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THE TEENAGE CHRISTIAN

- 1. Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. –Prov. 22:6***
- 2. I will remember My covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. –Ezek. 16:60***

Teenage years (13 –19) are a most troubling period for young people. Right now, you may have a child or brother or sister or friend who is a teenager. You yourself may even be one. Teenagers may show the physical features of adults but still have the emotional and mental innocence of children. They crave for freedom but easily misuse it, sometimes at enormous costs, such as teenage pregnancies, alcohol and drug abuse, or auto accidents. Propelled by peer pressure, curiosity makes teenagers restless and adventurous. Now, with the IT (Information Technology) revolution, they are gaining almost unguarded access to immoral and violent materials on the Internet or cable television. Increasingly, therefore, parents and teachers are finding it more difficult to preach discipline or the fear of God to their wards. Teenagers tend to believe that they have time on their side. Therefore, they can afford to be wild for a time before they settle down later. Unfortunately, most irreversible mistakes in our lives are made during that period.

*This is not a new problem. Even in Old Testament times, children of holy men became wicked adults. The sons of Aaron (Nadab and Abihu) were killed for burning unholy incense to God [**Lev. 10:1-2**]. It was Eli the priest that brought up Samuel, yet his own children were sleeping with female worshippers inside the church [**1 Sam. 2:22**]. Samuel's sons, Joel and Abia, were rejected by the people as his successors because they were greedy and took bribe to pervert justice [**1 Sam. 8:1-3**]. However, we also know of wicked fathers who raised God-fearing children. A good example is Saul, the father of Jonathan. There are also examples of good fathers with good children, e.g., Asa and Jehosaphat [**1 Kgs 22:43**], and bad fathers with bad sons, such as Omri and Ahab [**1 Kgs 16: 21-30**]. Therefore, it seems to me that the future of our teenagers is in the hands of God Himself and that is why we must bring them to His throne of grace.*

As I meditated on the subject and sought the Lord's guidance on what to write, I received an unexpected reply: invite Edujie to be the guest-writer! My daughter "graduated" out of her teens a few years ago, and she currently lives in California, U.S.A. When I called her up to make the request, she was not surprised at all. I had telephoned her close to mid-night [8.00 p.m., California time]. When I got to the office the following morning, she had already e-mailed her piece. It is reproduced in full below.

Edujie [the name means “day of joy”] is 24 years old. A civil engineer by training, she currently works as Transportation Engineer with the State of California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS), Fresno, California. She has two younger brothers, aged 21 and 19, both college students also in California. Let’s read her moving story.

Christianity and the Adolescent years
by
Edujie Imonitie Imoisili

Looking back on my life and growing up in a Christian home, I feel right to say that I was raised by both my parents and God.

The fact that I was raised in a Christian home did not necessarily determine how I eventually turned out. Actually, how I am and what I am today is a result of my personal relationship with my God.

My first experience of God was when I was 5 years old. I had a dream in which an angel revealed to me the significance of the hair on my head. Like Samson, I am not allowed to let a pair of scissors touch the scalp of my head. It is very amazing that at that age God chose to speak to me. That only confirms scriptural passages about how God spoke with Samuel at an early age. However, His message was heard loud and clear.

Between this time and the time I was 10 years old, I still had not grasped the concept of God. I was always an obedient and well-behaved child. I went to church with my parents on Sundays (we were devout Catholics then). I had memorized all the catechism notes and teachings of the church. I even attended a catholic elementary school where I was surrounded by nuns and priests who constantly taught us about God.

As I grew older (between the ages of about 10 and 14) my relationship and my understanding of God changed. It was at about this time I had gone through the experience of almost losing my mother and father. Also, a whole new world opened up to me. I had just started boarding school and we were no longer Catholics.

In the new denomination that my brothers and I were being introduced to (the Celestial Church of Christ), I learned that prayers did not just involve reciting memorized scriptures. I learned the essence of spirituality and the power of the spoken word of prayer. I also learned that God was not too far away or too difficult for me to communicate with. This is the period in my life when I accepted Jesus into my life as my personal Lord and Savior. However, I still ran away from the responsibilities of being an adolescent Christian. You see, at the time, I thought my parents could pray for me and everything would be all right. Just mere association with them protected me from all the evil forces in the world, so I thought.

One significant thing that I noticed in my life during this period was that I seemed to have a mind of my own. During the period of time I was in boarding school, I found myself taking solitary walks to talk with my God. I used to talk to Him as if He was beside me and I could hear His voice responding to me in my heart. This was the beginning of my awareness of God. In this same period, I learned discipline and did not have a problem focusing on things of importance to my success in life. Worldly distractions were not a priority for me and teenage curiosities were not of interest to me either.

Peer pressure has been one problem I have not had. Even when I was surrounded by friends that were doing things that I knew were wrong, there was this strong sense of self that stopped me from participating. I have always attributed that strong sense of self to my relationship with God because I always knew He saw all that I did and I wanted to do what was pleasing in His eyes. Also, I asked myself questions like: Is what I am doing going to make my parents proud of me? Can I stand before God and justify my actions? I always felt surrounded by the Spirit of God because I noticed people even coming to ask me where the source of my strength to resist peer pressure came from. They noticed that I was always focused and was stubborn about standing up for what I believed in. I was more of a leader and not a follower. Throughout my life a lot of people have said that they admire that about me. Some have even tried to emulate it.

When I came to America at the age of 15, I had every opportunity to do whatever I wanted to. My immediate family was in Nigeria at the time and my uncle (my father's younger brother) that I lived with did not have any clear-cut rules for me to follow. However, I had problems when I lived with my uncle because as a teenager, he expected me to be wild and uncontrollable. He thought that I should stay out late at night partying with friends and have boyfriends at this age. Oddly enough, I was never curious to do any of these things. I preferred to go to school, come home, baby-sit my cousins, help my aunt doing chores and stay indoors. My belief even then was that God had given me the opportunity to come to America for my education and I was not going to be tempted or distracted from that goal.

My college years were just as tempting. That was the time for experimentation with drugs, alcohol, sex etc for most students. The feeling of total freedom led a lot of my friends on a downward spiral. I watched them spiritually fall and I saw the physical manifestations of their actions. This only served to deter me from those avenues. Instead, just like I did in boarding school in Nigeria, I had my solitary walks and conversations with God.

This is not to say that I did not have a healthy social life during my college years. I was practically involved with most educational and extracurricular activities available to me. But, there was always that feeling/presence that served as a guide during the entire period I was in college. My choice of careers now is one of the results of this guiding force.

However, I am not perfect. Just as I have developed my personal relationship with God, I have also had instances in my life when I have tried to rebel against what I know to be

true. I have rebelled when the questions and the problems of this life seem somewhat overwhelming. I have also tried to rebel by challenging God to show me that He is indeed with me. In all these instances, God has never failed me. He has spoken to me through total strangers, through nature (the works of His own hand), scripture, dreams, prophecy and personal experiences.

Now that I am a young adult, I have seen God's handwork in my life. From the day I was born, He has been there guiding me through to where He wants me to be. Like a child, He has continued to teach me and mould me for His future purpose. He chastises me when I am wrong and He blesses me when I obey.

Even looking at all that I have been able to accomplish in my life today I have to say that, yes my parents had an important and significant part to play in being there to encourage me on. Salvation is a personal thing and it depends on the individual. It cannot be forced on anyone. The personal relationship that I initiated with my God at an early age is what has guided me through every instance in my life. This is because, when my parents were not physically present with me to tell me what to do, God was there watching over me and guiding me through every decision I made in my life. He instilled in me the maturity that I have today and He has given me the confidence and faith to accomplish things because I know He is with me. He is the voice within that says, "Fear not, for I am with you."