

Teenagers

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[0 : 00] Great, do sit down and turn back to Proverbs. So if you've been here the last week or two, we're going through a mini-series really.

Taking a bit of a tour of life, looking at different stages of life and seeing what the Bible, seeing what Proverbs has to say. Just looking out into the congregation, I'm aware that most of the people that I'd envisaged speaking to tonight aren't here.

I think there's one teenager in the congregation and that is fine. So if you're listening to the recording now in the back and you're a teenager, then turn to Proverbs 6.

I'm going to talk tonight about the period of life that we call teenhood or adolescence. And then before we kind of dive into the Bible, I just want to, I think it's worth calling out a few of the myths of teen life in our culture.

So that's where I want to start. What does the book of Proverbs say about teenagers? What does the Bible say? Well, the short answer really is absolutely nothing.

[1 : 17] Everything that you need to hear about being a teenager is in the Bible. But you will not find anything anywhere in the Bible about being a teenager, if that makes sense.

That word is never used, teenager. The whole idea of being a teenager is only about 80 years old, actually, in our culture.

The first time that word appeared was in a magazine called Reader's Digest in 1941. It doesn't sound so hip now, does it? And before that, people were really either adults or children.

Historians tell you that in the 19th century, as soon as the outward signs of puberty were there, you were considered as an adult. And that is kind of closer to the Bible's view, really.

Paul, the apostle, he talks about being a child and then becoming a man, an adult. There doesn't seem to be an interval in between.

[2 : 23] So the modern teenager actually is a very modern construct of our culture. Teenagers listening to this, no offence intended, but a hundred years ago, you just wouldn't have existed.

Most of you would have been at work in the family business. At the time Proverbs was written, you would have been working in the fields with your mum and your dad and your brothers and sisters.

So who you are and what you're expected to be as teenagers is massively shaped by our modern culture. And it's not necessarily how God sees you and what God expects from you.

I think the Western world owes teenagers an apology, actually. The word adolescence, it literally means to grow up.

But I think that the West has kind of fed you a myth as teenagers. We've been giving you half-truths about this stage of life. Because whilst it's about growing up, in some areas, our culture wants you to remain childish for as long as possible.

[3 : 39] We've invented a whole stage of life to hold off adulthood and responsibilities of adulthood for as long as possible. We've extended the kind of pre-adult years.

So what people expect you to do is different from maybe what you could be doing. And what you should be doing. Think about it.

People expect teenagers to use vast ways of their time in leisure activities, don't they? That's the kind of image. And teenagers, you have become big business.

Ever since the kind of 1950s when consumerism caught on, and we all started buying lots of stuff, that way of thinking centred around the lucrative market of the teenager.

And so for the first time there were teen movies, teen fashions, teen music, teen fast food. And what one generation tolerated, another generation has come to embrace.

[4 : 45] It is the typical image of a teenager, isn't it? People expect you to be lazy, to be glued to your mobile phone, to live for today.

People expect you to be consumers, And takers, And gamers, Not givers. Culture expects you to be really good with technology, And sexually active.

Culture expects you to be good at those things. I've just watched the latest videos, The music videos that you can see, And more often than not, It is, isn't it? Young people, Or older teenagers, Becoming more sexually provocative, And living life for the moment, And being consumers.

We believe that there is such a thing, As the typical rebellious teenager. The world expects you to rebel, And so it's no surprise, You might end up thinking, Well, maybe I should.

I think the irony is, Is that for this stage of life, That seeks to think independently, And to break free from control, Teens, all the while, Are just being moulded by others, Moulded by the markets, Told what to wear, And how to speak, What to spend money on, What to be interested in.

[6 : 18] Henry Ford, the carmaker, He used to say, Whether you think you can, Or whether you think you can't, You're right. Let me say that again.

Whether you think you can, Or whether you think you can't, You're right. Do you understand what he's saying there? He's saying what you expect, And what we expect someone to be, Can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

And so teenagers, The expected you, Is very very powerful, At shaping the actual you, Isn't it? And the myths of our culture, Will shape your expectations, Of how to be, And how to live.

I just want to ask, Teenagers amongst us, Just honestly, Answer this, Kind of quietly, Just out and about, And in school, And even maybe in church, What do you think, People expect from you?

Do they expect, Mature, Productive, Helpful people? Or do they expect, Lazy, And selfish, Overgrown children?

[7 : 30] The myth is, Isn't it, That adulthood, Is coming up over the horizon, And it's going to ruin your life, So hold it off, For as long as you possibly can. And I think, We need to say, Sorry as a society, That we've taught you to avoid, Avoid, Growing up in some respects, Taking responsibility, For too long.

And maybe we've taught our teenagers, To expect to do, Other things from what they could, Or should be doing. So teenagers, Call out the myths. So where do we go from here?

Whilst teenagers, Is a kind of modern thing, I think it's legitimate, To see them all over the Proverbs, Actually. Because when you look at, Many of the references, To children, And youths, And instruction, For sons, And daughters, What is noticeable, Actually, Is the quite, It's quite mature content, A lot of the time.

The youth, Throughout Proverbs, Is addressed on, Matters of sexual advice, Economic counsel, Political instruction, Social graces, Military advice, Even.

So those, Those kind of things, Are kind of discussed, With very young children, Are they? So it seems to me, That there is a case, For saying that, There is a stage of life, In Proverbs, For late adolescents, And young adults.

[8 : 56] So let's listen, To some wise truths, For those sort of people, In Proverbs. Just want to give you, Three wise truths, Teenagers. Okay. Wise truth, Number one, Is, Who you are now, Will shape, Who you are, In the future.

Who you are now, Will shape, Who you are, In the future. And, We can fall into, Into the temptation, Of thinking, That teen life, Is a kind of, Interval, In real life.

Proverbs, 22, Verse 6, Says, Train up a child, In the way, That he should go, And even when he's old, He won't depart from it.

Proverbs, 22, Verse 6, And that verse, Dismantles the lie, That what we do, In our youth, Has no impact, On our older age, Doesn't it?

It's common, For teenagers, To finish school, And go on a gap year, And that's really good. But we might think, Actually, That the whole period, Of teenage life, Is a sort of, Gap decade, In life.

[10 : 10] Where, We were teenagers, And we thought, That is a time, Where I can kind of, Spend my time, How I want to do, And it has no, Real impact, On who I am, Because, For the young person, There's always time, To change, Isn't there?

There's always tomorrow. So, I'll party now, And I'll get serious, About my life later, And about my faith, In Christ, In our teens, We think, It's okay, To kind of, Be how I want now, Because I can, Flick a switch, And change later, But, The shaping of life, In youth, Will inevitably, Shape your life, For then, For the future, What we do, With children, And young people now, Will shape them, And it's taken us, Many of us, Hasn't it, Until we get into, Our 30s, And 40s, Before we realise, That that is

totally true, That as middle ages, Or older, We're still struggling, With habits, And patterns of behaviour, That we fostered, When we were young people, When we were teenagers, For good, Or for ill, And those things, Don't just disappear, When we turn 20, So, Be fostering, The habits, That you want, To see yourself, Having in the future, Now, Now, Teenhood, Is not some, Gap in time, Where nothing you do, Will affect the future, J.C. Ryle, The bishop, In Liverpool, Said that, In his little book, Called Thoughts for Young Men, He said, That youth is the sea time, Of full age, The moulding season, In the little space, Of human life, The turning point, In the history, Of a man's mind, And so young people, Teenagers, You will find, That the decisions, You make now, And the advice, That you listen to, Or you ignore now, The friendships, That you make, Or break, Can have a lasting impact, And the habits, That you foster now, In church, And in your faith, Will last you, The turning points, Of your life, Are sooner than you think, There is no switch, That you can easily, Flick later, To become someone, Then that you know, God desires you to be, Who you are now, Will shape who you are, In the future, That's wise truth number one, Wise truth number two, For young people, Is now, Is the time, To be gloriously useful, Now is the time, To be gloriously useful, Another proverb, Proverbs 20, Verse 29, The glory, Of young men, Is their strength, Grey hair, The splendour of the old, The glory, Of young men, Is their strength, Grey hair, The splendour of the old, The writer there, He takes a view, Doesn't he, Of the opportunities, That are given, To young people, And to old people, And this is a unique, Time in your life, Young people, It is a time, Of unique strength, Young people, Teenagers, You may not feel like it, At times, But you are strong, Generally, Younger people, Are physically stronger, [13:50] You've got more, Physical energy, You've got sharper minds, You've got a zest, For life, A zeal, You've got a flexibility, With your time, But one day, That will pass, And you'll have, A different glory, Which we'll get onto, In a couple of weeks, You'll start to moan, Like your dad does, When he sits on the sofa, You'll need to start, Dyeing your hair, Cramming for exams, On a Sunday night, Will get much harder, Not that you should do that anyway, But for the time being, God has given you strength, Which is your glory, The philosopher Plato said, That the measure of a person, Is what they do with strength, And the expectation is, That you'll use your strength, For yourself, Isn't it?

Use your strength, For your own purposes, Use your mind, To get rich, Get a good career, And buy more stuff, Use your energy, To indulge, Or, Just don't use your energy at all, Just stay in bed, But your glory, Is in the right use of strength, Proverbs 11, 24, One gives freely, Yet grows all the richer, Another withholds, What he should give, And only suffers want, Solomon is saying, That the best thing, That you can do for yourself, Strong young people, Is to use your strength, For others, And to use your strength, To help the weak, Go to the gym, But not to get abs, So that you can kind of, Look in the mirror, Feel good about yourself, Or get more attention, Go to the gym, So that you can help the weak, John Wesley, The preacher said, Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as you ever can, And at this strong time, Young people, There is much you can, Do, Don't buy the myths, You are able to do things, That maybe society, Only expects you to be doing, In your twenties and thirties, Sometimes teens, Can do those things, Very well, And it's really good to see, Some of our church, Young people doing these kind of things, Isn't it?

Helping out with, Kids clubs, Helping out with Sunday school, Moving chairs, Baking cakes, For Sunday nights, Witnessing to your friends, Praying, If you've never been to Route 66, A kind of teenage group, On a Thursday night, Can I just say, It is amazing to hear, Some of our teenagers pray, It's so thrilling, We've got some really godly teenagers, And we're really thrilled by you, But maybe some of you, Really struggle with this, And you're thinking, You know, I'll start serving, And I'll start helping, But when I'm older, Because there's always tomorrow, Isn't there?

Or, I'll start serving, But only if I'm told to, Or I'm forced into it, In our chapter that we read, Chapter 6, Solomon says, Doesn't he, Well, Think about the ant, It does all it does, In verse 7, Without any chief, Or officer, Or ruler, No one kind of, Standing over him, Saying, Come on, Get on with it, It does all it does, Off its own back, It sees something it needs doing, It just does it, It doesn't think, Well, I'm just an ant, It thinks, No, Now is the time to be useful, And God has given you, Strength, And you ought to use it, Young people, We need your strength, As a church, You don't have to wait, Until you're 20, Or until you go to university, Because the habits, You start with now, Even in the small things, Will shape the ones, That you take with you, Into the future, Now is the time to be

useful, And thirdly, And lastly, Truth number three,

[18:09] Teenagers, It's possible, To do adult things, In an utterly childish way, It's possible to do adult things, In an utterly childish way, It is a time, Isn't it, For you to try new things, To think for yourself, To have a bit more control, And a bit more independence, And that's really, Really good, But as you do that, Don't be fooled, Into thinking, That doing adult stuff, Is the thing, That is going to make you, A good adult, That's true for all of us, Isn't it, Because you can do, Adult looking things, And be as foolish, As a simple child, And the chapter, That we read earlier, I think is really helpful, On this, Chapter six, In proverbs, And this chapter, Deals with a few cases, And in a lot of these cases, Solomon, Speaks to his son, Who wants to do things, That on the surface,

Are seen as adults, Without actually, Thinking them through, And thinking about, How he's doing them, And why, So if you look down, At verses one to five, There he deals with, The situation, Of a young person, Making reckless commitments, Doesn't he, The son, Who puts up security, For his neighbour, The son, Has made a crazy promise, And he wants to be seen, As adult, To look big, And grown up, So, He's persuaded, To stand as a backup, For someone else's death, Isn't he, He's so desperate, To be seen as mature, That he acts childishly, And makes unwise promises, He's caught in the words, Of his mouth, In verse two, And it leads him, To a serious involvement, With people, He hardly even knows, He gives a pledge, To a stranger, And that is one of the vulnerabilities,

Of young life, Isn't it, Of often, How young people, Get swept up, In some new group, Or in some kind of, Hairbrain scheme, Or with some charismatic person, Maybe on an internet chat room, Or something like that, Because the desire, For the appearance of maturity, Makes a young person, Vulnerable, To that kind of thing, It's why cults, Often target young people, If you've noticed that, So the desire, To be involved, With the approaching, Adult world, Is a good thing, But not everything, About the adult world, Is good, And what you've got to do, Is discern, What to jump into, And when to just hold back, Solomon, He deals with, He deals with sex too, Doesn't he, And it's another sermon, In itself, But it's worth noticing, That all through Proverbs, The father, Is not embarrassed, About the emerging, Sex drive, Of his children, He's overt, He's not embarrassed, About it, He has the awkward, Conversations, In a right way, In a godly way, But it's another, Experience, Isn't it, Where the temptation, Is to confuse, The adult looking activity, With true, Mature, Wise behaviour, Again, You want to be doing, What looks adult, But you could be doing it, In a very, Very foolish way, And don't we see that too, Sudden explosions, Of adult looking behaviour, But with no mature, But with no, Mature restraint, Or understanding, Of God's ways, It's a problem, Isn't it, As young people, Kind of leave home, And maybe go to university, And get into, The beans drinking, And just sleeping around, And it feels adult, But you can do adult things, In a really foolish, And childish way, There's the attraction, Of the role model, Who has the appearance, Of something he isn't, In verse 12 to 15, Even if that person, Is against everything, You've been taught, Until now, They're attractive, Because they can make you, Feel like a proper grown up, So it's a bit of a minefield, All of this, Isn't it really, If you're a young person, So what is it, That is going to protect you, From these kind of things, From diving into things, That you shouldn't, Yet, And not waiting, For the right time, Who is, What is going to protect you, Well, Just look at verse 20 to 23, With me, Of chapter 6, My son, Keep your father's commandments, And forsake not your mother's teaching, Bind them on your heart always, Tie them round your neck, And when you walk, They will lead you,

[23:15] When you lie down, They will watch over you, And when you awake, They'll talk with you, For the commandment is a lamp, And the teaching a light, And the reproofs of discipline, Are the way of life, To preserve you, From the evil woman, Or from the wife of a neighbour, You are protected, Aren't you, Young people, In the family unit, Whether it's your parents, Or older people, At church, And I just want to ask you, How do you see, Your home life, And your parents, If they're both at home, The typical expectation is, Isn't it, That teenagers home, Is kind of more like a hotel, That you're there, To sleep, And eat, Get your washing done, And your parents, Are basically like, A sort of concierge service, That organises, Taxis for you, You kind of see them, Now and again, And your real life,

Is outside of the hotel, With your friends, And the centre of your life, Is school, Or activities, Out of the home, Work or whatever, It's not at home, Is it, Now I realise, That for a lot of you, If your mum or dad, So much has looked at you, In public, You want the ground, To swallow you up, Don't you, They are so cringy, Aren't they, And I reckon, That sometimes, You think that people, Think you're a baby, If you spend more time, With them, But the proverbs, Are saying aren't they, That don't let,

The embarrassment, Of that perception, Rob you of what they are doing, For you, Which is protecting you, From making these, Unwise decisions, As a young person, You want to do, The adult looking thing, That's okay, And so what you do, Is you want to get away, From them, Don't you, But that would be, Really really stupid,

It might look like, You're really really grown up, When you hardly spend, Any time with your mum and dad, But you'd be missing out, On something, And you'd be vulnerable, You'd be like, Walking on the snake path, Without a guide, What they teach you, Is your best friend, In adult life, Their teaching, Is like that faithful friend, The guard, The guide, Leading, Watching and talking, With you, And so it's at home, Where you'll learn, The wisdom, To know what's right, And have the strength, Of your convictions, To stand, Against temptation, To preserve you, From temptation, And so it would be ironic, And it would be tragic, That in the desire, To be adults, You cut yourself off, From the advice, And care, And instruction, That is there, To help you, Become good adults, The desire, To be perceived, As a grown up, Could be more important, Couldn't it, Than actually being, A grown up, In the way, That God wants you to be, And you could get yourself, Involved with adult behaviour, That looks adult, With adults, Who are not doing adulthood, Very well at all, Actually, In every case, Beware of seeking experiences, That would make you feel, Or seem older, Just for the sake of it, Just as we close, Let me finish with a story, I don't know if you know, Gareth Malone, Kind of, Choir trainer, He's amazing, Absolutely fantastic, He has these kind of, Shows, Doesn't he, That he does once in a while, Where he gets a group of people, And they're absolutely useless, At singing, And he trains them up, And puts them in an amazing place, To perform, A great piece of music,

And about ten years ago, He ran one of these programmes, Where he went into a school, And they hadn't had a choir, In the school ever, And at first, The students were really resistant, To his instruction, To his advice, There was one lad in particular, Called Imran, Who was gifted with one of the best, Singing voices in the whole school, So Malone starts, Personal tuition with Imran, But he just, Could not take it, He couldn't stand, To take correction, He couldn't be bothered, He stroked out, Halfway through the lessons, He responded, To Gareth's advice, With insults, And abuse, And in the end, Gareth kind of, Managed to break him down, And he did listen, And there's an amazing moment, Where Imran, Performs a solo, In the Albert Hall,

[28 : 21] And there's a kind of, Standing ovation, Every person, Who saw that episode, Had a tear in their eye, I can guarantee it, Afterwards, Kind of, People running the programme, Interviewed him, And he said, Don't be an idiot, When people try to help you, I'm ashamed that was me, He realised, Didn't he, That trying to be the man, He was being a child, But when he did listen, And take instruction, Then his, Kind of, Adult life, Really opened up, Teenagers, There are certain myths, And there are certain, Expectations, About you, In our society, Don't buy them, Because whether you think you can, Or whether you think you can't, More often than not, You're right about that, Expectations mould you, And God can change all of us, Can't he, No matter what age we're at, Thankfully, But what you do now, As young people, As young Christians, Will surely shape you, So do all you can now, In all your strength, To serve, And to grow, In godly habits, And to listen, To those who instruct you, At home, Be humble enough, To not be an idiot, When people try to help you, Let's pray, Thank you.