



# TEACHING KIDS TO MAKE GODLY DECISIONS

Almost every morning, I log onto my Google News Feed and check out the stories that come up with the key words *Teen, Teenager, Youth, Adolescent, and Adolescence*. Sadly, the news that pops up is usually less than positive. The more negative headlines fall into one of two categories. First, there are the research reports giving us sobering numbers on social problems like substance abuse, addiction, and sexually transmitted diseases. Second, there are the news stories reporting on individual teens who have engaged in some sort of dangerous or criminal behavior. Just this morning I read about how my own childhood school district had to suspend the football team's home opener because a student decided to show up at the game with a loaded pistol tucked into his pants.

Each of these stories (while admittedly complex in details of causation) began and continued with a series of bad decisions. These realities got me thinking about a current cultural trend that requires a response. And, they reminded me that those of us who are parents and youth workers are uniquely positioned to train kids in how to make good Godly decisions, rather than decisions that are foolish, immoral, and at times criminal.

The cultural trend is what I call "too much time spent living life in the moment." This is "Carpe Diem!" and "YOLO" taken to an extreme. While followers of Jesus are called to make the most of every moment, we are also called to live responsible lives of obedience to God's will and God's way. We are not called to live without regard for past lessons or future consequences.

This cultural emphasis on eating, drinking, and being merry. . . for tomorrow we die, is magnified when you understand where kids are at developmentally. They're already prone to this kind of in-the-moment living because of the impulsive nature of the adolescent experience. Yes, it's that not-so-old frontal lobe again! That's the part of the brain that's responsible for decision-making and impulse control and isn't fully formed until about the age of 25.

This creates a situation where when kids face decisions they tend to default to what they *do* ask vs. what they *should* ask. It goes like this. . . "What will this get me now?" vs. "How will this affect me for the rest of my life?" They default to feelings and

CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE →

YOUTH  
CULTURE

HOT  
QUOTE

*"Now the rich – or at least those who appear to be rich – fill our feeds and our screens, providing a skewed vision of how other Americans live. The Kardashians cannot, in fact, be kept up with. Online, everyone else's life looks more glamorous than our own."*

Jean M. Twenge, Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University, and author of several books, *The Atlantic*, May 2023.



**“PARENTS ARE UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO TRAIN KIDS IN HOW TO MAKE GOOD GODLY DECISIONS, RATHER THAN DECISIONS THAT ARE FOOLISH, IMMORAL, AND AT TIMES CRIMINAL.”**



emotions (being “authentic” to one’s self) vs. rationally thinking through the decision and its consequences. They tend to seek out sensations rather than wisdom. And they tend to default to immediate vs. delayed gratification.

Think for a minute about kids and sexting. Asking for and/or sending a nude photo of one’s self happens in a pressure-filled moment. Kids cave in the midst of the moment. . . and then wind up living for a long, long time with regret when photos go viral or law enforcement has to get involved.

I’ve come to understand that whether we are young or old, one key to making good decisions involves engaging three decision-making principles. These are worthwhile principles to teach to the kids you know and love.

**The Principle of the Past:** Don’t make a decision until you think back. Have you made a decision like this before? If so, how did it turn out? Do you know people (parents, youth workers, other adults) who have made a decision like this in the past? Seek their wisdom and advice. Does the Bible contain any principles or examples from biblical history that can be employed in the decision-making process? Winston Churchill once said, “Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” We must consult and learn from history.

**The Principle of the Pause:** Don’t act too quickly. Seek the advice and counsel of those who are older and wiser. . . people

who can help us learn from their mistakes. Ponder whether your decision will put you on the wide road that leads to destruction or the narrow road that leads to life. Consider which path will glorify God, and which path will glorify the world, the flesh, and the devil. I often tell my own kids this: “Every time you make a decision, you are choosing sides.”

**The Principle of the Prospects:** Recognize that every single decision you make puts you on a road that will bring with it all kinds of twists and turns. What will the consequences of this decision be?

Fourteen-year-old Connor Halsas story of good decision-making recently popped up in my daily Google search. While fishing on a Minnesota lake, Halsas hooked and pulled up a soggy wallet containing \$2,000 in cash and an identification card with the name of the wallet’s owner, a man who had accidentally dropped his wallet in the lake a year prior, thinking it was lost forever. Without hesitation, Halsas contacted the wallet’s owner and returned it with every last cent. He said, “I didn’t work hard for that money, he did, so it was his money.” Kudos to Connor and his parents who had trained him well! Perhaps we will all do such a good job teaching our kids how to make God-honoring decisions that good decision-making won’t be so rare that it’s newsworthy.

**WALT MUELLER**  
CPYU President



## FROM THE NEWS

### ChatGPT as Counselor

**If you’re familiar with the growing world of Artificial Intelligence, or AI, you have probably heard about ChatGPT.**

This chatbot allows users to ask questions, and then get answers in a matter of seconds. Of course, this can be helpful when you are looking to do things like find a particular product, plan a trip, learn how to fix an appliance, and find answers to trivia questions. But mental health professionals are sounding the alarm that many kids who are struggling with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues are now turning to ChatGPT for counseling advice. There are many concerns related to this development. One in particular that I will mention here is that kids who do this are opting for a simulated relationship with a machine, as opposed to leaning into a real flesh and blood relationship for help and support. Parents, monitor your child’s mental health. Where there are issues, intervene with trustworthy pastoral counseling and help from a qualified Christian counselor.



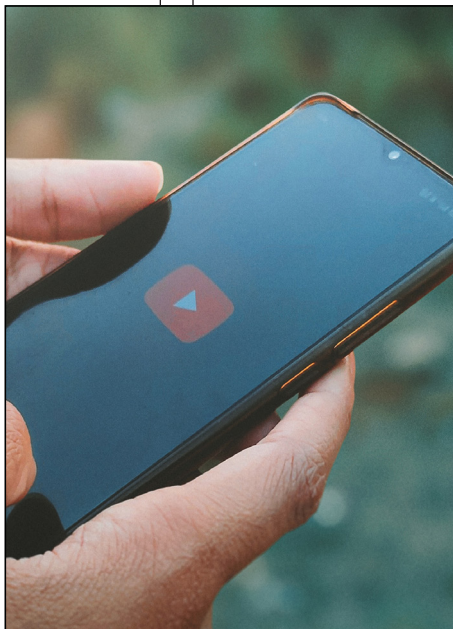


## TRENDS:



## Sexual Preference and Teen Identity

The CDC's recently released bi-annual *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System* data on American teenagers offers a look into what our kids believe and how they are behaving on a variety of matters. Parents and youth workers need to look at the data so that we might know how to best address our kids on matters that Scripture so clearly addresses. For example, this year's data reveals that the proportion of high school students who identify as heterosexual has declined from 89% in 2015, to around 75% this year. In addition, the proportion of high school students who identified as homosexual, gay or bisexual has increased from 8% in 2015 to 15% now. The implications are clear. Our kids are listening to the cultural narrative on sexuality, a narrative that encourages living in to one's personal choices rather than God's good design for sexuality. We need to teach our kids God's freedom-giving design for sex and marriage.



## LATEST RESEARCH:

## Social Media Platforms

In case you've been wondering where your kids are spending their time on social media, the latest survey data from Pew Research offers some insights. YouTube is the most popular social media platform, with 77% of teenagers saying they use YouTube on a daily basis. Coming in at second is TikTok, with 58% of teens using the video sharing platform every day. Rounding out the top five are Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook. Pew also discovered that 19% of teens say they use YouTube almost constantly, 16% use TikTok almost constantly, and 15% use Snapchat almost constantly. The online world of social media platforms are serving to shape, nurture, and we might even say disciple our kids into beliefs and behaviors. Shouldn't we be clearing paths and making efforts to have Scripture be our children's guide? Parents, are you setting borders and boundaries? And, are you talking to your kids about what they see?



## QUICKSTATS



Nearly three in every four teens have been exposed to pornography, either accidentally or on purpose. 52% of our boys and 36% of our girls say they have watched pornography on purpose. Among teens who have watched pornography intentionally, 59% watched once a week or more, and 31% watched less than once a week. And while 12 is the average age when children first watched pornography, 15% of kids first saw it at age ten or younger.

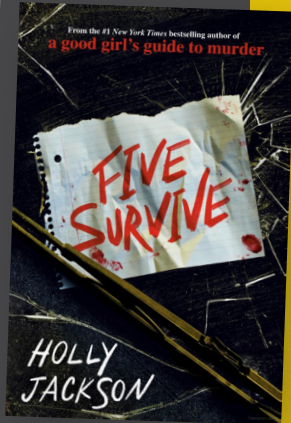
(Common Sense Media)

When setting up a brand new TikTok account, researchers found that it can take under three minutes for the user to see content related to suicide, and just about five more minutes to be exposed to a community promoting eating disorder content.

(Center for Countering Digital Hate)

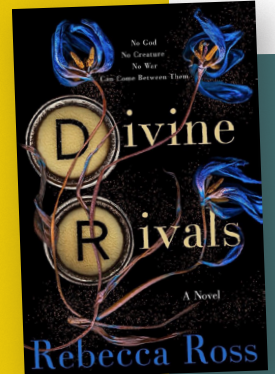
III TOP III

10



## YOUNG ADULT HARDCOVER BOOKS

September 3, 2023  
Source: New York Times  
Best Sellers List



1. *Divine Rivals* by Rebecca Ross
2. *Solitaire* by Alice Oseman
3. *Nick and Charlie* by Alice Oseman
4. *Five Survive* by Holly Jackson
5. *House of Roots and Ruin* by Erin A. Craig
6. *The First to Die at the End* by Adam Silvera
7. *Lightlark* by Alex Aster
8. *Loveless* by Alice Oseman
9. *The Ballad of Never After* by Stephanie Garber
10. *She is a Haunting* by Trang Thanh Tran

## NAVIGATING PEER PRESSURE

by WALT MUELLER

As Christian parents, what can we do to help our teens weather the inevitable storm of negative peer pressure in a way that brings honor and glory to their heavenly father?

First, realize that negative peer pressure is a spiritual battle that all of us fight constantly.

Second, pray for your kids as they face the pressure on a daily basis.

Third, examine yourself to see how your example serves them as a model of how to handle negative peer pressure.

Fourth, live a lifestyle of following Christ instead of the crowd.

Fifth, actively help your children to realize their value and worth in God's eyes so that they are less prone to seek the approval of others.

Sixth, get your kids involved in a positive peer group where following Christ is celebrated and affirmed.

And finally, help your kids understand the truth of Proverbs 13:20 – that the person who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.



# FROM THE WORD

When G. Stanley Hall first wrote about “adolescence” back in the early 1900s, he characterized this period of life as a time of “storm and stress.” Anyone who has ever been a teenager or is raising a teenager knows that some of the storm and stress is the result of impulsivity and poor decision-making. Like the rest of us, teenagers are prone to stray from God’s will and way as they make wrong – yes, even sinful – choices and decisions.

**“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

**Jeremiah 29:11**

God used His prophet Jeremiah to deliver a strong message to His people regarding the blessings and curses

associated with the making of both good and bad choices. Because He is a God of great love, mercy, and grace, God promises to forgive and bless those who repent and turn away from their sin as He works out His plan for their lives. The familiar words of Jeremiah 29:11 speak to this reality as God promises those who repent that He will “prosper” them eternally with His forgiveness and peace.

Your teens need to not only know that God frowns on their sin, but that He has provided a way through Christ to forgiveness of sin and the erasure of the condemnation that results from our sinful choices and decisions. Contrary to the way some people interpret Jeremiah 29:11, Jeremiah is not telling people that they can expect a life filled with great wealth that is void of any and all suffering. Rather, God’s wrath is satisfied for those who are in Christ. With the threat of eternal punishment gone, our hope and future is certainly bright! That’s a truth worth pursuing and experiencing for yourself, and one to be sure your kids understand.



# PODCAST



*Youth Culture Today with Walt Mueller is a one-minute daily radio show and podcast from CPYU.*

**A NEW SHOW IS POSTED EVERY WEEKDAY!**



**LISTEN AT [WWW.CPYU.ORG/YOUTHCULTURETODAY](http://WWW.CPYU.ORG/YOUTHCULTURETODAY)**

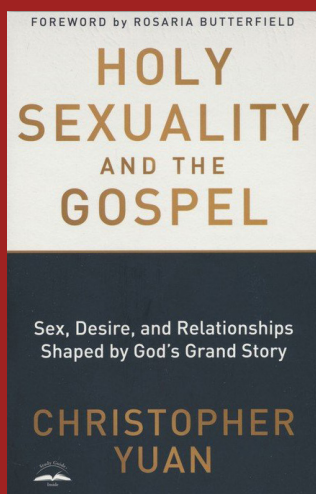


The world tells those of us with same-sex attractions that our sexuality is the core of who we are. But God's Word paints quite a different picture...my identity is not gay, ex-gay, or even straight. My true identity is in Jesus Christ alone.

CHRISTOPHER YUAN,  
HOLY SEXUALITY AND THE GOSPEL

@christopheryuan

## HELPFUL RESOURCES



### BOOK

How do we apply the essence of the gospel to a gay loved one? In what ways can we better walk with truth and grace alongside a fellow Christian with same-sex attractions?

*Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story* offers theological and practical insights that leads us to find our identity in Christ—not in our sexuality.

Dr. Christopher Yuan explores the concept of holy sexuality—chastity in singleness or faithfulness in marriage—in a practical and relevant manner, equipping readers with an accessible yet robust theology of sexuality.

Whether you want to share Christ with a loved one who identifies as gay or you're wrestling with questions of identity yourself, this book will help you better understand sexuality in light of God's grand story and realize that holy sexuality is actually good news for all.