



CHAPTER TWO

No Such Thing as a “Junior Christian”



There is something you should know about me right up front (or at least pretty close to the front). I believe in the spiritual capacity of young people. Do you? Not sure? Well, ask yourself if you think children and teens receive a “kid’s portion” of God’s spirit when they become Christians. Years ago, my friends at Youth With a Mission (“YWAM”) persuaded me that God can use younger Christians in powerful ways because He has equipped them with the same capacity to believe, trust and obey God as any adult. Ever since that time I have been challenging young people to trust God for big things, even though they may possess less life experience and may not be deemed “competent” by the world.

Ephesians 2:10 states, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Some of these good works are for our children and teens. I remember when my oldest daughter was only eight years old. She came to me quite burdened

in her heart about sharing the Gospel with a visitor to our home. Thinking it was not a good time for her to share her faith, I was on the verge of suggesting that she wait. In this case though, the Holy Spirit “checked” me. I remember her saying, “Dad, where is the booklet about Jesus?” I told her and the next thing I knew she had her little pink Bible out and was reading her favorite verse to the visitor. The visitor called me the next day and confided that he had placed his faith in Christ as explained in the booklet Emily had given him. Two weeks later I baptized him at our church, and learned an unforgettable lesson about doubting the spiritual capacity of youth.

We live in a culture that expects very little from young people. In fact, our culture presumes that teens will be

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disrespectful, disinterested and irresponsible. Thus, it follows that our culture generally “under-challenges” youth. This low view of our youth can seep into the Church with the result that our young people can miss out on the blessings that come with obedience. The task of reaching this culture for Christ is daunting, so giving our youth a “pass” and encouraging them to just “enjoy” their teen

years amounts to squandering a valuable resource for fulfilling the Great Commission.

In his book *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, Thomas Hine asserts, “Teenagers must be treated and educated as the young adults they are and encouraged to participate more fully in our social, economic, and political life.” I agree wholeheartedly; thus, a theme verse in *TeenPact* is, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” (I Tim, 4:12) David Alan Black emphasizes a similar principle in his book, *The Myth of Adolescence: Raising Responsible Children in an Irresponsible Society*. (Davidson Press, 1999) Black writes,

the theory of adolescence undermines the Christian understanding of human nature. It underscores the modern disinclination to treat a person as responsible for his or her actions. When we assert the “fact” that teenagers are to act like irresponsible children rather than like responsible adults, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. And when school, church, and family treat 16-year-olds like young children, teenagers act in ways that justify that treatment.

In *TeenPact* we believe young people are really young adults—capable of enormous impact now . . . and later. Have you ever heard a parent say something along the lines of, “I’ll be happy if my kid just stays off drugs, stays out of jail, and doesn’t make me a grandparent”? I know young people make mistakes and they do

not always live up to our expectations, but don't you think we have set our standards too low?

I believe we need to consistently communicate to our children that God has called them to dedicate themselves to His service, to engage the culture, to make an impact on their community. I know we cannot guarantee how they turn out, but I believe we should seek God's face about their unique calling and the role we can play to prepare them for the future. Windy and I prayed before each of our children was born that God might give us *some* hint about how to steer them. In five of seven of those cases, we are confident that we have received specific direction on which we have acted and continue to act.

A couple of years ago my oldest daughter and some other *TeenPacters* around the southeast brought suit against the Federal Election Commission. Tucked away deep into the bowels of the McCain-Feingold Campaign Reform Act was a provision which, by prohibiting minors from making monetary contributions to candidates in federal elections, exemplified the overbearing and overreaching regulatory impulse of big government.

Jay Sekulow, Chief Counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice (“ACLJ”) contacted Emily to ask if he could represent her and her colleagues. After a deposition, many interviews and a trip to the Supreme Court, Emily emerged just about the only winner from that landmark case. I will never forget seeing my 14 year old step in front of a bank of television cameras with Mr. Sekulow and make a statement. Because of Emily and her friends, minors’ constitutional right to contribute to federal campaigns has been restored.

In *TeenPact* we challenge students to dream big and believe that God can use them to change their culture. We ask students to step out of their “comfort zones.” For some, that will mean doing a better job in their own family—cooperating with parents or serving brothers and sisters. For others, it may mean changing their ambitions or taking seriously God’s leading in their lives. We have seen students become effective legislative aides in their state capitols at 15 years of age. We have watched tireless campaign workers who are only 14 years old. We have seen eight-year-olds learn how to speak in public. We have seen young people of all ages pour their heart out to God in prayer.

While all of the above are examples of the skills we teach in *TeenPact*, students need to be challenged in a variety of areas and on a variety of issues—learning to trust in Christ all along the way. I believe that we must prepare the next generation of political, business, and cultural leaders. Scripture admonishes the older to train the younger, (Titus 2:3-5) and our failure to do so will have grave consequences in our country’s future. God has important work for the next generation of believers to do—starting today.

Chapter Challenge

1. Read Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For* (Zondervan Publishing Co., 2002). See also, www.purposedrivenlife.com.
2. Take a spiritual gifts test and ask God to show you more ways to use your gifts. See www.Lifeway.com for a great booklet containing a number of tests like this.
3. Read the stories of Daniel, Esther, and Joseph again, and ask God to speak to you about your future. But be careful, He might do it!