

## **The Not-so-good Old Days**

Being a teenager is sometimes hard. It has been several years now since I was a teen, but looking back on it, for the most part, I am glad I don't have to go through those years again!

The teen years are just an awkward time in life in many ways. It is a time where you are "too old" for the toys you grew up with, but "too young" for many adult things as well. Your own body is changing in ways you can't understand or even predict, and it seems (at least in your mind) that everyone else is looking at you -- and wondering why you are so weird.

I remember when I was a teen, there were times when I was angry! I distinctly remember during some of those moments trying to figure out what I was angry about -- but I could not! Often my parents or my siblings would be the object of my anger -- but in reality, I really was not mad at anything in particular. Perhaps it was raging hormones. I have no idea. Over time, this angry feeling went away.

Sometimes I would feel like no one cared about me. And then sometimes, I would feel that -- even though no one cared about me -- everyone really cared about the large zit that had appeared on my nose overnight. Acne was a big issue with me during those years! It never really occurred to me that almost everyone my age was battling acne, so we all were in the same boat!

I remember being mean and making fun of people at times during those years. Kids can be so mean. Being mean is often an effective way to hide our own imperfections and shortcomings. But finally I learned that being mean and making fun of people was not a good way to live life. I still remember saying some of those mean things to people... seeing the hurt and embarrassment in their eyes. I wish I could go back and un-say those things, but I can't. All I can do now is try to do better -- and treat people better.

There were many fun times and exciting times in my teen years as well. The teen years are a time for learning what you can do, learning who you are, and learning who you want to become. I used to think I wanted to be an astronaut... nothing wrong with that, but I'm deathly afraid of heights! One by one I thought of directions I wanted to go in life. I looked at things I enjoyed, things at which I excelled -- and gradually I decided on a path to pursue in life. Well, more or less. It is difficult as a teen to project accurately where we will be in 10, 20, or 30 years into the future in our professional lives! And even now, I sometimes wonder if it is too late to do the astronaut thing...

As time went on as a teen, I learned better how to make friends -- and to be a friend. I learned that sometimes those who were less popular actually were really cool people and made great friends -- sometimes they were just quiet or shy. And I learned that sometimes the super-cool and popular people struggled with problems -- just like all the rest of us. I also learned that the more I became comfortable with who I was, the more others were comfortable with me as well. You don't have to pretend to be somebody else -- just be yourself.

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I finally came out of the teenage years -- bruised and battered -- but somewhat wiser about life. Some of my more uncomfortable experiences in my teen years toughened me up for things that were to come later in life. And maybe that is an important purpose of the teenage years -- to prepare us to be adults by toughening us a bit.

I want to encourage those of you who may be reading this who are teens -- don't give up! You will not be a teen forever! But start right now -- learn to laugh, learn to love, learn to control your emotions and your anger, learn to make friends -- and more importantly, learn to be a friend.

I'll mention one final thing that helped me make it through my teen years. I remember a youth minister (I'm not sure who it was exactly) said this: "You will be unsure about a great many things as you grow up and go through life. Family and friends will sometimes let you down. But whatever you do, hold on to Jesus through it all. Keep trusting Him. No matter what comes up, and no matter what happens, and no matter how confused you get -- hold onto Him!" Great advice that has served me well -- and that still serves me well!

I survived the teen years, and the fog of uncertainty of those years has lifted... and I still do not have everything figured out by any means. I guess I just wrote all of this to remind us all that the teens around us may need some encouragement from those who are older. Give them a hug, an encouraging word, a sincere compliment, and let them know you are praying for them by name. Maybe your kindness will mean more to them than you will ever know.

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