

*BECOMING A*  
**TEEN SAVVY  
PARENT**

*NAVIGATING THE CHAOS OF  
YOUR TEENAGER'S WORLD*



YM360

BY BRIAN HOUSMAN

# ENDORSES

"As a father of seven, I know what it feels like to walk through 'the hailstorm of parenting with nothing but a newspaper over your head.' ***Becoming a Teen Savvy Parent*** is a breath of fresh air for every mom and dad who feels overwhelmed by today's teen culture, gadgets, and tech. Thankfully, you don't have to be a tech expert to be a godly parent! Brian Housman offers wisdom, compassion, and Christ-centered hope that will help you engage your teenager's heart instead of hiding from the storm."

— **Dr. Rob Rienow**

Visionary Family Ministries | [www.VisionaryFam.com](http://www.VisionaryFam.com)

"As parents, we rightly see ourselves as the primary teachers, leaders, and guides of our teens. In ***Becoming a Teen Savvy Parent***, Brian Housman invites us instead to become students: of Scripture, of culture, and most importantly, of our own children and their world. With honesty and insight, he challenges us to stop blaming culture, media, or ideologies and to recognize the true enemy opposing God's goodness and Kingdom. Brian then calls us to enter and engage our children's world with patience, curiosity, and hope, joining God's redeeming work. A must-read for every parent who desires to cultivate a legacy of faith that reflects the heart of Christ."

— **Dr. JJ Jones**

Pastor of Groups | Fellowship Bible Church (Brentwood, TN) |  
Adjunct Professor of Youth Ministry | Toccoa Falls College | Author of  
*Reimagining Church as Family*

"This book does an amazing job of helping parents learn how to authentically step into their teens' world, build relationships with their children that last, and engage culture together as a family. All of us are designed by God, and we have a purpose to play in His world. Housman helps parents see a different way to lead and points them to Scripture as they seek to help their teenagers find their passions and make a difference in a lost and chaotic world."

— **Chris Sasser**

Author of *Bags: Helping Your Kids Lighten the Load* |  
Host of *Ministry to Parents Podcast*

"I wholeheartedly endorse ***Becoming a Teen Savvy Parent***—a book that has profoundly challenged and reshaped my approach to raising my three boys. Never before have I felt so confronted by the realities of engaging a chaotic culture while holding fast to a God-designed mindset, and this book delivers practical, Scripture-rooted wisdom that meets parents right in that tension. It equips us to guide our teens with both openness and unwavering conviction, turning daily battles into opportunities for spiritual growth. If you're navigating the teenage years with a desire to honor God, this is the resource you need. My friend has poured truth and grace into every page—read it, apply it, and watch your family thrive."

# EMENTS

— **J. Stephen Ford**

CEO of M28 Group Inc | Father of three boys

"The ever-changing world of teens can seem impossible for parents to navigate. Brian has been a voice of wisdom and reason to countless families who want to grow with their teenagers and not be swallowed by the culture."

— **Mark Hall**

Father of three kids and two grandkids | Lead singer of Casting Crowns

"I've always appreciated Brian's ability to speak honestly about the challenges families face, while offering hope that feels both real and reachable. In ***Becoming a Teen Savvy Parent***, he gives parents a clear path to engage their teens without the fear, blame, or frustration that often comes with the territory. This is a gentle, wise guide that will help you love your teen well in a constantly shifting culture."

— **Zach Wyatt**

Father of two sons | Director of Youth Leader Collective

"No one has done a better job than Brian Housman of helping parents think carefully about the culture their teenage children live in. Brian is clearly in touch with teen culture, but he remains hopeful and optimistic, avoiding depressing hyperbole that characterizes much writing on the subject. He shows parents how to turn their hearts toward the hearts of their teenagers so they can respond to the culture together rather than as adversaries."

— **Dr. Richard Ross**

Senior Professor of Student Ministry | Southwestern Seminary

"Once again, Brian Housman places a timely, practical resource into the hands of parents in his newest book, ***Becoming a Teen Savvy Parent***. Parents feel overwhelmed with the tsunami of issues stemming from social media, cultural pressure, peer influence, sexual identity confusion, and more. Brian presents a clear understanding of the struggles that bombard today's parents, accompanied by useful, workable ideas. This easy-to-use tool offers a group discussion guide to facilitate use in workshops, church groups, and small gatherings."

— **Tim & Leah Simpson**

Emmy-winning newscaster and co-creators of *Embrace Your Everyday Podcast*

"Brian has a deep understanding of the turbulent adolescent years and has charted a course for us as parents to be humble and patient and take time to really listen to our teenagers."

— **David Parkerson**

Father of Seven | President of Home Life Academy

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*Becoming a Teen Savvy Parent: Navigating the Chaos of Your Teenager's World*

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*BY BRIAN HOUSMAN*  
PUBLISHED BY YM360

*To my mom and dad,  
Wayne and Sheri Housman.  
Having now been in your shoes,  
parenting at times feels like walking in a  
hailstorm with nothing but a newspaper over my head.  
Thank you for modeling for me how to do it with  
such grace, understanding, and patience.*

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# INTROD

Your teen is now living in a postmodern culture. That fact is undeniable. The debate is no longer whether or not we inhabit a postmodern culture. A more fruitful debate is, since we are living in a postmodern culture, how will this affect the lives of our teenagers as they grow older, as well as our families as we engage the culture? Your teenager's worldview affects their understanding of relationships, spirituality, justice, and truth—all important characteristics of postmodernism. Their expression of these qualities can look markedly different from what we are used to as parents. Moreover, our unfamiliarity with this new culture can lead to an uneasiness in moving into it.

But move into it we must. Author Robert Lewis said, "I believe we need to accept the fact that the world has dramatically changed. We need to recognize, and not ignorantly fight against what is inevitable. If we could finally accept change, we could begin to look at, and not ignore, the issue of postmodernism."<sup>1</sup>

I am not writing in defense of postmodernism, nor in opposition to it. I am merely attempting to shed light on the adolescent culture as it is today. My intention is not to get bogged down in a heated philosophical debate over the tenets of a postmodern worldview. As a matter of fact, after this introduction, you won't see the "P" word mentioned anymore. Instead, a simple understanding that the perspective of the world I'm describing is from that of a postmodern teenager will be all that is necessary.

There is much of postmodernism that should give us pause. On one hand, this generation feels it is acceptable (and important) to find more meaningful ways to express truth. And this is a good thing. They long for a fuller understanding of areas that affect them, such as sexuality, identity, vocation, and money. Nonetheless, we have a responsibility to ensure that the conclusions are indeed true, having been vetted with logic, reason, scripture, as well as tempered with tradition.

Consider religion as an example. There are some in evangelical circles who would paint postmodernism with broad strokes as a humanistic and faithless philosophy. While postmodernism does place a greater emphasis on the human experience, it is filled with faith. Admittedly, that faith may look very different from what Christian traditionalists would consider personal faith. I was watching an NBC News podcast<sup>2</sup> about faith in America that had two interesting observations. One, America is the most religiously diverse nation in the world. Two, for the first time since the founding of America, Catholic Christians will soon be the largest religious group.

# UCTION

Postmodernism indeed has shown a change in religious expression in America, a change that continues to grow. Sociologist Tony Campolo foresees that in the coming years, "the ways in which religion is expressed and the structures that institutionalize it probably will be displaced or changed."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to say that for this new generation of Christians, "the worship of God need not take place in churches that have Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or congregational forms of polity."<sup>4</sup> In other words, where, when, and how this generation expresses their faith will look very different from what may seem normal to us. Nearly half of all millennials now say that "faith" is something that is important to them, yet they no longer embrace the same traditions of corporate worship they grew up with.

Religion is just one area of transformation among many. As you will see, every area of life is changing for this generation. Moreover, our unfamiliarity with the changes in this new culture can lead to uneasiness from parents and unwillingness to adapt to it in order to better lead our teens.

We become like the culturally paralyzing private detective, Adrian Monk, from the TV show *Monk*. Although Monk looks normal, he is an obsessive-compulsive, manic, and suffers from multiple phobias. At times, Monk's phobias become so deeply incapacitating that he is unable to appreciate the fresh air of a walk down the street without fears of accidental disaster at every footstep. He can't enjoy the companionship of others without feeling he will be infected with some unseen disease. Day after day, he is forced to make his surroundings fit his view of normalcy, even if that means compulsively touching each parking meter as he walks by it.

This gentle and well-meaning man is genuinely concerned for the people around him, but is never able to fully engage them because of his fears and rigid ideas of what makes life right. Instead of experiencing a satisfaction with his job, his family, or even himself, he isolates himself from the world around him.

In many ways, the Christian community today is filled with religious (Adrian) Monks. You love your teen, and you want God's best for them. But how they think and the things they say they believe make no sense to you and seem contrary to how you were raised. Their inclusivity of lifestyles feels threatening and threatening to you, and their "liberal" politics feel empty. As you look at their world, a sense of paranoia, fear, or defensiveness wells up inside you. Maybe you feel a need to protect yourself (and your teen) from the confusion and disorder in their changing world without ever stopping to understand what is bringing about the changes.

The good news is that over time, Adrian Monk got a little better at seeing the world around him without running. He became more tempered; able to see reality more clearly. There's a change that took place in his life, just as there is in your relationship with your teenager.

Hopefully, this book will serve as a good starting point for you to begin to look into some of the changes your teen is likely already exploring. To make our conversation together flow a little easier, I've broken the book into three parts, with a group discussion guide at the end of the book.

Part 1 deals with unhealthy approaches to adolescent culture that many of us experience as parents. Every day, we make choices as to how we will react to the world. Our responses are positions that many of our teens will adopt as they get older. If you respond with anger or disdain, chances are good that your teen will grow up with the same bent toward the world, or, much to your dismay, they may flee in the opposite direction. Likewise, if you model a humble and teachable response, they too learn how to walk wisely in their culture. But before you can do that, you may have to come face-to-face with your own responses that keep people and the world at a distance.

Part 2 takes you on a journey of discovery into who your teenager really is. It's not important for you to understand all teenagers—just your own. We'll be looking at three different parts of your kids' lives:

1. Their values and how they make decisions.
2. Their passions and how they direct their energies.
3. Their influences and how you can make a greater impact in their lives.

Once you understand healthy ways to respond to your teen's culture, and you understand who your teen is, then you are ready to move into the world together to love others. This is what Part 3 is all about. If this seems like the most difficult part to you, don't worry. It is for me, too. Most of the time, we engage our culture by accident or when forced to—like when our teens get into trouble or in danger. Rarely do we think through ways to intentionally engage the world as an expression of our faith. We spend much of our time being reactive instead of proactive.

The hope here is that the stories and words on these pages will stimulate you to think of ways your family can begin to purposefully love those around you. Just as your teen is part of a culture that is trying to live in a different way, you too must think of ways to move into the culture alongside your family.

As a word of advice, this book may not be most effective if you read it straight through in one sitting. At some points, you may need to put it down and spend some time thinking. Take time to process what you are reading and the appropriate ways you can respond. Feel free to also disagree and fight with my ideas as you continue to make sense of the changing world of your teenager.



# PART 1

*ENGAGING YOUR  
TEEN'S CULTURE*

# 1

## FRIDAY THE 13TH

*There are very few monsters who  
warrant the fear we have of them.*  
— André Gide<sup>1</sup>

*Such love has no fear because  
perfect love expels all fear.*  
— 1 John 4.18 (NLT)

When I was ten years old, my family got cable television for the first time. It lasted about two years in our household. I don't know why my folks got rid of it. I think it had more to do with the cost than the hours wasted watching it. I remember sneaking into the living room late at night, being drawn to the images behind the static snow of the premium channels we hadn't paid for. It may have been fuzzy and jumpy at best, but to a ten-year-old, it was still the best sex ed around.

"Where do you think you're going?" my mom said as she saw my brother and me sneaking toward the living room. "You can't go in there tonight because your dad is watching a grown-up movie." The movie was *Friday the 13th*. I know. It's campy, and the gore is juvenile by today's standards, but for 1980, it was the top of the line for scary films.

A little later, my mom abandoned her post, and I managed to sneak to the wooden, louvered doors that closed off the living room. The slats were slightly open. With the top and bottom of my view cut off by the slats, I

was experiencing the first widescreen TV. I knelt silently and soaked in every scream and desperate run through the woods. I could feel the tension building, but told myself, "This isn't scary. I can handle it. What's the big deal?" Then it happened. Jason (the killer) jumped an unsuspecting blonde college girl and gutted her in the back. I tripped over my own legs sprinting down the hall to my mom's bedroom. And I added a new emotion to my TV viewing experience—*fear*.

I will not bore you, but if I wanted to, I could tell you similar stories of the first time I watched a couple making out, or glimpsed a naked woman, or heard new curse words, or saw a person beaten to death with a bat—all on TV. Those kinds of things stick with you as a kid.

Turn on your TV at any given time, and you can't miss them. Images. Tens of thousands of them every hour. I read a report that said the typical kid sees 200,000 violently graphic images on TV before leaving for college.<sup>2</sup> Since I can't think of anything I've done 200,000 times, it sounds like a big number to me. And before you jump to any conclusions, I'm not one of those parents who threw out the flatscreen TV years ago. My kids, just like the ones down the street, grew up binge-watching Netflix, playing endless hours of video games, and learning about life from mind-numbing reality TV. (I'm pretty sure all of her time in middle school watching *Say "Yes" to the Dress* ruined my daughter from ever being able to look at a wedding sensibly.)

It's not so much TV itself that worries me. It's more the overall values and lifestyle of the culture that the entertainment industry portrays. It's practically an everyday occurrence to read a social media news story of another celebrity whose lifestyle of excess has led them into rehab or bankruptcy. The video games, such as the simplistic Mario Bros., have been replaced by the ultra-violent, sexist, and sadistic likes of *Grand Theft Auto*. School shootings have become an expected part of life that are splashed across the screen. And to top it off, virtually every sitcom about singles displays easy sex without relationship or consequences, such as STIs and emotional baggage. My own daughter said, "Dad, I saw so much sex before I was 16 that I think I became numbed to it."

When I see things like this, several questions immediately arise. Here are some of the questions that often scroll across my mental screen:

- How bad is it going to get?
- Why do they act so violent?
- How can I protect my kid?
- Has no one ever taught them right from wrong?
- Why don't the authorities do anything about this?
- When are parents going to wake up?
- I wonder if my child would do that, think that, want that?

Sound familiar? Maybe you have the same questions when it comes to thinking about your teenagers and popular culture as we now know it.

At first glance, these are not bad questions. But they may not be the best questions for parents who want real answers. They don't go far enough or probe deeply enough into the root issues. For example, when you ask, "How can I protect my son or daughter from being influenced by their culture?" What are you really asking? Do you want to protect them from getting hurt? From experiencing ridicule? From facing consequences for poor choices? What are your real fears on behalf of your teen? Let's admit it, many of us are fearful of anything our kids see or hear that leaves us (and our experiential, parental wisdom) out of consideration. We are afraid of anything that excludes us or that we don't "get." Too often, our fears come from a lack of wholistic understanding about the situation.

I know we live in a world where we say everyone is equal and that it is wrong to judge or stereotype others, but that's just not reality if you think about it. Even though we shouldn't, we judge entire groups of people based on the actions of one representative. We presume to know someone's intentions based on their politics, gender, sexual orientation, race, or religion. We do the same thing when it comes to culture. I imagine you recognize common assumptions like these:

- Politicians are liars who will say anything to get elected.
- Celebrities are politically liberal.
- Abortion is a choice of convenience.
- Social Media influencers have no morals.
- Immigrants are filthy and lawless.
- Homosexuals are grooming children.

These are assumptions that many people make of entire groups based on the actions of an individual within the group. I don't deny my own disappointment in many of our celebrities, social shapers, or politicians, but I am still not given the liberty to assume to know the heart or values of each and every one.

Each of these judgments, assumptions, and questions—whether they are fair and accurate or not—leads to emotions. Fear. Frustration. Sadness. Anger. Hate. Excitement. I'm sure you've felt each of these at some point as a result of something you've seen or heard in your teen's culture. And emotions, in turn, inevitably lead to actions. There is always a response.

It's a natural step from emotion to action. Our actions aren't made in a vacuum. They originate deep down, from our presuppositions and perceptions about the world we live in.

## WHEN IT ALL CRASHES IN

Crash is an important film that shows what can happen in the human experience when the lives of people from all different walks of life coincide—or collide—during a single day. The film's attempts to address sexism, racism, xenophobia, and bigotry can be hard to watch. One character, an older Pakistani man, owns a five-and-dime shop. He thinks no one can be trusted and everyone is trying to cheat him out of a dollar, so he buys a gun. Later, when his store is burglarized, he assumes the burglar is the Latino locksmith who had put in a new lock on the back door to his store. He works up so much anger that he seeks out the locksmith at his home to kill him. His prejudice causes emotion, and that emotion results in action.

Look at the cycle of where this character's presuppositions led him.

Presupposition	<i>People can't be trusted.</i>
Question	<i>How can I protect myself?</i>
Emotion	<i>FEAR</i>
Action	<i>Reinforce the locks</i>

Presupposition	<i>Latinos are thieves.</i>
Question	<i>My burglar must be the Latino locksmith.</i>
Emotion	<i>Why would he do this to me?</i>
Action	<i>RAGE</i>
	<i>Murder/Revenge</i>

The presupposition-through-action cycle the shop owner goes through is the same sort of cycle each of us goes through every day. Think about how this cycle plays itself out in your response (action) toward your teenager's culture. All the emotions you experience when you think about your teen's world eventually provoke an action. These actions are going to be a factor in the health of the relationship you have with your teenager, as well as how you teach him or her to interact with the culture and the greater world.

## SOAKING IT ALL IN

I've heard many exasperated parents say to me, "If I can just get my kids through their teenage years, then they'll be okay." There were many tiring and frustrating days when I could have given that sentiment a big thumbs up. But I think you would agree that "just making it through" wouldn't exactly qualify as a lofty goal—as if somehow the objective of parenting is just to protect or tolerate and then hope for the best. For one thing, that approach doesn't take into account what I might call the sponge effect.

When my daughter was young, she got a package of animal-shaped bathtub sponges as a gift. They were the size of a large multi-colored vitamin. She dropped one in the sink, and we all watched as it started to grow. Within a

few minutes, it was the size of her hand. The sponge seemed to keep soaking and soaking up all of the water around it. And once it grew to its full size, it never shrank back to its original size again.

This is what teenagers are like. They are not just trying to “make it through” a few adolescent years. They are soaking up everything in their environment. And they learn first and foremost through their experiences with you. If you have always responded to people in your culture out of fear, your teen will generally tend to do the same. If you respond with anger, so will he or she. If you model a disdain for the people that make up the world around you, your teen may also.

Not responding to your teenager’s world is not an option. You will respond, one way or another. But how you respond is entirely up to you. The first step in understanding a teenager’s world is making sure your response is based on reality and not on unfounded or unhealthy assumptions. It will require more than sneaking an occasional peek through louvered doors for you to detect and understand the reality of your teenager’s world. You’ll have to come out from behind any hiding place, fling open the doors, and walk into that world. You’ll have to explore it patiently and thoroughly, with eyes and ears wide open. Only then are you ready for a true and faithful response to your teen’s world.

## *WHEN THE TEACHER BECOMES THE STUDENT*

Too often, we try to put ourselves in our kids’ shoes and figure out what should happen in a given situation. Then we tell our kids what to do based on our limited understanding. The problem is your child has a different personality, a much smaller life experience, and most importantly, you telling them what to do doesn’t equip them to make the choice or resolve the situation on his or herself.

The first step should be to become the student and let your child teach. Ask questions that help you learn about the world around your child. Ask your teenager questions about social issues. You probably have an opinion on issues such as gender identity, social media, politics, relationships, etc., but before you start telling your teenager what they should do or believe, you need to understand their culture from a teenager’s perspective. When my kids were in high school, I would regularly ask them about a new app I heard of or what a new slang word meant. I wanted to understand how teenagers felt about sex and how those views might have changed since I was a teenager. I regularly asked about political hot-button issues without sharing my own opinions unless I was asked. I never wanted my son or daughter to be able to say, “My dad just doesn’t understand.”

The second step in being a student is to learn how your teenager’s world affects them. Ask questions that allow your teen to express their feelings, even if the situation is hypothetical. When they are asking for permission to do

something, calmly ask why it is important to them. When they are recalling a situation at school, ask how it made them feel or what they thought should have happened. After my daughter had been dating her first guy for about a month, I asked her what did she hope to get out of the relationship. Not only did she say that no one else had asked her that, but she was ready to ponder it.

It is important that your teenager understands why you are responding the way you are in a situation, but it is even more important that you help them think through why they are responding the way they are. You want them to be able to own their choice and know why they hold things dearly. Who knows, maybe their beliefs and convictions will reshape some of your own.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

There is a tendency in group book discussions to get a few people together and spend all the time talking about where you agreed and disagreed with the author. And you should, but let that be only part of your discussion. Move past the stories in the book to your own experiences. Respond from what you know to be true and what you're grappling with in your own life.

The following questions are for you to think through alone or with a small group of other parents. They are meant primarily to be conversation starters. Don't let them be the end of your thinking on the subject. Let the Holy Spirit guide the conversation as you discuss each topic.

If you are leading a group discussion, take some time to ready yourself. Think of a story from your own experience as a parent, one that ties in with the chapter topic. Think through how you would respond to each of the questions.

## CHAPTER 1—FEAR

1. Think this through:

I would say that the part of my daughter's/son's culture that has the most influence on him/her right now is \_\_\_\_\_ (movies/television, friends/social media, dating, violence, alcohol/drugs, wealth/possessions, status/popularity, family, other).

2. Finish this thought:

I experience fear when I think of my child at \_\_\_\_\_ (school, home alone, a certain friend's house, the computer, boyfriend/girlfriend's car). Why at this place? How much of this is rational and how much is irrational?

3. What is it you want to protect your child from most (getting hurt, experiencing ridicule, facing consequences of poor choices, acting outside your area of wisdom, etc.)?
4. Read 2 Timothy 1:7. Paul is talking to Timothy about his tendency toward fear in relationships, particularly in speaking the truth. How might you respond to your teen's culture with the spirit of power, love, and self-discipline that God has given you?
5. Try to remember a time you effectively responded to a crisis situation without fear. What happened?