

SOARING



The Last Thing We Want by David Nelson, Pastor of Christian Education and Discipleship

Apostle Paul wrote, *Fathers, do not exasperate your children.*¹ Nowhere in life is our ability to follow this principle more challenged than in raising our children through their teen years; especially in our society today.

Our children may already be exasperated² and cynical³ toward life to a greater degree than you or I were growing up. If going through puberty isn't enough, our children have greater access and exposure to the differing opinions and opposing philosophies of the world than any people in history.

In addition to the pitfalls of our *information age* (tv, internet, etc.), our children also face some of the same struggles we faced in our teenage years - things like unprovoked harassment or teasing from mean-spirited classmates, indecision about *"What do you want to do or be when you grow up?"* and the age old issues - *What is the meaning of my life? Why am I here?*

With all these things pressing our teens, the last thing we who love our children want to do is *exasperate* them. How do we follow Paul's command? How do we avoid contributing to our children's frustration, skepticism and anger during their tumultuous teen years? Here are some ideas.

First, work to keep the lines of communication between you and your teens open. Anyone with teens knows this is easier said than done - that's where the *work* comes in. To keep good, open, honest communication is tough enough between husbands and wives... but keeping up with teens who range from giving one-word answers -

Mom: *"Did you have a good time?"*

Teen: *"Yah!"*

Mom: *"Tell me about it."*

Teen: *"Fun."*

Mom: *"What sorts of things did you do?"*

Teen: *"You know."*

to those who have interests in many things about which we haven't a clue... Communicating with teens can be challenging.

Consider this: Is your communication with your teens characterized by being critical or encouraging? Do you pick on their failures and shortcomings more than you praise their successes, accomplishments, and natural talents? Just about anyone - even a teen - responds better to praise and encouragement than criticism and condemnation. Some teens - in their *no longer children, but not quite adult* status - may have nine failures and shortcomings to every one positive attitude or action on a given day. On days like this, it's important for us to praise the positive wherever and whenever we find it - even in the midst of correcting the wrong. Also, don't underestimate the impact of heart-felt compliments like, *"You really have pretty hair."* for your daughters; and, *"You're really getting strong."* for your sons.

...that's part of the
secret teenager code:
*Never let 'em know
what you're thinking*

Another ingredient to help us avoid exasperating our teens is to acknowledge their frustrations, struggles and pain, as well as our own. It's important for teens, as they move into adulthood, to see that adults - even their very own parents - don't always *have it all together* or know all the answers. If we act like we do, and they see that we don't - that's exasperating!

If you say things like, *"I know its tough right now, but things will get better... I love you."* Your teenager might not show much response - [that's part of the secret teenager code: *Never let 'em know what you're thinking or feeling.*] - but they receive a lot more than you might expect. It might be good to share examples of your own struggles from your teenage years or let them hear some of your current doubts and concerns. If you really want to surprise them, ask your teens for their opinion or advice on something - and receive their response as valid input and thank them for it whether or not you decide to follow it.

Peter's idea, *love covers over a multitude of sins*⁴ and Paul's further teaching *look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*⁵ go a long way with helping us relate to our teens (or anyone for that matter) in ways that will build them up and not exasperate.

I used to teach leadership at the U. S. Naval Academy. Part of our curriculum had midshipmen explore their motivations for wanting to attend USNA to become military leaders. In helping them discover these things about themselves, it was amazing how many mids were at the Naval Academy, not because it was their dream, but because they were living out the dream or expectations of someone else. Many were living out a legacy - trying to become a 2nd, 3rd, or 4th generation Naval Academy grad. Some of the young women there were becoming Naval officers to live out the role of being the son a father never had. For these midshipmen, since this wasn't their dream, living it out was exasperating.

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Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Society and life do enough to exasperate and breed cynicism; if we practice a few of the above principles in dealing with our teens, maybe we can do our part to avoid becoming a nation full of exasperated cynics. Not only that, by dealing with our teens in ways that are healthy and uplifting, we may learn to enjoy them more during their teenage years and end up with them being our good friends as they live through their 20's, 30's and beyond.

¹ Ephesians 6:4a, *New International Version (NIV)*, Zondervan, 1985.

² Exasperate means *annoy* or *make furious*. One who is exasperated is left *aggravated, provoked, angry, infuriated, incensed, outraged, or insulted*.

³ Cynical means *skeptical, believing the worst of human nature and motives; having a sneering disbelief*.

⁴ Peter 4:8b (*NIV*)

⁵ Philippians 2:4 (*NIV*)



David Nelson is Associate Pastor of Christian Education and Discipleship at First Presbyterian Church. He and his wife, Laureen, are raising four children ranging in age from 15 months to 14 years old.

L to R: Micah, Lydia, Laureen, Isaiah, David & Gideon

Online Resources

Focus on Your Child ministry helps parents raise healthy, confident, and well-adjusted children. You can find out about topics such as parenting teenagers, being a single parent, and helping your child develop a relationship with God. *

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When you thought I wasn't looking...

I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I immediately wanted to paint another one.

I saw you feed a stray cat, and I learned that it was good to be kind to animals.

I saw you make my favorite cake for me and I learned that the little things can be the special things in life.

I heard you say a prayer, and I knew there is a God I could always talk to.

I saw you make a meal and take it to a friend who was sick, and I learned that we all have to help take care of each other.

I felt you kiss me good night and I felt loved and safe.

I saw you take care of our house and everyone in it and I learned we have to take care of what we are given.

I saw how you handled your responsibilities, even when you didn't feel good and I learned that I would have to be responsible when I grow up.

I saw tears come from your eyes and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry.

I saw that you cared and I wanted to be everything that I could be.

I learned most of life's lessons that I need to know to be a good and productive person when I grow up.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked at you and wanted to say, "Thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking."