

NEEDED: CHRIST-LIKE LOVE

This universal longing to understand and learn how to experience love was directly expressed in the title and text of a song we've probably all heard, Foreigner's well-known chart-topping power ballad from 1984, "I Want to Know What Love Is." Doesn't the title express what we all want? And, could it be that giving and receiving love is what we were created for?

Over the course of the last month or so, our kids have been privy to a news and social media onslaught of dialogue and posturing that has been anything but loving. At times, it seems like everyone, regardless of their beliefs and perspectives, is lobbing messages that are anything but loving at those who are somehow different, who disagree, or both. What we are seeing is not love, but hatred. I can't help but believe that deep down inside, whether they know it or not, our kids are feeling the same way as Foreigner. But isn't there a better understanding of love we can teach our kids?

When the lawyer came to Jesus to ask about the most important of the commandments, Jesus gave him this answer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:36-39).

If we want to help our kids know what love *really* is, we need to point them to the living model of love Himself, Jesus Christ. So, how has Jesus loved us? The late theologian Lewis Smedes, in his book *Mere Morality: What God Expects From Ordinary People*, offers a practical explanation of the life of Jesus and how He loved that serves us as the authoritative model for how we must strive to love in today's world of hatred and hostility.¹

First, we need to understand that love moved Jesus to help people. Our kids are growing up in a world where

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YOUTH CULTURE

HOT QUOTE

Seth Hedman, Pastor of Garwin Valley Community Church in Iowa, in an article titled "Digital Monasticism" in the Mar/Apr, 2025 issue of *Touchstone Magazine*.

"Social media is inherently designed to capture and hold your attention in order to sell advertisements. Through carefully crafted feedback and reward mechanisms, social media is designed to trigger the same dopamine release and addictions as slot machines. When the product is free, so the adage goes, then you are the product. Is it any wonder that tech CEOs put their children in tech-free schools?"



"IF WE WANT TO HELP OUR KIDS KNOW WHAT LOVE REALLY IS, WE NEED TO POINT THEM TO THE LIVING MODEL OF LOVE HIMSELF, JESUS CHRIST."



radical individualism and a "me first" worldview nurtures us all into looking out for #1 and treating others as a means to the end of self-gratification and advancement. But Jesus loved by humbling Himself to become human and to "give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Smedes says that "helping was His life-style, and His death-style, for He turned even His dying to our good." Jesus loved by being "a man for others."

Second, we need to see that love moved Jesus to help all people. Jesus showed no favoritism or partiality. Take time to read the Gospels and you will see that He went out of His way to embrace sinners, to love sinners by consistently pointing out their sin and calling them to repentance, and by offering forgiveness and eternal life. He engaged with the just and unjust alike. Jesus loved by being "a man for all others."

Third, we need to learn that love moved Jesus to help all people for their sakes. He didn't come for Himself. Rather, He came to rescue those who were His own. In the Gospel of Mark we learn that Jesus "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life

as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He demonstrated His love and showed us how to love by suffering for our sakes.

Finally, we need to learn that love moved Jesus to help all people for their sakes without regard for cost. Love is not focused on what it can get for oneself, but for how it can serve and bless others. As Smedes tells us, "To provide the help we needed most, God had to give us himself. Moved by love to help us for our sakes, he was committed to do whatever had to be done to help us."

Parents, do you long to sift through the mess of a world full of conflict and hatred to discover how to obey and live out the Great Commandment? Will you take seriously your responsibility to show and tell your kids how to do the same? Look to the living model of love Himself, Jesus Christ. Then, by the power and strength of the Holy Spirit ("For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." - 2 Timothy 1:7), live out Christ-like love in your home, online, in your neighborhood, at your workplace, in your church, and wherever God leads you!

¹ Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality: What God Expects From Ordinary People*, 48-50.

WALT MUELLER
CPYU President



FROM THE NEWS

DOOR KICK CHALLENGE

Many of us who were typical kids doing typical mischievous things in our neighborhoods after-dark might remember the activity "ring and run" or "ding-dong ditch."

You ring a random doorbell then run and hide, leaving the homeowner befuddled as they look around to figure out who was at the door. Of course, this was long before the advent of the video doorbell. But even in this video doorbell world, a viral TikTok trend has kids engaging in a new and dangerous version of the prank, this time known as the "Door Kick Challenge" or the "Door Knock Challenge." Because it is a trend marked by aggressiveness and oftentimes property damage, Police have been warning parents of the legal ramifications. In addition, there are concerns that residents might take violent action against what they perceive to be an intruder. Parents, warn your kids about the dangers, risks, and potential fallout of this foolish viral trend.



TRENDS:



Youth Sports, Finances, and Idolatry

According to the Aspen Institute, the youth sports industry here in the United States is a \$40 billion a year business. About 60 million kids are playing youth sports, with the average family spending just over \$1,000 a year on a child's primary sport, which is a 46% increase since 2019. Sadly many parents are pushing their kids to achieve in sports as a way of addressing their own unfulfilled dreams, and to live vicariously through their kids. 20% of sports parents believe their child could play a Division I sport, and 10% hold on to the unrealistic dream that their child could go professional. But the reality is quite different. For example, only 1 in 610 high school baseball players will get drafted by a major league team, and 1 in 10,399 high school basketball players will go pro. Parents, have you made sports an idol, prioritizing your child's success over their spiritual growth?



LATEST RESEARCH:

Mental Health and Social Media

New research from the University of Cambridge offers up some noteworthy information on the relationship between teen social media use and mental health conditions. Researchers found that kids who struggle with anxiety and depression report higher rates

of being negatively affected by social media. Those with anxiety and depression have a higher rate of comparing themselves to others on social media, having a lack of self-control over the time they spend on social media, and experiencing changes in their mood in response to the comments or likes they receive on social

media. While the study doesn't say that social media use causes these mental health conditions, it does say that those who have them use social media differently, including spending an average of almost an hour more per day on social media than those who aren't anxious or depressed. Parents, monitor your kids use, and if they need help, get them to a qualified Christian counselor.

QUICKSTATS

In 1960, 44.2% of American households consisted of 2 married parents with children. In 2023, married parents only represented 17.9% of American households. A record 58.4% of American households now consist of married or single adults without children.

(U.S. Census Bureau)

The percentage of those aged 12 years or above with a drug use disorder in the past year increased from 8.7% in 2021 to 9.8% in 2024 whereas those with a past-year alcohol use disorder decreased from 10.6% to 9.7% over the same time period.

(National Survey on Drug Use and Health)

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COOLEST BRANDS OF 2025

1. YouTube
2. Netflix
3. Nike
4. Target
5. Sour Patch Kids
6. Nintendo
7. Oreo
8. Chick-Fil-A
9. Amazon
10. Roblox

Among Gen Alpha aged
7-14 in the U.S.

Source:
Beano Brain



HELPING TEENS THROUGH CRISIS

by WALT MUELLER

The amount of change and questioning our kids face makes teenagers more vulnerable to stress than any other age group. Things that would never bother us as adults can be devastating to a teenager. The stuff we might write off can be monumentally difficult for them to handle or overcome.

When you've seen a teenager stress out over a "wardrobe crisis," mediocre test grade that has no bearing on eternity, or facial blemish. . . you have to wonder what might happen if they would ever face problems of a more severe and significant nature.

We can't forget that the adolescent years are a time of change, pressure, crisis, and even impulsive overreaction. While we might be tempted to simply say "get over it" (and there are times where that response might be justified!), it's better to walk through the crisis with them and allow them to express themselves, all the while offering support and the benefit of a more mature perspective.

FROM THE WORD



When the lawyer came to Jesus to ask him a question to test him, he was asking Jesus not about love, but about the law. In his answer, Jesus re-routed the conversation, pointing the lawyer to the fact that all the law and the prophets hang on the two commandments to love, the first being to love God, and the second to love one's neighbor.

Jesus makes it clear that our love for God is to be a love that involves not just part of who we are, but everything we are, have, and ever hope to be. It is a love that requires the totality of who we are: all of our spiritual, moral, and intellectual faculties. This love for God will grow as we meditate on the grace and love He's shown to us through the Cross.

Our love for others must be motivated and practiced with a growing awareness and gratitude for the way He has loved us. We will see others, regardless of who they are, as Divine image-bearers who have been created by God with dignity, value, and worth. . . making them worthy of our love.

As you seek to teach your kids to live in obedience to these two great commandments, consider these words from Leon Morris: "When we understand love in the light of the cross, we understand that love is to be shown to the unlovely and the unworthy. No one who takes the cross seriously can think otherwise. The Christian who has been transformed by God's love revealed in the cross cannot be other than deeply concerned for sinners. That is what love means. And as he responds to God's love he becomes a loving person. It is love that brought him life and therefore it is love that he brings to life."²

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 22:37-39

² Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love*, 278.

PODCAST



Youth Culture Matters

A CPYU PODCAST

Youth Culture Matters

is a long-format podcast from CPYU hosted by Walt Mueller.

BE SURE TO CHECK OUT EPISODE 207:

SPITTING, STEALING, AND SHOWBOATING - REDEEMING SPORTS FOR OUR KIDS

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What Others Are Saying

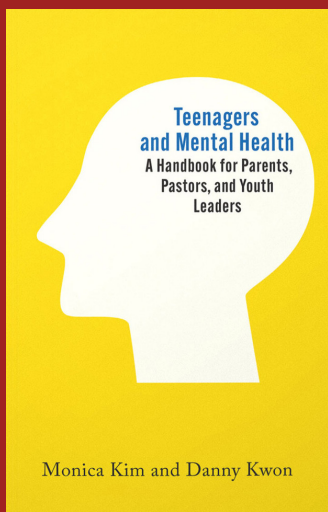
"I can think of no better resource on this topic to prepare us to serve with truth and grace as instruments of hope and healing in our Redeemer's hands."

Walt Mueller



A Handbook for
Ministering to Teens with
Mental Health Struggles

HELPFUL RESOURCES



BOOK

Teenagers and Mental Health: A Handbook for Parents, Pastors, and Youth Leaders by Monica Kim and Danny Kwon imparts gospel hope and guidance for parents, churches, and youth leaders ministering to teens with mental health struggles and their families.

Anyone who has regular interaction with teenagers can tell you that there has been an increase in the number of students struggling with mental health issues in recent years. An uptick in bullying, violence in schools, and social media pressures have only added to the stress, anxiety, and depression they feel. How can parents, churches, and youth leaders help?

Teenagers and Mental Health is a comprehensive guide to better understanding the challenges adolescents face and outlines strategies for compassionate, gospel-centered care. Married coauthors Monica Kim, a licensed psychologist and biblical counselor and Danny Kwon, a veteran youth pastor, have extensive experience in working with struggling youth both professionally and as parents. They equip youth leaders, pastors, parents, and other caregivers to notice when a teen is having trouble and reach out to offer help.

This book includes direction for care and help with specific conditions such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, trauma, and substance use. It also emphasizes the importance of churches offering resources to encourage and equip parents, and promotes collaboration between families, churches, and mental health professionals. *Teenagers and Mental Health* also provides practical tools for support, including questionnaires and activities to assist teenagers in understanding their problems and turning to Jesus and other caring adults to get the help they need.