

Ages 13-19**
(Book 4 Of 4)

Parenting Your Teen

by the *Spirit*



*Yes, your teen
can reach the
potential God
intended*

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Contents



PREFACE	6
1 UNMET NEEDS	9
2 MEETING NEEDS	16
3 ABUSED ABBY	26
4 HISTORY PLAYS A PART	35
5 LET FREEDOM RING	43
6 PREREQUISITES	55
7 CHOOSING YOUR DESTINY	63
8 LOST IN THE FOG	74
9 FROM GOVERNOR TO COUNSELOR	86
10 HORSE TRAINING	98
11 COOL JACE	104
12 LOVE AND LIMITS	113
13 DISCIPLINE IS . . .	122
14 USEFUL LABOR	134
15 THE WINGS OF DECISION	145
16 THE YOUTH'S WILL	156
17 EXERCISING THEIR WINGS	167
18 ASSOCIATIONS	178
19 BOY-GIRL RELATIONSHIPS	190
20 SEXUAL MATTERS	204
21 THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND	218

Preface

The turbulent teens—a time more dreaded by many parents than the terrible twos! This critical bridge between childhood and maturity was intended by God to be the most rewarding years of parenting. And yet Satan has sabotaged it. He has been all too successful in railroading our youth into a myriad of self-defeating detours.

He has accomplished this by hiding vital truths through misconceptions galore of how to raise children into mature adults. He has fed us a faulty program, and we have eaten it. The predominant child-rearing practices today are truly detrimental and do not produce wholesome, well-balanced characters.

So let us pull back the devil's curtain of deception and deceit to expose God's gems of wisdom for parenting teens. Let us dust off those jewels and hold them up to the light to see them for what they really are. Let us examine how to use them and reflect upon how they have worked in the lives of real parents and real teenagers of today!

Is there such a thing as a safe passage for our teenagers through the snares and pitfalls that surround them on every side? Yes, there is a way! And that way is Jesus Christ.

In writing *Parenting Your Teen by the Spirit*, I share my very real burden for our teens and young adults (ages thirteen to twenty-five). As their parents, we have the privilege of making this transition easier if we are willing to take hold of certain important keys. First, understanding how their minds are developing right now, and second, grasping how to connect them to Christ in a very practical way. To put these keys into your hands is the purpose of this book.

Jesus Christ is our Teacher in this process. As you read this book, He will be by your side personally to show you how these principles can be implemented within your own unique and individual family. It doesn't matter what you have failed to do in the past or what the situation is right now for your young person.

PARENTING YOUR TEEN BY THE SPIRIT

God has a plan that will work for you if you are willing to follow Him. He is able to help each parent to prepare his or her young adults to meet their God with cleansed hearts, minds, and habits through faith in Jesus, their Savior and Friend!



*Matthew and Andrew playing the guitar, 1997.
God wants to make our teen's lives to be like heavenly music.*

Chapter 1

Unmet Needs

*But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings as eagles
—Isaiah 40:31*

“Look who is coming up the street,” I remarked to Jim.

Coming toward us I saw fifteen-year-old Chains Charlie sauntering aimlessly down the sidewalk with his sidekick, Misfit Murphy, fourteen. Following them in a lively conversation was Tough Tommy, age thirteen, and Abused Abby, probably fourteen. Lying Larry, Mad Music Mandy, and Despairing Dora tagged along, not wanting to miss a thing. What a sight!

As I watched where this group was headed, my fears, as well as my sympathies, were aroused. Not far from where we stood was Brooding Becki, an unhappy, vulnerable thirteen-year-old, talking with Cool Jace, whom I happened to know was trying to be a Christian, *without* success. Shy Sarah joined this twosome just as the first group arrived, and they all began to talk.

I saw Abused Abby, an outgoing, bubbly girl, reach out to Brooding Becki in an exchange of sympathy. Soon Abby’s arm was around Becki, drawing her in with concern. Chains Charlie, his pants cascading with chains, was the obvious leader of this strange group. He approached Cool Jace with an air of authority that made introductions awkward. However, Misfit Murphy, who seemed to know Cool Jace, intervened, and soon all three boys were engaged in lively talk. Despairing Dora was drawn to Shy Sarah, who seemed taken aback by this motley group. Before long all of them were walking together down the street.

Do you see what is happening here? Which child is yours? Do you know some of the other young people in this group? Do you want your young people to adopt the ineffective problem-solving techniques, poor lifestyles, destructive habits, and vices of these youth?

Unmet needs in the hearts and minds of these potentially good kids make them vulnerable to what they see as love, acceptance, and caring by the rougher teenagers. Often *something* seems better than *nothing*! After all, *someone* is sympathizing, is caring, is listening, and is there for them, filling that void. But why isn’t that sympathizing, listening ear a safe parent? Why are these young people so vulnerable to the kind of help that has a hook buried within it? Real needs are being met—but at what cost?

This scenario is happening not only in Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, Miami, and Houston but in every small city and many small towns today. Worse yet, these scenes are far too common in our churches as well.

What are we going to do about it? Are we going to stand idly by, our hands too full of other pursuits, while the current of worldliness sweeps away our youth? Is it

God's plan for Chains Charlie and Abused Abby to teach and lead our youth? No, no, no! A thousand times NO! That is the plan of our enemy, Satan, who wants to drown our youth beneath the waters of a self-directed life. And we need not let it happen! There is a better way. God has provided a lifeboat. Twenty-three years ago, Jim and I chose to get into that lifeboat and to help our sons get into it also. You can do the same, if you will. *Jesus is the lifeboat—our only place of safety.* Under God's guidance we can rescue whom we can—at least our own children, surely!

We need to give ourselves to our youth! Give our time, our hearts, our lives, and our interests to work for their best good and to help them know Jesus. We need to show them a better way, to be there for them. We need to learn how to be lovingly firm, to direct them without harshness or anger, to love and care for them, and to bring them out of wrong thoughts, feelings, and responses as God leads.

In order to do that, God needs to be the center—the very focus—of the parents' lives in a positive, attractive, and practical way so that the youth can see a demonstration of something better than what the world offers. Of course, this will require courage, fortitude, energy, a willingness to change priorities, and an openness to learn new problem-solving techniques!

But friends, the rewards far outweigh the seeming sacrifices. I can tell you from personal experience that you cannot put a price on being your young person's confidant. As you provide that sympathetic, listening ear and influence your teenagers to make wise choices—rather than abandoning them to flounder on their own with dubious companions—you can have the joy of seeing them successfully meeting the challenges of life under God's direction.

From eaglets to eagles

We all want our youth to fly above the pull of their flesh, don't we? We want them to have self-control and upright manners. How are these things inculcated? How is this accomplished?

The Christian life has often been compared with the flight of the majestic eagle. "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles."^{*} The two wings of the eagle, when strengthened by frequent use, offer him a dependable vehicle with which to consistently defy gravity. The two wings of the Christian—trust and obedience or surrender and cooperation—with Christ's help, provide a means of consistently rising above the pull of his flesh.

Beyond these parallels it is obvious not only that the eagles are *masters* of successful flight themselves but that they know *how to teach* their youngsters to fly. Let's see what we can learn from observing them.

The parent eagle hovers over that little eaglet very closely, feeding it, protecting it from predators, and providing a good environment to grow in, as well as demonstrating eagle behavior that is worthy of imitation. Interestingly enough, the example of the parent eagle—*not* the eaglet's peers—is the greatest influence in transforming that eaglet into a majestic adult eagle. Isn't that God's plan for us, too? Eaglets learn

^{*}Isaiah 40:31.

how best to fly, hunt, eat, respond in a crisis, and live happy, productive lives by imitating their parents' example.

Are our lives, habits, and character worthy of imitation? Do we demonstrate healthy, productive choices? Sadly, children following the example of a slothful, lazy parent will obey the perverted nature and have a miserable nonproductive life—avoiding responsibility, coming to want, and getting angry, all of which lead to destruction.

The transformation of my youth's character, behavior, attitude, and life must begin with me. I must let God change my character first. My youth must see me consistently spreading strong, well-developed wings of dependency on God and flying by His power. How can I expect my youth to fly well if I set an example of floundering on the ground much of the time? I must rise above the pull of *my* flesh for my youth to see and imitate how God empowers me.

The parent eagle's driving purpose in life is to raise the eaglet to carry on the majestic *heritage* it was created for—and, in turn, to pass this heritage on to the next generation. This eagle is not interested in keeping its offspring in the nest indefinitely. Neither will it allow the eaglet to leave prematurely. It provides both protection and challenge at the appropriate times with the purpose of seeing the little eaglet one day fly successfully—properly independent of its parents and properly dependent upon God.

As the eaglet grows, the role of the parent will change. At the beginning of the eaglet's life, the parent provides physical care and training in the basic habits of life. But before long the young eaglet is flapping its wings, stretching its muscles, and showing interest in the world beyond by peeking over the edge of its lofty home. Soon it scrambles up to get a better look and perches uncertainly at the edge of the nest, testing its wings against the wind while enjoying the scenery. At times, the wind buffets it back into the nest, but the eaglet clumsily climbs up again until it gains strength and balance to stand against the winds of its summit home.

Just like those eaglets, our children get on the edge of our home nest, don't they? They begin by saying things such as, "May I drive, Dad?" "I want to learn how to change the oil in the car!" "Mother, does my dress look right?" "What do you think of my new hairstyle?" "What do I say when . . . ?" "I'm thinking about having four kids when I get married, and . . ." "I can't cook the whole meal, Mother! That's scary." "Let's all go skiing in the dark." "We just want to hang out with the kids. What's wrong with that?" "What's wrong with this music?" "But this is the style today; everybody's doing it." "Wear these clothes? That's old-fashioned." "Yeah, that's the hairstyle I want. I think it looks cool."

The eaglet has closely watched how its father stands as he scans the horizon. It now imitates the same stance. Whom do our youth imitate? As they teeter on the edge of the nest, preparing to make life's decisions, whose flying patterns are they watching—those of their peers or their parents? We must allow God to show us how to help them as they learn to fly in this life. It isn't animal instinct we want them to follow. We don't want to leave them to themselves! Our flight training has eternal ramifications! Are we pointing them in the right direction—toward biblical

standards irrespective of fads and fashions? Do they know how to connect to the empowering Jesus so that the air currents of worldliness do not take them downward?

Learning to fly

Mother and Father eagle look at each other with understanding. The eaglets are no longer babies. Parenting now requires meeting a *new* need: learning to *fly*. The eaglet is ready, so Flying 101 begins. Father gives his eaglet a gentle push, and the youngster finds himself airborne. Frantically flapping his wings, he plummets downward. Father eagle is prepared for this. He swoops down to catch his little treasure on his back and carry him safely back up to the nest—letting his offspring feel flight for the first time. Back in the nest, the young eaglet huddles briefly, recovering from the fearful sensation of this new experience. But soon the intrigue of the big world draws it again.

This time, Mother is soaring by and calls to her youthful eaglet to jump. When he hesitates too long, she returns to the nest and gives him a little shove—then intercepts him as his father had done. Now, like a puppy retrieving a ball for fun, these parents give the youthful eaglet *opportunity to exercise his wings* while providing a safety net. The maturing eaglet develops courage and gleeful trust in this way.

Are we there for our maturing eaglets in a similar fashion? Are we showing them that their parents and Jesus are their safety net? Are we encouraging them to practice flying—making right choices the right way? When they need us, are we swooping down to pick them up in a healthy and safe manner—before they are dashed on the rocks below? Do they see our help as loving? Are they learning to try again and again, choosing right over wrong until it becomes who they are?

On the other hand, are they hovering in the nest—fearing to choose, fearing to fall, or fearing to displease you because you'll yell and criticize their trying? If we demean their choices or give them a guilt trip for not doing what we would do, if we don't reason with them and tell them why we do what we do, are we helping them learn how to make good choices? If we are demeaning and denunciatory in our approach, we're pushing them away from us and toward their peers!

If we are inattentive and neglect the important training of these years, Satan will take up the slack. Do you really want that? If we don't decide to direct our youth to God, we are deciding to let Satan lead them! There is no middle ground. But if we will be attentive under God, He will give us His own courage and confidence to direct our youth to Him. We can replace our demeaning, fretful, faultfinding ways with wise restraint, loving direction, and sympathetic encouragement.

The eagle's driving purpose of life must become our own! Dedicated and focused like the eagle, we need to be teaching our teens how to become adults—how to make wise choices that will result in successful living. We open the textbook of *true flight* to our teens' minds when we help them decide to spend time with God, to learn to hear His voice in Scripture, in their conscience, in providence, and their daily walk. Will they participate or will they decline? Decisions for good or evil truly determine their destiny.

Pushing our young people off the edge of the nest is challenging them to apply God's principles in their daily life. When you call them to participate in washing the dishes cheerfully, scrubbing the tub faithfully, or preparing the meal willingly, you are giving them the opportunity to spread their wings in trust and obedience. Insisting that they do their schoolwork thoroughly or keep their room neat and orderly tests their flight skills. These challenges call them to a decision to obey or not to obey. They can choose to fly with God when Mother calls them to soar above the pull of their flesh—or they can sink beneath the gravity of self and be grumpy, unfaithful, disorderly, or rebellious. We are to be their safety net showing them how to fly, catching them when they fall, and returning them to the nest for another try until they get it right.

Flying requires defying the law of gravity while cooperating with the laws of flight. Being a Christian requires defying the law of sin and self while cooperating with the laws of heaven. When we ask our teen to do something that crosses self, they have the opportunity to choose flight or disaster. We must be there to pick them up and bring them back to try again. It's all right to fail. Trying and failing and trying again is called learning. Trying and failing and giving up is called quitting. We can love our youth by helping them to keep trying until they succeed.

We have an enemy, Satan, who tries to deceive these inexperienced eaglets. He, too, calls for flight—but flight of a very different nature—more like a death spiral. He confuses license with liberty and leads our youth into *abject bondage*. He inspires them with his own negative or rebellious thoughts, feelings, and emotions. He cries out to the eaglet, “Jump! Jump and fly free from restraint! Be unwilling to help! Go have fun with your friends! Do forbidden things! It doesn't matter! Your parents and God don't know what they are talking about. They are just trying to keep you from all the fun!” Many youth believe him and jump, thinking they are truly flying. But eventually, they find he was only leading them on until their crash course was set. Then he laughs as they flounder.

True flight comes when the eaglet makes the decision to filter all his thoughts, feelings, emotions, habits, and inclinations through Christ and His Word. The *art of flying* is choosing to listen to God's voice and to connect with Him for power as he jumps to obey. It is clinging to Jesus' back and flying in Him—not attempting to fly in the strength of self.

Pressing upward

Have you ever heard the eagle scream? When trapped in a narrow valley by dark storm clouds, the eagle swoops back and forth, sending its strident cry for freedom echoing from rock to rock. It can't see the sunshine, but it knows by faith that it is there. Soon with a shrill scream, the eagle darts upward into the darkest part of the cloud and wings its way upward to the clear sky above.

Our youth must learn first by faith (not by sight) and then by experience that he doesn't have to stay under the cloud of bad habits, bad attitudes, vice, or rebellion. It is a powerless Christianity that says we must live under the cloud. Our teens, like the eagle, can cry out to God, “I don't have to stay under this cloud of earthly nega-

tive thinking or feeling! Sunlight and life is just on the other side! I'm going to press through the darkness into the sunshine of life—Jesus!”

He sees nothing, senses nothing, can hope for nothing. But faith and experience tell him that there is sunshine and life (in Jesus) on the other side, and he longs for it. He pierces *through* the dark fog, the storm clouds of trials, difficulties, and selfish inclination. By faith he screams and flies through the clouds of uncertainty and finds *true freedom and life*.

Do you see it? Are you experiencing it yourself?

As the youth cries out to God, yields to Him and/or to his God-led parents, he applies all his effort. Jesus reveals His sunshine within, and His character shines without. The eaglet then becomes a diligent worker, a cheerful helper, a faithful team member in home duties. He learns to keep a neat and clean room and develops good study habits in school. With each choice to cooperate with divine power, his habits of right doing strengthen. Divine power attends his human effort and produces a life hid with Christ in God—real flight.

What better legacy could we give to our offspring?

As our young eaglets taste repeated success, they learn to like the challenge of flight. It's a newfound freedom to actually live above the flesh. They want to repeat this learning process because “in Christ” it works, whereas “in self” it doesn't. They are more inclined to cooperate with their parents in the important exchange of implementing good ways of thinking, feeling, or responding—and discontinuing the bad and harmful ways. They will find power to be all God created them to be. The sad become happy, the dishonest honest, the disobedient obedient, and the argumentative agreeable because God enables them to fly.

Experience with successful flight prepares them to navigate the challenges of worldly associates—both within and without the church. They will not desire wrong companionship. They will see it as shallow, empty, and not fulfilling, for their real needs are met—in their parents and in their personal, powerful God.

So the choice is ours, parents! Let's ask ourselves some pointed questions.

Is our flight training God-directed or self-directed? Is it Spirit-led or human-driven? Are we wisely seeing the need for positive direction to influence our youth in a good pathway of life, or are we letting them direct their own steps? Are we washing our hands of all responsibility? Are we too busy or preoccupied in other pursuits? Are we letting our teens dash themselves against the rocks below because it seems too troublesome to challenge their character weaknesses, self-experimentation, and unwise judgment? If this is you, realize you need not continue in this way!

God is willing to give us on-the-job training in flight instruction *if* . . . we will abandon our excuses and distractions and come to Him in the spirit of a learner. Much is at stake! Our youthful eaglets are wavering on the edges of their nests—preparing to launch into life sooner or later. Will we determine to do whatever it takes to loft them into the current of heaven? Or will we take the “easy” approach and watch them enter the death spiral of a self-directed life? Will we dedicate ourselves to meeting their needs as God planned, or will we let Satan fill the gap?

UNMET NEEDS

If we want to give our dear youth a better chance, we have some pretty important flight training to do. In the following chapters we will look more closely at different aspects of how to parent our teens by the Spirit. Come with me as we explore more closely how to meet more of those unmet needs we have neglected and save our youth!



THE LONE EMBRACE

A SPECIAL WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SINGLE PARENTS

“I see unmet needs all over the place,” you say. “How can I, one person, add anything more to my life, schedule, or duty list?”

God answers this question so simply, yet profoundly. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

Your attitude in this trial determines your altitude. Your seeking Christ first will give you the eagle-eye perspective, the big picture. Big things, insurmountable obstacles, become “small” through His eyes. Looking to Jesus’ strength and not to your weakness is an important perspective to lift your attitude higher, and thus raise your goals and hopes as well.

God will put on you only that which you can do in and with Him. Fear not what is before you, for God will give you wisdom and enable you to do all that He asks you to do. Learn to walk and talk with Him as Enoch did. Read the Scriptures with God as your Interpreter. Ask Him to help you see the practical application of what you read. He is your faithful Teacher.†

This is your flight training—which you need so you can teach your youth. We can only teach what we ourselves know. When you have Jesus as your Husband, Counselor, Guide, and Friend, you have all you need to meet those unmet needs in your teen. They don’t have to be left to the motley crew. And God will give you wisdom and a plan for how to draw them to your heart and His. He will multiply your efforts and empower your choices. You will see! So do your best under God and fear not. Begin by starting with your first step—make a plan with Christ to change in His strength.

*Matthew 6:33.

†John 6:45.