

Checking Pride and Rebellion During Adolescence

Because teens are trying to figure out who they are, what they are supposed to do, and what's expected of them, all of these issues focus on the big me.

by Dennis and Barbara Rainey

“His attitude stinks!”

We wonder if Samson's parents and friends ever said words like those about him!

You remember Samson—the popular, affable, good-looking man's man who had everything going for him? Samson was dedicated to God before birth and was definitely gifted and talented. Today Samson might have become an Olympic competitor. He had the tools: athletic ability, physical strength, intelligence, courage, leadership qualities, even great hair!

Although he lived long before the arrival of arrogant, trash-talking athletes, he definitely had an attitude. Arrogant and proud, Samson thought that all he needed in life were his own strength and abilities. Weren't the rules only designed for weaker and less-gifted men?

He found out how wrong he was when he fell for a woman named Delilah. She plotted with Samson's enemies against him, and when Samson betrayed his lifelong covenant with his Lord, he was left to survive on his own. His life collapsed.

God has some words of His own for what today we call attitude: *rebellion* and *pride*. He despises them both. “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord (Proverbs 16:5). Jesus said, “And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

It is a rare adolescent who does not fall victim to the trap of attitude. Regularly, teens will display an attitude of self-conceit or arrogance: “I can do it myself!” “Leave me alone!” “What do *you* know anyway?”

Just this morning, as we said good-bye to three teens heading off to school, one of them was struggling with her attitude. Her countenance was sullen. No one could help her fix her school lunch. Her back was turned ever so slightly away as we read devotions. It was a classic case of “I want *my* way.”

At the very core of adolescent behavior are pride, rebellion, and undisguised self-centeredness. It is the root disease of the human heart. Because teens are trying to figure out who they are, what they are supposed to do, and what's expected of them, all of these issues focus on the big *me*.

Even if your child doesn't display a boisterous, angry brand of attitude, be aware of passive pride and rebellion, too. Some teens are quieter and do not push against the limits with brass-band gusto. In fact, their pride may be in being the “good” child, always pleasing Mom and Dad. This child may subtly develop an “I'm-better-than-most” attitude. Do not be deceived into thinking this type of child is any less prone to sin and does not struggle with pride and selfishness.

Passive rebellion manifests itself in failing to do chores, homework, and what's expected. This teen may chose to selectively hear what he wants to hear and then hide behind a statement like, "I'm sorry, I guess I didn't hear you." The parent of this more laid-back child must be very committed to pushing beyond appearances and to discerning the child's heart and mind.

Since genuine satisfaction and success in life involve self-denial and humility, young people are headed for certain trouble if they stay focused on self. Pride is the most important issue that you will ever deal with in your teenager. Ever. At its core is the question of who will be the Master and Lord of your teen's life. Spiritually speaking, this is a life-and-death issue.

I didn't eat much humble pie myself during the teen years. I remember how my dad became very dumb and I became pretty smart. Then upon graduation from college, that process started reversing itself. Dad suddenly became a genius. I was finally growing up and realizing how wise he really was.

The tragedy was that it took me nearly eight years to emerge from my self-centered cocoon. That's a long time. No wonder so many parents lose heart with their children during their teen years.

As we know so well, pride and rebellion do not disappear after adolescence. We grapple with them for a lifetime. But we parents have some unique opportunities to advance the cause of humility when our children are adolescents. They need to learn Kingdom rules, which include humbling yourself, putting God first, and not seeking your own interests. All of life's pursuits, whether they be in marriage, raising children, or success in the marketplace, depend upon renouncing the foolish attitudes of youth and attaining godly humility. If you miss humility, you miss life.

Adapted from Parenting Today's Adolescent: Helping Your Child Avoid the Traps of the Preteen and Teen Years. Copyright 1998 by Dennis and Barbara Rainey. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers.