

Open Doors by Paul David Tripp

The teenage years are tough. As a human being transitions physically and emotionally from childhood to adulthood, the change can be uncomfortable and stressful for all involved.

Our culture has adopted the mentality that the teenage years are a battle to be survived; adolescents are sadly reduced to raging, rebellious hormones encased in skin. The Bible, on the other hand, would encourage you to embrace this stage of life. Teenagers are changing people in need of help, and God has intentionally positioned parents to be instruments of grace in their life. What a dramatically different perspective!

As the father of four (all my kids are now grown), I experienced firsthand the joys and struggles of parenting teens. I wouldn't for a second minimize the heightened tension for parents, but more importantly, there are issues that get exposed during this phase of life that make it full of opportunity.

Over the next three days, I want to share with you three fundamental doors of opportunity to look for during adolescence. Each of these doors present added stress in a parental relationship, but they give you unique access to central issues in your child's heart.

**OPEN DOOR #1 - INSECURITY**

Teenagers are not secure people - I don't think you need to be full of discernment to discover that!

The teenager who sits at peace at the breakfast table can be an emotional disaster by lunchtime. Your daughter will go to bed comfortable with her looks and wake up distressed at the condition of her skin and the shape of her body. Your son, finally beginning to feel confident in his social circle, will make one embarrassing blunder and spiral into thinking that he has no hope for friends.

This time of insecurity provides many opportunities for you to listen, love, and encourage your teen with the gospel. Just think about the questions that your child wrestles with on a daily basis:

* Who am I?
* Am I normal?
* What is happening to my body?
* Do I look okay?
* What do people think about me?
* Do I have friends?
* What am I going to do with my life?
* Will I be a success or a failure?
* What is right and what is wrong?
* Who should I listen to for advice?
* Is God real?
* What does Jesus have to do with my life anyway?

The world of physical appearance, responsibilities, morality, and future are all scary and uncertain to a teenager. But this presents a wide open door for opportunity.

In the midst of their questions, significant biblical themes can be discussed, like the doctrine of creation, fear of man, sovereignty of God, and identity in Christ. In the context of their daily insecurities, you have an opportunity to help your child connect theology to everyday life. Each of these questions provides an open door to discuss, test, experience, apply, and internalize biblical truth.

But let's be honest - when your teenager wrestles with insecurity, it often spills out and results it difficulty for you. Their bad attitude and rude demeanor will be hurtful, but more importantly, they will confront the idols of your heart. Sadly, for many parents (myself included), instead of walking through this open door of opportunity, they will slam it shut in order to maintain comfort and control.

How are you doing? Are you vigilantly seeking open doors of opportunity? Or are you slamming them shut to defend the idols of your heart? Jesus came and died so that parents would have the power to embrace this opportunity, despite its difficulty.

The first open door is the insecurities of teenagers and the doors of opportunity they open for a parent. Next, we focus on another door - rebellion.

## OPEN DOOR #2 - REBELLION

The stories of gross and flagrant rebellion are one of the reasons that parents fear the teen years. The thought that your once-precious and innocent child can turn into the leader of a violent neighborhood gang is your worst nightmare.

As parents, and as Christians in general, we need to re-evaluate and redeem our expectation of automatic teen rebellion. At the same time, we have to recognize that this is an age when children push at the boundaries, when temptation abounds, and when peer relationships do not always encourage right and godly behavior.

Luella and I received one of those dreaded calls one Sunday afternoon. It was a mother in our church telling us that our son had not stayed at her house overnight as we had thought. She told us that our son had asked her son to cover him, but her boy was conscience-stricken and went to his mother for help. That's when the call came.

We were afraid and disappointed. For a moment, we gave in to those worst-case scenarios. How many more lies had there been? Were we living with a son we didn't know? At the same time, we were so deeply thankful for the Lord's rescuing mercy.

We questioned our son and he confessed. It was a watershed moment of choosing whom he would serve. We left the room so thankful than an event that we hoped would never happen had, in God's plan of mercy, taken place.

There are many desires that make the teenager susceptible to the temptation to rebel:

* The desire to be an individual
* The desire to think for oneself
* The desire for freedom
* The desire to try new things
* The desire to test the boundaries
* The desire for control
* The desire to make one's own decisions
* The desire to be different
* The desire to fit in
* The desire to be accepted

Without a doubt, these desires - fueled by autonomy and self-centeredness of the sin nature (which you still struggle with as a parent) - can surely lead your teenage child astray.

At the same time, these struggles of rebellion and submission become the context in which another set of critical biblical issues can be discussed, applied, and internalized. Biblical truths having to do with authority, sowing and reaping, the nature of truth and falsehood, wisdom and foolishness, law and grace, confession, repentance, forgiveness, and the nature of the heart all get put on the table in the midst of these crucial moments of submission and rebellion.

But again, like I talked about yesterday, the rebellion of your teenager will expose and confront the idols of your heart. Sadly, instead of walking through these open doors of opportunity with grace, you'll slam these same doors shut with anger and legalism.

The teenage years provide unbridled opportunity. What path will you take? Remember, God's grace is abundant for you in weakness, empowering you to make decisions of grace that you wouldn't otherwise make.

As I parented my teenager children, and as I counseled parents of teenagers, I became convinced that this was a time of unbridled opportunity. There are issues that get exposed in this delicate, scary, awkward, and volatile period of development that make it so full of opportunity.

There are three fundamental doors of opportunity that every teenage parent can walk through. The door of insecurity, the door of rebellion, and the third and final door is discovery.

## OPEN DOOR #3 - DISCOVERY

One of the frightening things for parents is the sudden explosion of the teenager's world. All of a sudden, it seems as if the world gets bigger. The little boy or girl who played for hours on the backyard swing set now drives miles away to new locations, new experiences, and new friends. It's a time of discovery.

This stage of discovery is not always exciting for your teen; sometimes it will be scary and overwhelming. Surely there are moments when a teenager feels alive with their potential to discover new things, but a teen will also experience timidity and fear as they discover new things.

Regardless, there is no stopping the discovery of a teenager's world. Just think of all the new things your child will discover as they grow independent:

* New friends
* New locations
* New opportunities
* New expectations
* New responsibilities
* New thoughts
* New feelings
* New temptations

All of the joys and insecurities of your teenager's discovery will provide open doors of opportunity to help them understand and internalize fundamental truths. These include the sovereignty and providence of God, the ever-present help of the Lord, the nature of biblical relationships, spiritual warfare, discipline, self-control, contentment, faithfulness, trustworthiness, the nature of the body of Christ, the world, the flesh, the Devil, the principles of responsibility and accountability, biblical priorities, discovery, and stewardship of gifts (to name a few!)

Wow! That's quite the list. But this phase of teenage discovery provides wonderful opportunities for you to prepare your child for an effective and productive life in God's world.

## A SENSE OF CALLING

The teenage years are years of insecurity, rebellion, and discovery - combine that with the sin nature and you'll run into tumult and conflict with your child. Yet these are the very things that God uses to bring truth to light in the eyes and heart of your children.

If you want to be an instrument of grace, you need to confront the idolatry of your heart and take seriously the calling God has given you as a parent. Approach parenting with hope, patience, and courage, not because you have the skills and abilities, but precisely because you don't and God will provide in your weakness.

Parenting is one of the most important jobs you will ever have. And it's a job brimming with opportunity. Walk through those open doors and watch what God will do!