

The Problem with Parents.....

Its easy to think that life would be so much easier *if only* your parents would go away. Even for the Christian Teenager (perhaps *especially* for the Christian Teenager), life with Mum and Dad can be far from easy. Its often harder still if Mum and Dad are Christians as well. And the fact that there are so many rows, disagreements and quarrels, or you end up lying to them, causes you to feel guilty as you try to obey the commandments:

'Respect your Father and your Mother, so that you may live a long time in the land I am giving you'
Exodus 20 . 12

'Children it is your Christian duty to obey your parents always, for that is what pleases God'
Colossians 3 . 20

Surely God didn't know what He was asking!!

No easy answers.....

Firstly let me make it clear that I am writing this to you, the Teenager. If I was writing something to your parents about 'The Problem with Teenagers' then I would speak to *them* about what *they* ought to be doing. But I am not, I am writing to you and so I will suggest one or two things that *you* ought to be doing! So don't start saying that I've missed out Colossians 3 . 21 which says:

'Parents, do not irritate your children or they will become discouraged'

because that's written to them, not you! It *does not* say 'Children obey your parents *if* they don't irritate you'. It says 'Children obey your parents' full stop, end of sentence. Then it says something else to the parents. They are separate. Your bit is to obey your parents *whether or not* they do their bit. So stop using their behaviour as an excuse for yours. Adam did that when he blamed Eve. Eve did that when she blamed the snake, and we all know what trouble all that caused!

You will NEVER change your parents. They might irritate you and wind you up something chronic, but there's nothing you can do to stop *them*. What you can do is change your attitude towards them in such a way as to reduce the problem. But before we consider that more, the first thing to do is:

PRAY

.....as if you weren't doing that anyway (you were, weren't you?).

God wants to be involved in all aspects of our lives. He does not force Himself in, however, but waits to be invited. It is only as we ask Him into the problems we face that He can actually begin to change them. Jesus said:

'Come to Me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest'
Matthew 11 . 28

There are plenty of Bible promises that assure us that God answers prayers, and if so then God answers prayers about problems with parents. Some examples:

'Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart' Phillipians 4 . 6

'Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you'
Matthew 7 . 7

Tell God how you feel; if you feel angry tell Him. If you feel resentful,

tell Him. If you feel you don't love your parents, tell Him. If you feel guilty about lying to them, tell Him. If you feel like running from home, tell Him. If you feel like swearing, swear to God! He is big enough to take it and He wants us to be honest with Him. If that is how you feel you are not being honest *not* to swear!

Only when you honestly open up your own feelings to God can He begin to heal the hurts you feel, both real and imagined. When we 'bare ourselves' to God then He can move in and start to work in us. And it is in you that He will do a lot of the work, since you are the one that has come with the problem. He might tell you that the problem is entirely on your side. He might show you that your parents are in the wrong, and give you the grace and patience to cope. More likely it will be a bit of both.

Pray regularly about the problem, even when it isn't bothering you. Pray that God will change the situations, but don't just pray that He will change your parents' attitudes. Be honest enough to pray that He will change your attitudes as well. Admit that you are not perfect; you may only be able to see the wrongs your parents are doing, but be prepared to admit that you *might* be wrong as well! (See Matthew 7 . 3).

An example

Jesus lived with His parents to the age of thirty. He knew what it was to honour and obey parents (Luke 2 . 51). Jesus shared family life with His younger brothers and sisters, and suffered the tragedy of Joseph's death. He had to stay on and work to keep the family, though He knew He had more important work.

What does 'honouring your parents' mean? It doesn't *always* mean doing what they want you to. Once Jesus 'disappeared', and they later found Him in the Temple. They had frantically searched for Him, and must have been panicking. (See Luke 2 . 41 - 52). Its important to realise though that Jesus wasn't off 'doing His own thing', but was actively seeking God. Sometimes your parents are going to get worried by what you do, and they might 'tell you off' for doing it. If you are convinced that it was the right thing to do, however (and by that I mean that you sincerely believe that it was what God wanted you to do), then there is no need to feel guilty.

As a guide to this, if you have to resort to lying or half truths, or you end up doing things you know are wrong, then God certainly is not leading you to do it!

Change your Attitude

Its easy to start to think that your parents are ogres, or in league with the Devil or something. Just when you'd been praying that you might be a better 'witness' at home, more loving or something, they come along and start winding you up again and before you know it all your super-spirituality is lost and you're shouting at them and storming out of the house just like normal. What follows might be difficult to accept but if you think about it I'm sure you'll agree its true:

FIRST: YOUR PARENTS LOVE YOU. All these restrictions like being home by 6:30 and not going to parties after dark or not watching programmes on TV after Childrens' Hour *may seem to you to be based on malice* but they're only doing it because they love you and are concerned for you. They think they know best. (Actually, when you look back in 5 years time you may just begin to realise that *most* of the time they do!).

Try this exercise:

Imagine you are a parent of a Teenager today. In the papers, on TV, you are told of drugs, alcoholism, sex parties, kidnaps, teenage

crime, teenage pregnancies and abortions, gays and lesbians. Your child is growing up. You don't know who all their friends are. The ones you do know you're not sure about. Your child no longer tells you everything. They start to stay out later. You start to think: What if they're mixed up with the 'wrong sort'? Suppose they start playing with drugs? What if that party they're going to on Saturday gets out of hand? Are they safe on the streets?

OK, ok so *you're* not like that, but be honest: how are your parents supposed to know that? You've got to admit that it's all a bit worrying. And when people get worried they get edgy, frantic, touchy, unreasonable. Sound like any parents you know?

I'll let you into a secret. Most parents of teenagers are *frantically worried* about their kids. And because of that they behave the way they do. Now there's only one person who can start to relieve their fears. How you start to do that depends entirely on you. (Pray first, of course!)

Next, it might help if you tried to be a but less 'lippy'. I know it's easy to fire back when they start nagging but it only causes things to get worse. Have you tried *doing what they say*? For a few weeks it might be tough. You might not be allowed out. You might have a hard time. But slowly they will begin to see the difference and probably start to let go of the leash, let it out a bit and give you some leeway. This is all the more likely if you've been praying of course.

Be honest and open. *Tell them* where you're going, who with and when you expect to be back before they ask. It's NOT an invasion of your privacy, in fact it's common courtesy if you live with someone. Eventually, as they begin to trust you, they will let you stay out later. (Incidentally, I would expect them to tell you where they're going too, but that's another story!).

Notice that a lot of this is about TRUST. Do you honestly feel that you deserve their trust at the moment? If you don't then you do deserve all the problems you have got. As a Christian you should be trustworthy first and foremost, so that even the Devil can find no fault with you. Lies and deceptions will always lead to trouble!

Making life comfortable

Like it or not, you've probably got to live with your parents for another few years yet. It's no good looking enviously at friends whose parents let them go out at all times and do all sorts of things (they might regret it later). You've got to cope with *your* Old Man!

To make life more bearable the best thing to do is to go along with them as much as you possibly can. But don't worry too much if there are *occasional* flare ups. That happens to us all. It will happen especially if you've just been on something good like a Christian Camp, or to a really good service. The Devil will try to bring you down as soon as possible. Remember that you are in a Spiritual Battle, and that the Devil is the Enemy, *not* Mum or Dad. In Ephesians Paul writes:

'For we are not fighting against human beings (Mum and Dad) but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world (the Devil).'

ch 6 . 12

That means that the Devil loves us to be unhappy at home, or for it to be tough at home, but home is where God wants us to be relaxed and happy. So pray about it and learn to LOVE your Parents, because they're pretty special really. After all, you're made up of bits of them. Come to think of it, when did you last really pray for them as people, not just as

problems. They've got feelings too! Have you ever thought of asking them if there's anything they'd like you to pray for? If they're Christians, do you pray together as a family? If not, why not suggest that you do, say once a week to start? It could make all the difference! you might learn to value them not just as parents but also as Christian Brother and Sister!

Another help is to get a Christian friend to pray with you regularly, perhaps someone with similar problems so that you can help each other, but anyone you can trust and relate to will do!

PRAY about the problems

PRAY about your feelings

PRAY for your parents.