

# BEAUTIFUL TRAIN WRECKS

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A recent student in my Adolescent Psychology class used the phrase “beautiful train wreck” to illustrate her teenage years. That oxymoron summarizes the way many of us feel when we reflect on adolescence.

Samson’s life calls out from the Old Testament with a similar theme. In Judges 13:25, we read that the Spirit of the Lord began to stir Samson. The very next verse, 14:1, tells of Samson wanting to marry a Philistine woman, which was a no-no. Because the original text had no verses or chapters, we clearly see Samson simultaneously being stirred by God yet moving headlong in foolish directions. What a beautiful train wreck of a life!

And that description also fits many teenagers.

- **They're stirred.** God is moving young people to want more, feel more, question more, and get their feet wet in the experiential pool of relationships and culture. This is an important time to wake up, struggle, and call out to something outside themselves for the love and peace they can now put into words, thoughts, and feelings.
- **They're moving in foolish directions.** Yet the pool is deeper than it looks. Canaan had nothing on the options lurking around every corner of today's one-click world.

Their desires and passions are lit up like a match head. Kids are pulled between good passions (Serve! Give! Reach out!) and desires taking them in the opposite direction. Self becomes the lone keeper of the flame.

The teenagers you're serving are both beautiful and train wrecks. Their feelings, ranging from joy to despair, are coming alive, contending for the strong hand at the wheel of kids' everyday choices. Youth ministers must be keenly aware that God is stirring young people and must passionately address it. Help them recognize God as the author of this stirring—he wants them to want more and to feel more. At the heart of it, God wants them to want him.

If we don't provide outlets, explanations, and acknowledgement of this stirring, we'll lose kids. After all, the world is ready and willing to answer their desire for more, and to provide outlets for their angst.

Every life has beauty, and every life crashes—God uses both. Yet meaningfully putting words to the stirring may save some kids a lot of heartache. Samson's blindness calls out from antiquity, asking us all to listen. ●