

# Maximizing

Your

# Teen Years

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*How normal teenagers  
can make the most of their youth*

**Y**ou only get to be young once, so get everything you can out of it! In baseball, you get three strikes before you are “out.” So, if you are up to bat and you miss the first swing, it is no big deal—you still have two strikes left. However if you “zoom out” from your daily routine and view the scope of your life objectively, you will realize that you do only get to be young once. You only get one try at it. Once you reach your twenties you can’t say, “Wait a minute, let me have a second try.” Once it’s gone, it is gone forever. This sobering reality behooves us to gird up our minds and apply ourselves to maximizing our precious teen years.

If you are just a normal young person, then this article is for you. It is not my intent to raise an unrealistic standard that can only be attained to by a few “superspiritual” people who are unhindered by jobs or responsibilities. I know what it is like to grapple with the mundane realities of education, chores, and a job. And it is to those teenagers—normal teenagers—that I present a few practical suggestions from my own experience on how to maximize your youth.

Foremost in my mind is the subject of private prayer. No doubt, you have heard numerous sermons on this very topic. I have no doubt but that most of you could give an in-depth exposé on the need for, and benefits of, a vibrant, secret prayer life. However, in spite of all I’ve been taught on this, at times I have felt despair as I listened to or read stirring accounts of great men of prayer. Oh yes, it was a wonderful story ... what a prayer warrior he was. Yet, how does that relate to my life? I feel like a cow in a barren pasture wistfully looking across the fence to the lush green grass on the other side. However, whenever I make an attempt to move in that direction, I become painfully aware of the barbed wire that keeps me from it.

I don’t know if you have ever felt like that, but I sure have. Let’s say you read a biography of a man of God and think, “I want to be like that!” Suddenly your reverie is broken by the realization that you were supposed to start your schooling seven minutes ago. So you sigh and say, “Well, I guess there is no way for me to attain to such a level.”

All of that being said, I would like to point to a way that I have found to deal with this tension. “Spare” time is something every teenager has—in greater or lesser degrees. As a teenager I began to realize that (even though I can’t be a John Hyde right now) I can begin to use my “spare” time to get alone with God. Life on a farm has a tendency to keep one perpetually busy, but I discovered that Sunday afternoons were my time off. Instead of frittering away the hours in frivolity, I would slip away into the forest. There, free from inhibitions and distractions, I would pour out my soul to God. There, alone in His presence, God did many deep things within me ... things that have affected the course of my life. It is impossible for me to overrecommend this to you. If you would maximize your teen years, then you must find the time and place to get alone with your Lord.

Let me be the first to warn you: if you choose this path, it will not be easy! Should you decide to spend some of your “spare” time seeking God, you might as well expect ninety-nine good reasons why *now* is not the time to begin. Even after you overcome that pack of excuses, you may still feel strange. What does one pray about for two hours anyway? Most times we run out of things to say after ten minutes. Actually, that is a good thing. Prayer is not only about reciting a list of requests; it is a two-way communication with the God of heaven.

Learn to be still before God. Many times as I have stayed in His presence, I have felt uncomfortable at my own carnality and shallowness. Most people call it quits right there. Trust me, I have been there ... too many times. But my dear teenager, it is *there* that you must persist. Allow that uncomfortableness. Allow God to stir you and show you your needs. You will never maximize your youth by sticking your head in the sand, i.e. burying yourself in busy hustle and bustle of a “Christian life,” so that you never face up to your needs. If you persist and go through these deep searchings of your heart, you will also come to a place where God will begin to give you ideas and aspirations for the future.

Many times we mistakenly suppose that the course of our life is shaped by a few momentous decisions at times of crisis. In reality, our lives as teenagers are shaped by the many small decisions that we make every day. A lot of times these decisions are made even unconsciously. However, they are made in line with our values. As you get alone with God from time to time, He will change your *values*. As your values change, you will begin making godly decisions that

will shape your life. In short, you will be making choices that will maximize your teen years.

I currently live among a people where illiteracy is common. Because of this, I am constantly aware of the large difference that exists between those who are academically educated and those who are not. However, if you ask any student when he arrives home from school, "What did you learn today?" most likely the child will not be sure that he actually learned anything on that particular day. Does that mean the day was spent in vain?

We all know from personal experience that after eight to twelve years of going to school day in and day out (in spite of the fact that daily progress might not be realized) the result will be that you can read, write, do basic math, and hopefully a lot more besides. The graduate stands in stark contrast to the dropout who quit in first grade because he couldn't see a measurable change each day. Finally, after years of consistency, the one stands ready to be a productive part of society, while the other can't even write his own name, much less read instructions. Clearly, this difference is not happenstance. No, it is a direct result of how faithful they were in their studies.

The same is true concerning spending time with God. Many teenagers don't make it a regular habit because they can't tell any major difference right away. Should we not be able to learn something from school students? We must learn to persevere like they do! If you choose to devote your "spare" time to seeking God, you may not notice any immediate change in yourself. If you don't give up at that crucial moment, and continue to habitually seek your Lord, I assure you that God *will* change you!

Joshua did not just *happen* to be chosen by God to lead Israel. No, it came about because as a young man he stayed behind in the tent of meeting. It was there in the presence of Jehovah that one of Israel's great leaders was made. God will do the same with you. If you seek Him in secret, you will become more Christ-like, your goals will be replaced by His, and He will keep you from wasting your youth. If you persevere with studentlike consistency to get alone with God in your "spare" time, your life will be radically different than if you had done otherwise. One course of action will bring you to a place where you are "approved unto

God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed ..." The other, when the time comes that "ye ought to be teachers," you will find that "ye have need that one teach you again ..."

Satan knows that he cannot stop a teenager who has a deep, vibrant prayer life. You may be sure that he is working overtime to keep you from this holy exercise. One of his favorite tactics is to keep you so busy chasing your tail that you can never find the time to get alone and quiet before God. It reminds me of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Moses arrived on the scene with a desire to lead the people of God out to worship the Lord. Realizing that he would be in trouble

if that happened, Pharaoh set out to nip the plan in the bud. What was his method? Exodus 5:6 says "that same day" Pharaoh issued a decree to the slave drivers to quit supplying the Israelites with straw used in manufacturing bricks. Yet he insisted that the production quotas not be reduced by a single brick. "Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof: for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God. Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words."

Pharaoh planned to make them forget their desire to go and worship God, by swamping them in incessant activities. This story precisely illustrates the devil's plan for us youth.

He knows that if he can manage to keep us distracted by endless things to do (even benign things) to the point that we never break free to get out into the "wilderness" to worship God, then he has nothing to fear from us.

O that we would be like Moses! For him, Pharaoh's tactics were ineffective. Moses refused to let the brick-making keep him and his people from the call of God to the wilderness. O that we youth would do the same! Let us refuse to be swept away in the flurry of activities that prevent us from getting alone with God. Dear teenager, if you would maximize your youth, learn to redeem your time by getting alone with God.

And remember ... you only get to be young once, so get everything you can out of it! ~



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