

NUDGE YOUR TEENAGERS AWAY FROM NARCISSISM

Many social researchers say the push toward boosting young people's self-esteem has worked a bit too well. Constant praise—even when undeserved—has contributed to a generation that's all about "me, me, me." Kids internalize the belief that the world revolves around them, and social media encourage self-promotion and attention-seeking. Confidence can easily cross the line into overconfidence, with pride and selfishness taking over.

"We've been on this self-admiration cultural kick for a long time," says researcher Jean Twenge, author of *The Narcissism Epidemic* and *Generation Me*. Her studies show that vanity, materialism, and a sense of entitlement lead to anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Twenge says religion has even entered the realm of narcissism, with the popularity of so-called prosperity preachers and "involuntary volunteering."

God wants us to love and value ourselves as his precious children, but Scripture also helps us keep a proper perspective on our worth. God extended his mercy and grace to us by sending Jesus because we don't deserve his perfect love, forgiveness, or salvation. Through his death for us, Jesus taught—and modeled—that his followers must be servants who put other people ahead of themselves (see Luke 22:24-27). Read on for more insights about how you can loosen narcissism's grip on your teenagers.

TIPS >>>

Here are some ways to shift your teenagers' focus away from themselves :

- **Re-evaluate your schedule.** Scrutinize your family's routines and see what can go so you can make room to help other people.
- **Walk the walk.** Model how to live out your faith by doing more than just attending worship together. Find simple ways to serve other people and meet their basic needs, such as collecting baby supplies for a crisis-pregnancy center.
- **Offer customized encouragement.** Avoid false praise; kids can see right through it. Instead, provide specific feedback about your teenagers' efforts to use their talents to serve God and others.
- **Practice giving without strings attached.** Let kids see you give merely for the joy of giving—not for seeing what you can get in return.
- **Avoid comparisons and excessive competition.** Instead, focus on commonalities and cooperation.
- **Teach kids to have compassion for themselves.** Instead of self-admiration, young people need to learn to cut themselves some slack and to trust God to care for and forgive them when they mess up.

THE VIEW

According to research by professor Jean Twenge:

- Compared to their peers from the 1970s, today's teenagers have a stronger belief that they'll be great spouses, parents, and employees.
- Among college students (and especially females), narcissistic personality traits are rising just as fast as obesity.
- Kids today more often describe themselves as straight-A students, even if they're not. They also rate themselves as "completely satisfied" with who they are.

PONDER THIS

- In a typical day, how much time do you spend focusing on yourself vs. on other people?
- What does selflessness look like? When and where do you see it?
- What have you done to instill self-esteem in your kids, and what were the results? Have any of your efforts backfired?





GOING DEEPER

Expert Insights for Parents of Teenagers

By Walt Mueller

At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, youth-culture expert Walt Mueller discusses selfish vs. selfless living:

Sadly, we followers of Jesus who should be leading the cultural charge against self-centeredness are prone to follow the lead of the culture rather than Christ on this matter. The sad result of our prosperity and desire for even more is that we've become even more prosperous and desiring of even more.

Perhaps *The Prayer of Jabez* phenomenon is the greatest indicator of how self-centered and materialistic we've become. An

obscure Old Testament passage (1 Chronicles 4:9-10) has been marketed effectively to a 21st-century American church that's eager to find biblical justification to have more. It plays well in our consumer-oriented, narcissistic North American Christian culture.

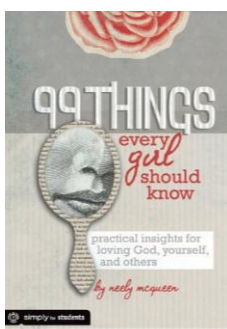
Recently, I stumbled upon another Old Testament prayer that seems timely and worth embracing. Try as hard as I can, I can't get it out of my head, most likely because it needs to be the prayer of my heart. In Proverbs 30:7-9, Agur simply begged to speak the truth and to have just what was necessary for him to remain committed and obedient to his God. Jesus taught

his disciples to pray for the same thing. Agur understood human nature, and he knew his weakness. In wisdom, he prayed to be rich in faithfulness.

I'm not sure Agur's prayer would sell (as books, trinkets, kitsch, etc.) in today's Christian market. That's too bad. It's a challenging prayer that shakes up our prevailing attitudes and reflects God's will, way, and kingdom priorities. It's a God-centered prayer that focuses on his will and not my will, as we ask God to bless by giving and withholding as he pleases.

Watch what you pray for!

RESOURCE



In *99 Things Every Girl Should Know* (Simply Youth Ministry), veteran youth worker Neely McQueen helps teenage girls explore their true beauty and God-given worth.

BIBLE FOCUS

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

Philippians 2:3-5

MAINSTREAM MUSIC



MASTODON

Background: This heavy-metal band just recently gained major popularity, despite having been around since 1999. Their style is considered progressive rock, with unique time signatures and multiple layers. Their albums are usually based on a concept, such as Moby Dick (*Leviathan*). Lyrics and themes are dark and seem very pagan.

Albums: *The Hunter* (2011), *Crack the Skye* (2009), *Blood Mountain* (2006)

What Mastodon Says: Discussing *Crack the Skye*, vocalist Troy Sanders says, “We kinda strapped on our aeroshells and departed from Earth for a while, and then captained to the ethereal element of the universe and kind of slept on the roof of the world...to get a perspective on this record. Basically, we’re exploring the ethereal world. We’re dissecting the dark matter that dominates the universe.”

Explore: Hear Mastodon’s new single “Black Tongue” and see a sculptor create artwork for the cover of *The Hunter* at www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwgqenxNUfs.

CHRISTIAN MUSIC



DOMINIC BALLI

Background: Singer Balli fuses reggae and rock into a chill mix that will have you tapping your feet. He lists Stevie Wonder, Bob Marley, and Lauryn Hill as influences. Balli’s first album made it onto iTunes’ top reggae albums of 2008. His sound, described as “CaliRockReggae,” is refreshingly different from much of contemporary Christian music.

Albums: *American Dream* (2011), *Public Announcement* (2008)

What Balli Says: “The most common comment I hear is, ‘I don’t even like reggae, but I love your stuff.’ I love that because it means my music has become accessible to fans who might otherwise totally shy away from anything even reminiscent of reggae.”

Explore: You can listen to Balli’s entire new album at www.dominicballi.com.

MOVIES

Movie: *Abduction*

Genre: Action, Thriller

Rating: PG-13

Synopsis: A young man who has always felt he’s living someone else’s life sees himself on a missing-persons website. Suddenly he’s running for his life while trying to piece together the mystery of his true identity.

Our Take: The fact that Sigourney Weaver and Alfred Molina are in this film offers hope that it will rise above the typical teen thriller. You could use the movie to launch a discussion about our identity in Christ.

Movie: *Shark Night 3D*

Genre: Horror, Thriller

Rating: PG-13

Synopsis: Young, good-looking friends vacation on an island in a lake. They soon discover it’s inexplicably full of massive killer sharks—and must figure out a way to escape.

Our Take: Teenagers love to be scared, so PG-13 horror movies are usually a hit with them. Based on the trailer, this film shows many semi-clothed young people.

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VIDEO GAMES



FIFA Soccer 12—The last two editions of the FIFA franchise brought huge improvements to graphics and game play. This year, the designers are promising even better artificial intelligence and decision-making abilities from the game, based on specific player attributes.

Gears of War 3—This game will be huge. It’s the conclusion of the ultra-bloody series that launched the Xbox 360. The graphics look gorgeous, and the game play is fast and furious. But the game is full of foul language, blood, and violence. The enormous guns have *chainsaws* on the end, for crying out loud.