. I must have that field!” That’s what God is to be for our teenagers, as for us. Part of your calling as a parent every day is to give your children reasons to know our marvelous God.

We have a marvelous illustration of that in the life of Joseph. Think about Joseph’s life experience. Terrible things happened to him throughout his life. He was repeatedly betrayed. But at the end of his life, he could say to his brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God meant good to bring about saving many people” (Gen. 45:5-7) What kept Joseph from becoming a bitter, angry, cynical, hardened man? Why didn’t he take revenge upon his brothers when he had the opportunity? Because he had a clear lens through which he interpreted his life experience: the glory of the God of the Bible. If you want your children to interpret life correctly, you have to give them a dazzling vision.

We must interpret our circumstances in relation to God because no one sins from duty. We sin from pleasure. Part of our task is to help our teens understand that the pleasures of sin are fleeting. Solid joys and lasting pleasures belong to the people of God. As Augustine said,

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They will become people who live extraordinary lives
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Interpret Life Circumstances in Reference to God

We must interpret our life circumstances in reference to God. Why? Because no one lives out of the circumstances of life. We live out of how we *interpret* those circumstances and how we respond. We must interpret in order to know how to *respond*. The key to right interpretation of the circumstances of life is the person and character of the God of the Bible. You can’t interpret life properly without this God. The only thing that will enable our teens to interpret life properly is to be dazzled by God. The more they are dazzled by possessions, friendships, relationships, skills, achievements, the less they are equipped to interpret life correctly. When we prize what is of no ultimate value above what is ultimately valuable, we can’t interpret life correctly. Part of our calling is to help our teenagers go through life and interpret the circumstances and conditions of life correctly.

“We were made for God and will be restless until we find our rest in Him.”

If we are going to hold this vision out for our teens, then we have to be dazzled by God ourselves. You can’t give away what you don’t have. We have to be people who continually keep God before us. We must interpret our lives through the lens of the glory and wonder of who He is. We need to be people who are dazzled ourselves so that our hearts overflow with the wonder of the glory of God.

In my observation, from speaking with thousands of mothers and fathers, parents rarely hold out the glory and wonder of God for their teens. Instead, they feed teen idols by giving them an over-abundance of material things. Families don’t even have time to have meals together, let alone have prayer or family worship. Outside activities keep us running in all directions. The people of God track right along with those in our culture who search for

meaning and fulfillment in a mad pursuit of performance, possessions, or pleasures. Somewhere down the line we have to conclude that life is not found in those things. It's found in knowing and loving God. You and I need to be people who are dazzled by God ourselves so that our hearts overflow when we talk to our teens. Don't exchange the truth for a lie by worshiping and serving created things rather than the Creator.

The Christian life begins with glory. Paul tells us that God caused His light to shine into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge and glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). When we see the face of Christ, we're dazzled. We say, "I must know this Christ" and we come to faith. Until then, we are blind (2 Cor. 4:4). "And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which come from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18) The word "reflect" actually means "meditate, contemplate, behold." We behold. We meditate. We contemplate on the Lord's glory and we are transformed into His likeness.

Do you know how you stay dazzled with

the glory of God? Behold Jesus Christ. He transforms us into His likeness. You experience the nearness to God when you bring Christ before you. The more you contemplate, the more you meditate on Him, the more you besiege your mind with truths about Him, the more you watch Him in action in the gospels, the more you know Him. As I behold the glory of Christ, I see that this is what I'm made for. This is where life is. If I behold Christ, I am transformed.

Your teenagers need something worth living for that is worth dying for. Only one thing is *that* big: our wonderful God. No matter how much you might feel like a blind person tapping with a cane, try to find your way to show your teens the glory of God. You'll help them make wise choices. They can't make wise choices without understanding who God is. They can't understand what life is about without understanding who God is. They can't be wise in friendships or circumspect in behavior without understanding who God is. Give them a vision of our dazzling God.