



THE COMMON CRY OF TODAY'S PRETEEN AND YOUNG TEEN

A few weeks ago I took my daughter to a nearby mall to get some clothes and other odds and ends. She is growing so fast that we can't keep up, with either our eyes or our checking account. We look away for one minute, and she is closer to becoming a young woman, and our bank account is emptier. In order to get to the mall, we had to drive past our church. Our church has a fantastic strategy of integrating the sixth graders into the middle school ministry halfway through the year. So for the first six months of the sixth graders' school year, they minister to just the sixth graders in the same format in which they worship and minister in the weekly middle school ministry.

Then in January, after holiday break, they bring them in with the seventh and eighth graders. This gives the sixth graders a chance to develop friendships, get to know the adult leaders, become familiar with the liturgy of meeting, and get comfortable with new buildings. From what I can tell, it works well.

Megan has recently started attending the middle school ministry. So, as we drove by the church, I asked her, "How is youth group going?"

She replied, "Okay, I guess."

"What do you mean 'okay'?"

"Well, I get the whole God thing, and I like going to youth group, but I don't really know what it all means. I know a lot of the stories, understand who God is and that God loves us and all, but I just don't know why it's important to do what the Bible says. Sometimes it just feels like a book to me."

Then she spoke the common cry. *"I just wish someone would show me what I'm supposed to do!"*

At first I was taken aback. I thought, *Isn't that what I'm doing every day?* Every day I try to live in such a way that shows my children who Jesus is.

So I asked her, "Do you see in me what you are supposed to do? Do I show you with my actions what it looks like to be Jesus?"

"Sometimes, but you're my dad. You don't count."

I smiled and laughed with her as we continued up the road toward the mall.

Megan reached for the volume knob and turned up the radio so loud that the words were distorted as she stared out the window. I stared through the windshield, reflecting on what had just transpired.

As I thought about my role in her life, I began to ask myself a lot of questions: *Am I revealing Jesus's way of life to my children? Am I making a difference in the world around me? Am I showing her and her brothers and my wife what it means to live, love, and lead in the way of Jesus?*

The common cry of today's preteen is simply this: "Don't just tell me—*show me!*"

But it involves so much more than that. The cry, as I call it, suggests that most preteens and young teens are interested. The lenses of skepticism and curiosity converge to produce a cry to be guided toward helping them figure out what they are "supposed to do with all this God stuff." Not to mention all the stuff they're learning about everyday life as they live each day with a sense of timidity, not knowing what is around the corner and whom they will be when they get to that corner.

Christian preteens and young teens long to make sense of everyday life and everyday faith—united. They strongly desire you and me to guide them into the depths of understanding and help them make sense of it all. Make no mistake—your preteen is crying loudly for help! The common cry is not always a shout. It may be spoken loudly through body language or softly through a small whisper. Perhaps your child will cry out in an outburst of emotion that doesn't seem logical or rational to you. And it may not be. Whatever ways your child tells you he or she wants a guide for life and faith, it's tremendously significant to him or her.

Part of being a good guide is learning to hear the common cry in its many axioms.

Everyday Axioms of the Common Cry

Noticing and identifying the underlying messages of the common cry are essential to your role as a guide for preteens and young teens. These axioms can help you establish a foundation for recognizing, acknowledging, evaluating, and acting upon the common cry. When these axioms are uncovered through the words, behaviors, and body language of your kids, you will hear the cry.

It's important to note that your child may not display all of the axioms. No scientific study has been conducted. And if your child does exhibit them, the degree to which they're exhibited will most likely vary.

As you are fully aware, there is no special formula for guiding your children into developing their own faith. The only element for success that I know of that effective parental guides share is *faithfulness*. Remember the phrase used in the Introduction? The phrase "You get who you are" could not be truer. Are you faithful in your efforts to guide your children? Your children's engagement in and expressions of matters of a life of faith are typically directly proportional to your own faithful engagement and expressions in matters of life and faith. So not only should we be faithful to live, love, and lead in the way of Jesus, but we also ought to be faithful

in our diligence to identify the common cry through the various following axioms.

Axiom 1: Challenge me!

Don't be the overbearing parent who lives vicariously through his or her kid, and in doing so, makes the kid's life miserable. We all know too well the parents or sets of parents who push their kids so hard in certain endeavors that the kids hate them but do them out of fear of disappointing their parents or, in some cases, fear of being physically abused.

Usually parents push their children too hard because their own dreams were left unfulfilled, so they make every attempt to achieve their dreams through their children's lives. Don't be that parent. If you want to teach your kids skills and responsibilities through various activities, that's great. But don't push them so hard that they hate what they do and those who make them do it—which would be you. However, don't avoid challenging them either.

Preteens and young teens want to be challenged. They want you to test them and put them in situations in which they come face to face with learning new things and accomplishing unconquered tasks. This is so important in helping children develop their own faith. When you challenge them—appropriately and in balance between being overbearing and underinvolved—you show them you think highly of them and believe they're old enough to take on new challenges. So challenge them to pick up

their Bibles, read them, and study them. Then cheer them on. Show them you're pleased with them. Point to what is right with them rather than what is wrong.

Some parents try to live vicariously through their children's faith development to the point that they are just as overbearing as the parents who push kids in extracurricular activities. Usually this parent rationalizes his or her behavior by citing the Christian faith as the reason for being overbearing, which is equally damaging.

If this is you, don't rationalize your behavior. Call it what it is, and get past your bossy nature. Being overbearing will not make your child a mature disciple. Your child will become a mature disciple when he or she feels ready, as guided by the Holy Spirit. However, *do* challenge your child!

Often, much later in life, children acknowledge that their spiritual growth is a result of parents and other adults who challenged them. Never have I heard the faith story of a person who said, "I thank God my parents never cared about my faith development. If it weren't for them not caring, I wouldn't be who I am today."

Axiom 2: You can't possibly know everything!

Remember those two lenses through which preteens and young teens view the world? One is curiosity, and the other is skepticism. It is their questions, as well as yours, that help make them ever more curious. Sometimes it is your answers that make them ever more skeptical.

When your child asks a question you cannot answer, don't pretend you know by making something up. Just be honest, and tell your child you don't know. The three most appealing and disarming words that preteens can hear are *I don't know*.

I was teaching a Sunday school class for middle schoolers a few years ago. I remember one of the students asking me a question I didn't know the answer to. I can't remember now exactly what the question was, but I know it was intentionally designed to stump me. I could tell by his facial expression and tone of voice. He was ready to pounce on me like a lion on its prey. After he asked the question, he curled up the corners of his mouth in a smart-alecky kind of way and sat back and waited for my response.

I finally said, "You know what? I've never been asked that question. That's a good question. I don't have an answer to it." The boy looked stunned.

Another boy in the group muttered, "No one has ever told me that before."

I blew their minds, no doubt. But I also taught them that I still have a lot to learn. I don't know everything about everything. Even my own kids are floored when they ask me a question and I say I don't know the answer. A stack of the books I've authored sits on the coffee table in the reading room in our home. I'm supposed to know everything. Well, clearly, *I don't* know everything.

It's totally fine to tell your kids you don't know the answer. It doesn't make you any less smart, and it doesn't lessen your

influence in their lives. In fact, I would argue that it makes you smarter and wiser and more of an influence. Your preteens know that you don't know everything, so stop pretending. Deep inside their minds they're thinking, *Please don't have an answer to this question!*

A few weeks ago I was having a conversation about the Trinity (you know, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) with my daughter. I tried to explain it to her the best way I knew how. She nodded as if she was getting it, but she had a puzzled look on her face, so I followed up my response to her questions by saying, "You know what, Meg? If we knew absolutely everything about God, God would be so small. Right?"

She reflected on that for a moment then said, "Yeah, 'cause if we could figure out everything about God, *we'd* be God." Smart girl.

If you don't know the answer, just say so. However, don't leave it at that. Make the time and space in your life to find an answer, preferably *with* your child. A response such as "I don't know, but we should find out" can go a long way in showing your child what it means to be in development.

One of my favorite things to do is leave the conversation with an "I don't know" and then follow it up a few days later with a response such as, "Hey, Meg, remember when we were talking about _____? Well, I've been thinking about it and studying it, and this is what I found out."

Practicing learning will not only blow your kids' minds; it'll also reveal to them the importance of learning about the faith—or any other matter in life—and show them how important you thought the question was.

Axiom 3: Protect me!

My daughter got the iPhone 4S when it was the hottest phone on the market. She earned it by working hard for it through a myriad of assigned and self-initiated chores, tasks, and responsibilities. Last month she created, replied to, or received more than four thousand text messages. She is *constantly* texting. I hate it, yet at the same time I love it. I want her to interact with her friends, but sometimes the phone is a source of contention, to say the least. We're working hard to find a mutually acceptable balance for her phone use.

Megan and I have a deal. She's not allowed to delete any of the threads of communication on the phone, text, or email. She knows it's a protection mechanism; we have explained to her the raging impulse some kids have to "sext" pictures of themselves or others. Our deal is that I will not read her texts or look at her pictures unless I suspect that something is amiss. I respect her privacy, but she knows that at any time I can pick up her phone and thumb through the conversations. It is a simple way to protect Megan yet allow some of the desired freedom and independence a preteen wants. It is my job as Megan's parent to guide

and protect her. She wants to be protected, so this usually isn't a problem.

Most preteens and young teens know there are certain songs they should not be listening to as well as TV shows and movies they should not be watching, plus websites and YouTube videos they shouldn't be viewing. In many cases, although most will explore, in my experience, kids want limits.

Honestly, I'm not sure how this differs between boys and girls, but generally speaking, since the ages we are talking about don't yet know how they are to truly process what they listen to, watch, and so on, they would rather just be told they can't watch it or listen to it. So protect them. First, don't neglect to do your job as a parent. Second, don't automatically assume the age group we're talking about doesn't want protective limits. When they put up a fight, it doesn't always mean they don't want or appreciate the limitations placed on them.

Axiom 4: Help me make good decisions!

You can tell preteens and young teens to make good or better decisions, as I have in the past, but unless you show them how to do it, they won't know.

I remember that, not long ago, I was frustrated by a decision Megan made. I blurted out, "You have to learn how to make better decisions!"

She shouted back, "What does that even mean?"

It occurred to me at that very moment that I expected Megan to make good decisions, but I had never really taught her how to make decisions. True, preteens know the difference between right and wrong, but they may not know how to make good decisions based on their conclusions of what is right or wrong. Expecting your children to make good or better decisions without helping them know how to critically think is your fault, not the child's. Do you know how to help preteens make good decisions?

There are some guidelines you can use to help your kids make good and better decisions. Feel free to edit, delete, add, or adjust these in whatever way will make them work best for you.

1. Define the setting, condition, or problem requiring a decision or solution.
2. Compile a list of the numerous courses of action that can be chosen. (Note: Most situations have more than one or two actionable scenarios.)
3. Identify the specific implications of not making a choice. (Note: Not making a choice is making a choice.)
4. List the Christian values and/or biblical principles that are being applied to help make the decision.
5. List the preconceptions and judgments or other factors that may unfairly impact the choices being considered.
6. Acknowledge and distinguish how the different decisions may impact everyone involved. (Note: Consider what will happen with or to others as a result of the choices made.)

7. Appraise the choices to make sure they are consistent with the values or biblical principles.
8. Make the decision, and then stick to it.

One of the best ways to teach preteens (or children of any age) about decision-making is to involve them in *your own* personal decisions. For example, I recently visited with a church in Iowa about becoming one of their campus pastors. After a few months of dialogue with this church, I realized it was something I thought God was encouraging me to pursue, so, with the support of my wife, I did. After an initial visit, I was still encouraged by the opportunity, so my wife and I decided we would share with our kids the opportunity to join the staff at this church.

My three kids had varying reactions, as you might expect. My wife and I told them we would not make a decision without involving them. We stated that together she and I would ultimately make the decision that was best for our family but that their thoughts and feelings were important to us and that we would seriously consider them before making the final decision.

We used a process similar to the eight steps I just shared. Not only did this show our kids how much we love them and value them as individuals, but it also taught them the importance of making good decisions and how the process for making good decisions works. I try to involve them in as many decisions as I feel appropriate and relevant, but I don't involve them in every de-

cision. By the way, I didn't accept the call to pastor at that church in Iowa.

Young teens want you to help them know how to make good decisions. They don't want you merely to blurt out, as I have done on occasion, that making decisions is important and that you hope they will make good decisions. They also want you to show them *how*.

Axiom 5: Hey, let me teach you too!

One of the most important things to young people is to be heard. They find a sense of self-worth in knowing that other people think they're smart and have potential solutions or ideas to contribute. Knowing they are adding something to the equation, so to speak, is critical to their formation and understanding of themselves as persons. Preteens and young teens want the chance to teach you about what they are learning too.

The other day my daughter said, "Dad, did you know there were two trees in the garden of Eden?" Clearly this was new information to my daughter. Somehow in all the Sunday school classes she had been in, she never grasped or was never taught that there were two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So what were my options here? One, I could reveal my superior knowledge and say, "Of course I knew that. Duh!" Or, I could lie and say, "Really? I didn't know that." My third option was to place blame on all those Sunday school teachers and say, "No

one ever taught you that before?" Or I could say, "Yes, I did know that. Why do you think there were two trees?"

I chose option four, which sparked a five-minute conversation and valued her discovery. These specific instances may seem small, but they are huge, and they add up. Let the spiritual discoveries of your adolescent children shape you too.

When all we do is preach or teach *at* our children, we face the chance that our kids will tire of our voices and block out the entire subject. It's imperative to the faith development of your children that, as you guide them, you allow them to shape your own spirituality, as simple or childlike as it may be. Preteens and young teens want to learn *with* you, not merely *from* you.

This idea of co-learning is certainly not new. However, based on my limited experience, it is rarely or only occasionally intentionally employed by families. Co-learning, when utilized well, can take the emphasis off the learner and put it on the subject itself. This subtle but monumental change in thinking can cause learners to engage at even deeper levels. Leonardo da Vinci once quipped, "Poor is the pupil who doesn't surpass his master."

How should we expect our children—our pupils—to surpass us if we don't share in learning with them? I hope my children's faith is ten times deeper than mine. In order for this to happen, I'll need to learn with and from them to deepen my own knowledge of God—for my sake, for their sakes, and ultimately for the sake of the world.

The next time your preteen or young teen wants to share one of his or her recent spiritual discoveries with you, don't use facial expressions, tones of voice, or emotions other than intrigue, curiosity, and amazement. Let your child walk away thinking, *I know things too, you know!*

Axiom 6: Trust me!

I facilitate a small group for high school boys at my church. The group is made up of seniors who attend the same school and have known each other for years. Our conversations are rich with laughter, questions, and sarcasm. After one of our recent conversations, one of the boys in the group sent me a Facebook message and asked, "How are my parents going to learn to trust me if they never let me be in situations that allow me to prove I can be trusted?" That's a good question, right? I mean, think about it. How does anyone learn to trust another if the other is never in situations that prove his or her trustworthiness?

Believe me, I know how hard it is, but we have to find ways to muster up the courage to allow our preteens and young teens to experience situations in which they get to test the depths of their faith. If what they're learning about God is merely intellectual and not practical or applied, it isn't a forming faith at all. It's only knowledge.

Knowledge is good, of course. However, left unused and untested, knowledge is impractical to everyday life. It isn't until one experientially lives out what he or she is learning that it becomes

real. For instance, have you ever taken Driver's Education? Long before I ever sat behind the wheel and put my foot on the pedal, I learned how to drive—except I didn't. Sure, I learned the rules and essentials of operating a motor vehicle, but until I got out on the road, the knowledge was untested and therefore merely facts *about* driving, not actually driving.

The same is true for our children's faith; it needs to be practiced. We need to allow our kids to test what they're learning about the Bible in everyday life. I get it. It's hard to watch them grow and develop a sense of independence. I don't even feel comfortable letting my daughter and her friends walk to the neighborhood ice cream shop by themselves. One day I followed the four of them in my car. As far as I know, Megan doesn't know I did that.

But if we don't allow our preteens and young teens to put themselves in situations where they're applying their faith, their faith will be lackluster—even dead. Of course, we have to use wisdom. We must not get ridiculous in the name of trusting in God.

For our family, this means Megan is allowed to attend dances at school. What goes on at dances requires the kids to use wisdom and courage to make good or better decisions. Our kids can't learn the importance of choosing to do what is right if they're never in situations where they might be allowed to choose what is wrong.

Allowing our young teens to test their faith (I'm not talking about *practicing* their faith, such as with compassion or evangelism) is scary, no doubt. But if we put them in imaginary bunkers and never let them step outside to begin to live for themselves, they will not develop the lasting, ever-deepening faith God desires and provides opportunity for all of us to explore, encounter, and continually experience.

Axiom 7: Let me see you do it!

I have what some of my Christian friends consider an unusual devotional life. I'm not a sit-down-and-read-the-Bible kind of guy. I read my Bible, but I usually read it in the context of what Christians for centuries have been calling the Daily Office. For me, part of what others refer to as their devotions is a commitment I made to pray three times a day. Usually I pray upon awakening, at midday, and then in the evening.

My prayers are usually what others have written. Often I use the *Book of Common Prayer* or some other tool to guide me each day. Praying these prayers has allowed me to memorize certain prayers that I have now taught to my kids. The Lord's Prayer, the Prayer of St. Francis, St. Patrick's Breastplate, and the Jesus Prayer are a few I've used. We say them on the way to school, before we eat, after we eat, when we're traveling, whenever.

We also have a prayer cube that we use before meals. On each side of the cube is a prayer that one of my kids reads. These

prayers—and other disciplines such as fasting, living simply, journaling, and so forth—are ways my children can enter into my devotional life, which is huge. They need to see my wife and me practicing the presence of God in our lives on a regular basis. They need to know that my faith is important to me. Our commitment to church attendance, our patterns of giving, our generosity with our belongings—these all play into my kids' ongoing faith formation.

If your kids don't see these practices in your life, they aren't likely to make them a part of theirs. Remember our phrase *You get what you are?* This, of course, doesn't mean that God doesn't work miracles for kids who grow up outside the faith traditions of the Scripture and the church. However, without any science to analyze this statement, I contend that children who grow up in the faith or the church and don't see it as real because they never see it lived out in the lives of others—parents, especially—have less interest long term than those who have grown up without faith and discover it at a later age.

The bottom line is, we need to let our preteens know that our faith is important to us if we want them to have a faith of their own. The lens of skepticism through which they view the world will shatter the lens of curiosity unless our lives reflect our commitment to the way of Jesus.

That being said, it is imperative that you and I share with our children what we learn every day. The co-learning axiom goes both ways. Your children want you to ask them to share, but they

also want to see it real in you, in order to ask you to share what you're learning. Can they see it in you? Do they know how important your relationship with God is to you? Or do you prove your real desire by your abstinence from such a relationship?

Axiom 8: How can I help?

Preteens and young teens want our help in finding a place for them to fit into the story and mission of God. It is important to identify skills and talents within them that allow them to contribute to the kingdom of God in meaningful ways.

Identifying skills and talents within them obviously proves that we believe they *have* skills and talents. No rocket science there. Throughout my experience as a youth pastor and now as a volunteer, however, I can't tell you how many dozens of teens have told me they don't know what they have to offer the church. This is tragic and unacceptable! Each one of us has been created artistically, and this means we each have unique skills, talents, and abilities that allow us to serve God and others.

Identifying skills, talents, and abilities in our preteens proves that we recognize something special within them; it also means we value their presence. This is a huge realization for young teens. To learn that adults want them around signifies that they are worth something. To be worth something signifies that they are important. To be important means they have a place; and to have a place

means they contribute. This is a virtuous cycle of significance, purpose, and meaning for preteens and young teens.

In what ways do your children contribute to the family? In what ways do they contribute to the church or community?

Here is a list of ways you can engage the talents, skills, and abilities of your preteens and young teens, beginning today:

- Help teach a younger child to read.
- Help cook and/or serve a meal at a homeless shelter.
- Gather clothing from your neighbors and donate it to a local shelter.
- Make “I Care” kits with combs, toothbrushes, shampoo, and other items for the homeless.
- Pack and hand out food at a local food bank.
- Adopt a senior citizen “grandfriend,” and visit him or her or send letters.
- Visit senior citizens at a nursing home.
- Rake leaves, shovel snow, clean gutters, or wash windows for a senior citizen.
- Teach a senior friend how to use a computer and the internet.
- Organize a drive for canned goods.
- Clean up a vacant lot or park.
- Plant flowers in public areas that could use some color.
- Volunteer to help at a Special Olympics event.

- Set up a buddy system for kids with special needs in your community.
- Raise money for Braille books for the visually impaired.
- Collect and deliver toys to patients in a children's hospital.
- Plant a garden or tree in a place where the whole neighborhood can enjoy it.
- Set up a recycling system for your home.
- Clean up trash along a river, on a beach, or in a park.
- Create a habitat for wildlife.
- Volunteer at your local animal shelter.
- Volunteer with Habitat for Humanity.
- Volunteer to walk your neighbors' dog or pet sit while they're on vacation.
- Volunteer to assist a teacher in a children's Sunday school class.
- Learn to be a peer counselor.
- Send a letter to one of your country's veterans or overseas soldiers.
- Volunteer at your local hospital.
- Adopt a pet from the Humane Society.
- Hold a door open for someone.
- Give someone your seat on the bus or train.
- Write a letter to the editor about an issue you care about.
- Learn first aid or CPR.

- Write a note to a teacher who had a positive effect on you.
- Tell a custodian you appreciate him or her.
- Make a care package for an elderly or shut-in person.
- Sing for residents at a nursing home.
- Befriend a new student or neighbor.
- Babysit for a family in need.
- Look for the good in all people.
- Coordinate a book drive.
- Donate money to your favorite charity.
- Make quilts or baby clothes for low-income families.
- Bake cookies and deliver them to your local fire or police station.
- Donate toys or suitcases to foster children.
- Start a neighborhood welcome committee.

My daughter is a good writer. Since I have some writing passions and gifts, I encouraged her to write an article for a magazine called *Sisterhood* (sisterhoodmagazine.com). The magazine is for teen girls and has some wonderfully positive and challenging articles. This is Megan's article:

Hi. I'm Megan.

I'm growing like crazy, and the changes in my body totally make me self-conscious.

I love to sleep.

I'm battling mood swings that can frighten a bear out of hibernation, and I often express myself through outbursts of anger. But I'm also terrified—and to cover that up—I pretend I'm much stronger than I am.

I'm only 11. And this is where you come in! I know you're older than me, and I want you to know that I need you. It seems like I crave encouragement, support and love—the unconditional kind. So when I try to hang around you, it's because I'm watching you. See, I know you remember what it's like to be 11. And because you're turning out OK, I figure I can learn by your actions.

My friends are really important to me. So is my freedom. I get lost in my day—sometimes I can't tell the difference between 5 minutes or 50 minutes. I daydream a lot, too.

I like to sew, paint and write in my journal. My little brothers drive me mad, but I love them like crazy. I'm interested in spiritual things, but a lot of what happens at church and what I read in my Bible doesn't make sense to me . . . at least not yet.

You remember this stuff, right? You were here. So you also know that I am a sponge! I soak in everything I see and hear, especially what I notice in teenage girls—girls just like you. Again, I'm watching you.

So I want you know how powerful your life is! Have you ever thought about the opportunity you have to shape the life

of young girls like me? It's crazy-huge! The way you choose to live your life is most likely the way my friends and I will choose to live our lives . . . so please . . . choose wisely.

A while ago my dad asked me to make a list of the characteristics I think are important in being a role model. I think he was hoping I might find someone your age who could help me become who God wants me to be. I think he also wanted me to know what kind of a person I'll need to be to shape the lives of younger girls when I'm your age. Anyway, here's what I came up with.

I want to be a teen girl who . . .

- has a positive self-image. I hope I don't look to the world for my worth, but instead remember that I'm a child of God and created in his image.
- respects authority. I hope I'll be someone who chooses to allow the people who are there to guide me (like my parents, teachers and coaches) to actually guide me.
- serves others first. I want to be a person who leads with love. I don't want love to be secondary in my life. I want it to be the first thing that comes out of me.
- is trustworthy. I want people to know they can believe in me because I fulfill my promises, keep secrets and am completely honest.

- is always teachable. I hope I'm a person who never thinks I know everything but can learn from everyone—even people who are younger than me or people I don't really know very well.
- is committed to social causes. I hope that I'm a person who actively works to right the wrongs in the world.
- admits when I'm wrong. I want to be the kind of person who can admit when I've made a mistake or that I'm wrong when I am—and asks for forgiveness.
- is truthful. I pray that I'm always truthful, because lies are damaging and can destroy friendships.
- is committed to living green. I want to increase my passion for this world to become a healthier place. As a future mentor or role model to others, I want to be a person who cares about all of God's creation.
- seeks holiness. I want to please God with my life, and I hope I'm a person who values love and purity.
- seeks peace. I want to be a person who tries to make peace and finds ways to bring people together by showing their similarities instead of their opposing views and different opinions.
- is a role model and has a role model. I want to always have someone to look up to. I think anyone

who wants to be a role model should have a role model from whom to learn, grow and be shaped.

My Plea

I don't know how you see yourself, but maybe the list of traits above will help you evaluate your life. Remember, I (and other girls just like me) am watching you. We all want to be just like you when we get older. I hope you'll show us how to live in the right way, so we can be powerful role models for others someday.¹

Everyone is gifted in some way. Be sure to find the talents, skills, and abilities of your preteens and help them find ways they can use them. This will go a long way in helping develop your relationships with your children and your children's relationships with God, self, others, and the world.

Axiom 9: I will make mistakes!

Preteens and young teens want to be treated as if they are young, maturing adults. They aren't young adults, and they know that; however, their desire for independence demands that they have the freedom to make their own choices. At the same time they want to be given the independence and ability to make their own decisions, they also want the freedom to make mistakes.

The common cry to "guide me" is laced with the knowledge and behavior that young teens *will* make mistakes. They often won't even try to hide their mistakes or poor choices the way ma-

turing teens might. They know and function as though they realize they are young and that young people make mistakes. To them, mistakes are a given, and they wish we as parents would remind ourselves of that from time to time.

Preteens want to be guided, and they want their parents to be the ones actively guiding them. This doesn't mean they won't complain, bicker, or put up a fight when being held to a certain standard or expectation. The resistance comes with a desire for independence, not a desire to do what is wrong. We cannot expect our preteens never to make mistakes. When they make poor decisions and act inappropriately, it doesn't mean they have no desire to do what is right. It simply means they are young teens, and that's what they do; they search for boundaries that define their independence.

Your children want to learn what you know and know what you learn. Most of them want to be reminded when they're off course. For the most part, your children *want* to be corrected.

They want to know that right behavior is important to you. They also want to know that you love them enough to care for them, even when it isn't fun. They truly feel respected when you expect more out of them than what they display. Finally, your children want to lean into their created-ness. They may not articulate it this way, but in the depths of each and every heart and soul of preteens and young teens is embedded a desire to seek what is good.

When humans were created, they were created in the image of God, not the image of this world. Yes, there is sin in the separation caused by Adam and Eve's rebellious decision to eat of the tree (Genesis 2–3), but long before their decision to rebel, there is nothing but peace and goodness that hold the earth and all creation softly in God's hands of love. Deep inside of each of us is a strong urge to do what is right, good, and peaceful. The common cry to be guided into understanding how to live a life of faith is born from something far greater than your hopes for your children; it is born from God's hope for your children and for the world.