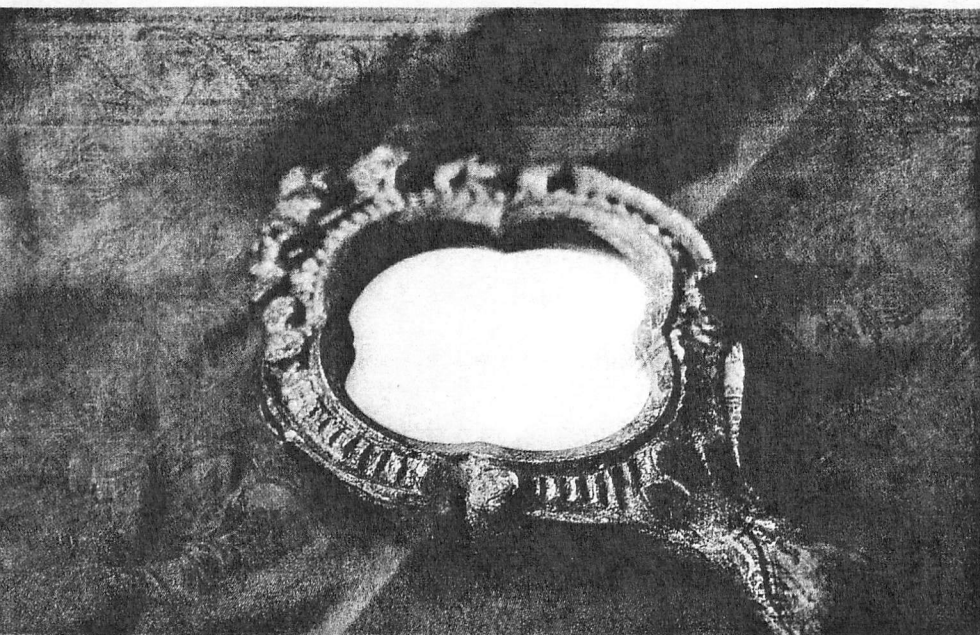


The way we view teenagers is likely the way we treat them.



- If we see kids as needy, we'll provide for them.
- If we see them as revolutionaries, we'll rally them.
- If we see them as adults, we'll have greater expectations of them.
- If we see them as children, we'll protect them.
- If we see them as assets, we'll recruit them.
- If we see them as buyers, we'll exploit them.
- If we see them as problems, we'll reform them.
- If we see them as hooligans, we'll avoid them.
- If we see them as wayward, we'll control them.
- If we see them as hopeless, we may give up.

Our actions and responses toward teenagers are very revealing. Yet, we can take that one step further: By looking at kids, we can learn an awful lot about ourselves. Research shows that although many people view adolescents as a problem in society ("Just look at them!"), they're actually an unfiltered reflection of society ("Just look at us!"). In other words, what we really see in teenagers is... ourselves. They're mirrors.

Adults may respond, "But teenagers are so self-centered, materialistic, independent, anti-establishment, and inarticulate about their spiritual beliefs!"

Yep, that describes many of them. But it also describes many of us. Adolescents reflect what they see. So when adults point a finger at kids, they must see the other fingers pointing back.

This mind-set can change our entire ministry posture. What would happen if we began looking at teenagers as mirrors rather than as problems? How might our approach to youth ministry and counseling differ? Instead of trying to "change" kids, we can put more effort into changing our society, our churches, and ourselves. Of course, this is a huge challenge because it means adults no longer can export the "change" to teenagers. We must invite them into a dynamic community that accomplishes transformation together rather than dictates how kids themselves must change.

The encouraging news is that teenagers still desire parental and adult connections. Kids need adults who are willing to journey with them, not adults who try to conform them to adult demands and expectations. These teenage "mirrors" can help adults see how well they're really doing, be a gauge for change, and offer constant glimpses of beauty. ■