

Wired by God

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how to use the CD-ROM

No doubt about it: This book will help you encourage your teen to discover how God has “wired” him or her. But you don’t have to do all the work yourself. We’ve provided a tool your teen can use, too, on the CD-ROM that accompanies this book.

It’s a guide for your teen’s journey of self-discovery, a creative way to dream big dreams about the future. We don’t want to call it a workbook, because it’s too much fun. Your teen can read it onscreen; to make it interactive, just print it out a chapter at a time so that he or she can complete the exercises on paper. For best results, talk about what your teen is learning. The CD-ROM encourages that, too.

The CD-ROM includes the *Wired by God* teen guide in PDF (Portable Document Format). You’ll need Adobe Acrobat Reader (already installed on many computers) to read the PDF file; if you don’t have it, you can install it from the disk.

Here are a few technical things you’ll want to know.

Since the PDF file is large, we recommend copying it to your hard drive and opening that copy—especially if you plan to print it out. Because printing large files can be slow, it’s best to print out single chapters as you need them rather than producing the whole book at once.

System Requirements (PC)

Intel Pentium processor

One of the following: Microsoft Windows 95 OSR 2.0, Windows 98 SE, Windows Millenium Edition, Windows NT 4.0 with Service Pack 5, Windows 2000, or Windows XP

64 MB of RAM

24 MB of available hard disk space

Additional 34 MB of hard disk space for PDF file (recommended)

Additional 70 MB of hard disk space for Asian fonts (optional)

System Requirements (Macintosh)

PowerPC processor

Mac OS 8.6*, 9.0.4, 9.1, or OS X*

64 MB of RAM

24 MB of available hard disk space

Additional 34 MB of hard disk space for PDF file (recommended)

Additional 70 MB of hard disk space for Asian fonts (optional)

(* Some features may not be available)

To Read the Guide (PC)

Insert the CD-ROM in your CD-ROM drive; a menu will appear on your screen. To read the guide, click on the “Get Wired” icon.

If you don't have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed, click on the icon that corresponds to your operating system (for example, “Adobe Reader Windows XP”). Follow the onscreen instructions, accepting all defaults, to automatically install the proper version of Adobe Acrobat Reader. Restart your computer before continuing.

To Read the Guide (Macintosh)

Insert the CD-ROM in your CD-ROM drive; an icon called “Wired by God” will appear on your desktop. Double-click the icon, and the disk will open. Double-click the file “Wired by God.pdf” to open the guide.

If you don't have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed, click on the icon that corresponds to your operating system (for example, “OS X 10.22-10.3”). If the folder contains another folder, drag it to your Applications folder and you're ready to go. If the folder contains an installer, then double-click the icon to install. Follow the onscreen instructions. Restart your computer only if the installer instructs you to do so.

Introduction: Helping Teens Dream

Life is a great adventure, or nothing.

HELEN KELLER

To an aspiring tennis player, the dream is Wimbledon.

To a 260-pound, muscled-up linebacker, it's the Super Bowl.

To a perfectly pitched vocalist, it's the center stage on Broadway.

Whatever your teenager's dream, God has wired him or her for a unique future full of possibilities. You as a caring parent play a vital role in life's most fulfilling and rewarding arena—helping to shape that dream and make it come true.

To the Hauschild family in Oklahoma City, “dream building” is helping a 14-year-old daughter run a triathlon on one leg and one prosthesis, after bone cancer required amputation.

To one family in Missouri, dream building is helping their daughter publish and distribute 30,000 copies of a book she wrote at age four and illustrated at age seven—a book telling the world about her grandmother's heroic faith.

To the Foley family in Denver, the joy of dream building came as parents Steve and Cindy encouraged daughter Natalie after a disheartening fall—and watched her compete for a place on the world championship team and a chance to represent the United States of America.

To another family in Texas, dream building meant patching up the broken heart of their son, ridiculed for being big and clumsy—and launching him into Division I Big Ten football greatness.

Some parents, like a single mom in the Midwest, build dreams alone.

Arising before the sun comes up, she ferries her 17-year-old daughter in a minivan to a local swimming center and naps until dawn in the backseat. Then she works an eight-hour shift as a school nurse to get food on the table.

In orchestras, art shows, science fairs, basketball courts, and hockey arenas, insightful moms and dads are spending the greatest years of their lives developing their kids' God-given gifts and talents. They do it in a careful, hand-in-hand, side-by-side process that allows their teens to grow a dream from conception to celebration. Over mountains of acclaim, through lonely valleys of discouragement, and along winding trails of discovery, these dream builders and their dreamers travel one of life's most rewarding roads.

For these parent-teen teams, the "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow" is much more than a letter jacket, a state championship ring, a straight-A report card, or a perfectly executed piano recital. As good as those short-term fulfillments are, the never-ending satisfaction comes from building the parent-child relationship, teaching a valuable work ethic, and deepening your teen's faith as he or she explores ways to serve God.

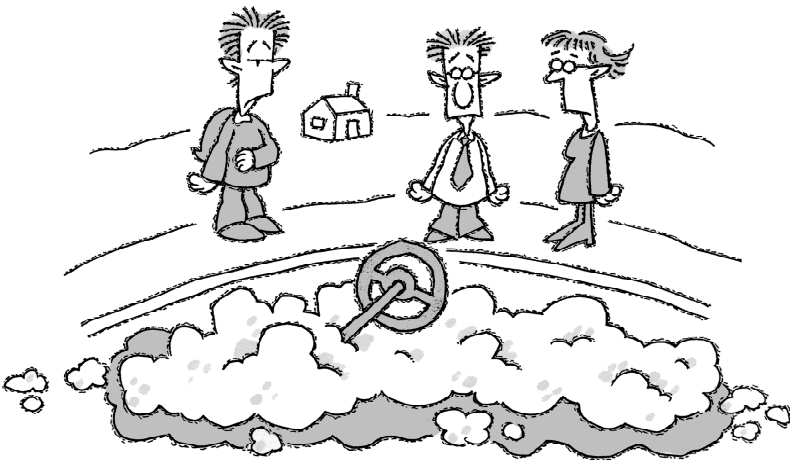
After navigating that extraordinary highway with four teens of my own and assisting some 20,000 young dreamers each summer in our 10 sports camps, I can tell you this without a shadow of doubt: The time you, as a parent, invest in becoming a dream builder, helping your child discover his or her unique wiring, will be one of the most cherished investments you'll ever make.

Parents everywhere are doing that every day. You can, too.

—JOE WHITE

1

a house full of green lights



Until the big storm, Ed's parents encouraged him to pursue his dream of building a convertible out of Q-tips.

When Matt was little, his parents read to him daily from illustrated children's books. He developed a love of stories and art. By age eight he was writing his own epics, complete with drawings of the characters and action. Never mind that at that stage his people's arms and hands looked like flippers on a seal. He was hooked!

Mom and Dad read and praised every story, even the ones that were difficult to follow. They encouraged Matt's drawings with comments like "That's a great-looking spaceship!" and "Ooh, that bad guy really looks nasty! I'm glad he's not after me!" Matt continued to write—and especially to draw.

As the years went by, his drawing skills improved dramatically. Mom and Dad saw that his interest remained strong, and they supported it in any way they could. They bought drawing pads, special pencils and erasers, and instruction books. They faithfully attended every student art show and enthusiastically expressed their admiration for Matt's work. They planned family vacations to include scenic spots where he could sit for hours at a time and begin a new picture. (One day in Yellowstone National Park, Mom even held an umbrella over his head and sketch pad through two hours of light rain!)

By the time he got to high school, Matt was taking every art class available. When he worked on a picture, classmates would look over his shoulder and say things like "Did you really draw that?" and "You ought to frame that one!" Gradually, the dream of working and serving God in the field of art took root in his mind and heart.

Today Matt is in college, majoring in art. The future shape of his dream isn't clear yet, but he's hard at work, developing the skills and interests God gave him. Mom and Dad are still cheering him on, providing financial support, telling him how proud they are of the young man he's become, and helping him to discover and explore new possibilities.

Is your teen, like Matt, on the track to a meaningful future? Are you, like Matt's parents, finding out what a joy it can be to help a young person make the most of how God has wired him or her?

Since you've picked up this book and read this far, I believe you share my passion to help teens dream big, fulfilling, God-honoring dreams. But how, exactly, do we do that? That's what this book is all about.

Just Another Chore?

If you're thinking that raising a teenager is tough enough without having to turn yourself into a full-time guidance counselor, you're right. I know you're busy. You've already got more to-dos on your list than you're ready

to handle. You want to provide the help your teen needs, but you're wondering where you'll find the time and energy to take on what sounds like another big responsibility.

Believe me, I've been there. My wife and I raised four highly active teens while directing multiple sports camps, leading Bible studies, and doing all the other parental running around that's required by modern life. Yet helping our teens to dream never felt like a chore. It was fun, exciting, and a natural part of coaching them through adolescence.

That can be your experience, too.

In this chapter and the next, I'll show you how to provide a home atmosphere that supports dreams and builds a teen with the confidence that those dreams can come true.

In Part Two, I'll guide you—and prepare you to guide your child—through the great experiment known as your teen. In all of human history, there's never been another person with your teen's exact mix of God-given personality, talents, interests, and spiritual gifts. As the two of you get to know that unique wiring through the self-tests in each chapter, you'll start to see which kinds of dreams might make a good fit.

In Part Three, I'll show you how to help your child put his or her plans in perspective. You'll aid your teen in learning to see where God is at work in the world, beginning to make today's choices in view of long-term goals, and gaining the most from life's hardest lessons.

Finally, in Part Four, I'll challenge you to pull together with your spouse if you're married, to give whatever it takes to help fulfill your teen's dreams, and to make sure the right dream—your child's—is being pursued.

Blue-Sky Thinking

No matter what we *say*, our children usually imitate what they see us *do*. If you're a dreamer, your teen is likely to be a dreamer. If you believe God has plans for using your time and talents, if you're serving Him regularly

in your church and community, if you're open to things like short-term missions trips or even a change in careers as He might lead—your teen is apt to believe and do the same kinds of things.

This is an influence that no one but *you* (and your spouse, if you're married) as a parent can wield.

Have you stopped dreaming? That's easy to do when you're raising a family and established in a career—one that perhaps pays the bills but doesn't satisfy. It's easy to stop picturing and planning for a brighter future other than eventual retirement. It's easy to fall into a rut, a mind-set often labeled "being realistic." But if we do that, and stay stuck there, our children are likely to imitate us and to think and live in ruts as well.

If we want our teens to be dreamers—to picture and pursue a challenging and fulfilling future—we need to be (or become) blue-sky thinkers ourselves. We need to believe that whatever our lives have held so far, God isn't through with us yet. He still wants to work in and through us, to challenge us, and to bring us meaning by employing *our* unique blend of talents, gifts, and interests. If we believe that blue skies lie ahead—that life is still full of possibilities and opportunities provided by a loving heavenly Father—our teens will believe it, too.

Steve and Donna Thurman found out how true this is. The popular founding pastor and his wife of a large and growing church in Colorado, they might have stayed comfortably and indefinitely on the beautiful Front Range. God, however, had wired them differently and had a new dream for them.

As Steve explained in his sermon announcing their intention to leave, God made some people to be pioneers and others to be settlers. He and Donna were pioneers, he said, and God had been growing in them the dream of moving halfway around the world to help develop church leaders in the spiritually needy land of New Zealand. It was time for them to take the first steps of faith leading Down Under.

Years later, Steve and Donna can see how their willingness to dream and pursue big things for God affected their own teenagers: "Today our

kids—the two youngest, anyway—are ‘adventurers’ by nature and by the fact that they’ve followed us around for over 20 years and seen that ‘traveling light’ and chasing dreams and taking risks are all ‘the way to go.’ ‘What’s the worst that can happen?’ they tell us. Not much, except that you’ll have some great memories and some stories to tell and some new friends you’ve met along the way. To the kids, God is big—a lot bigger than the fear of taking risks and making changes.”

You don’t have to become a missionary and move 8,000 miles to be a blue-sky thinker. But you do need to remain open to the possibility—and demonstrate it to your teen—that God may want to use you and your family in new and exciting ways in the future.

Support Your Teen’s Interests

Another way to create a home full of green lights is to support your teen’s interests—in academics, sports, music, church or community service, the arts, technology, cars, or whatever. This support takes the form of time (attending sporting events or science fairs, for example), effort (helping your teen practice the sport or build the science project), money (for lessons, supplies, and equipment), and encouragement. I’ll say more about all of these in coming chapters, especially chapter 14, but for now let’s focus on encouragement.

»» “My parents have encouraged me to pursue areas I’m interested in. They have told me my strengths and said why these would be helpful in the area I want to study. They’ve also had me be involved in different Christian services to be able to explore my gifts.”

—Monica

Peers are not nice to each other. Many teens are catty; they cut and they gossip. They don’t encourage each other to pursue meaningful goals. If a teen and her dreams are like a steam engine that needs to have coal shoveled into the boiler every day to keep running, peers are often coal thieves. They steal that source of energy with their snide, envious remarks. But we parents can supply

every day the coal—true, sincere encouragement—that will fuel our teens’ fire.

During the day, raided by negative coaching, negative teachers, negative peers, and a negative school environment, a kid runs out of coal. His little bank of confidence burns up. But a parent has a chance to spend the evening with a child. At the dinner table, out shooting baskets, helping with homework, before bed, the parent has lots of opportunities to praise.

Some parents assume their opinions no longer matter to their teens. It’s true that peers are of great importance to teens as they establish their individuality and prepare for independence. But all teens—including yours—still long to be loved and affirmed by Mom and Dad. No one else’s praise and support means more.

When it comes to encouragement, the more frequent and specific the better. That’s why, at our Kanakuk football camps each summer, we make it our goal to encourage each teen by name 10 times a day. We want every kid to hear his name—and something specific that he’s doing well—at least that often. Some of our kids will start in Division I, and some will never put on a helmet in a college game—but they all walk away from 26 days of Kanakuk feeling as if they can run through buildings. They love it!

If he’s running the ropes—an agility drill—a camper will hear things like “Great job with your knees, Bill! Your eyes are up perfect! Great quick feet, Bill!”

A guy running sprints will hear “Way to sprint, John!” or “Super job, John! Man, I love the way you do your backwards run!”

Those things may sound tiny. But when a kid hears them 10 times or more a day, every day, with his name attached, he begins to believe in himself.

What works with adolescents at Kanakuk football camps will work with our teens at home. The more we encourage them, and the more specific our praises are, the more coal we’ll provide for their boilers. If your

teen is a budding artist, for instance, your comments might include things like “I love your way with colors, Mary!” or “That fruit in your picture looks so vivid, I’d like to grab it and take a bite, Kevin!” or “The combination of textures in your sculpture is fascinating, Sue! I could look at it over and over and see something different in it every day!”

A teen who gets that kind of encouragement will keep pursuing her dreams.

Encourage Your Teen to Try Different Things

Many young people have yet to zero in on a specific dream for the future. That’s why Part Two of this book provides self-tests to help teens get a better handle on the way they’re wired. But you don’t have to wait to get started. One of the simplest—and most effective—ways to help teens is to encourage them to try a wide variety of activities:

- Does your son think he’d like to play the guitar? Rent an instrument, get him some lessons, and encourage him to work at it for at least six months.
- Does your daughter like to run? Buy her some good shoes and shorts, and encourage her to go out for the cross-country team.
- Does your son think he might like to work with children, maybe even become a teacher? Encourage him to volunteer with a Sunday school class at your church.
- Does the medical profession appeal to your daughter? Encourage her to volunteer at a local hospital and to interview your family doctor about “what it’s really like.”

Some of these efforts won’t go so well, but that’s okay. Your child may learn which interests *not* to pursue—an invaluable lesson. Other efforts will show promise, meriting further study and practice. Sooner or later, one may prove to be the most enjoyable and natural fit in the world.

We could call this the Ephesians 2:10 search: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared

in advance for us to do.” If God has prepared good works for our teens, then encouraging them to try different things will help them find areas of service for which the Lord has already wired them.

Say Yes

Another way to create a house full of green lights is to say yes as often as possible when your teen wants to try a new activity or take the next step in pursuing an interest. That sounds simple, but it’s not.

For one thing, saying yes can be scary for a parent. If your teen hasn’t enjoyed much success lately in drama tryouts or getting elected to student council, you might fear her heart will be broken again. If he wants to take up hockey, you might fear physical injury. Those are both legitimate concerns.

Your *yes* can also mean a commitment of your time, money, and energy. Say yes to an interest in art, for example, and you may be buying paints and pencils and sketch pads and canvases and lessons for a long time. Say yes to a sport like softball and you may be buying gloves and spikes and bats and other equipment for the next decade, not to mention taxiing your teen to a seemingly endless string of practices, games, and tournaments.

If at all possible, however, say yes to the things your teen wants to pursue. *Yes* is a door opener. It’s a switch that turns on lightbulbs inside kids. It fires the imagination, stimulates creativity, and opens the door to a world of opportunities.

When my daughter Jamie was five years old, I told her about the idea of sponsoring a needy child in another country through a Christian ministry. I gave her a picture of a Cambodian child. Jamie thought about it, then asked if she could use her Christmas gift to begin supporting that child. My wife, Debbie Jo, and I said yes. Jamie put the picture on her bulletin board and developed a feeling of connection to that child.

A few years later, as a high schooler, Jamie started a clothing company

(a story I'll tell in more detail later). She wanted to give any profits to help hurting children in the U.S. and abroad. Again Debbie Jo and I said yes. Jamie's company made \$300,000 over the next several years—and Jamie did indeed give it all away! Hundreds of needy kids continue to benefit every year as a result.

Not every teen is going to start a business and generate that kind of income, of course. But saying yes to possibilities and passions, thereby sowing seeds of opportunity, applies to every parent and teen. As your young person explores gifts and talents and interests—whether that means taking piano lessons or joining a gymnastics team or helping to build a house with Habitat for Humanity—say yes whenever you can. Your teen will learn, and the dreams will grow.

Evaluate Setbacks: Learn, Grow, and Go

Here's one more way to provide a house full of green lights. It's helping our teens deal with the reality that setbacks are almost inevitable on the road to a dream.

The question isn't "Will glitches happen?" but "How should we respond when they do?" I'll say more about this in chapter 13, but for now let's note that the healthy response is to *learn, grow, and go*.

A setback might mean that a door is closed and the teen needs to look for another that's open. But it might also mean that God wants to develop perseverance, the ability to forgive, or some other character quality in the teen.

Is the setback a dead end or just a detour? Drawing on our experiences with God and with life, we can help our teens tell the difference. We can also help them learn lessons the situation has to teach.

As our young people struggle with the emotions and absorb those lessons, they can grow stronger and wiser—better prepared for future successes and losses. Some wisdom can't be gained in any other way, making setbacks one of God's most effective teaching tools.

Then, when they're ready, our teens can go on to the next opportunity—the next step in a dream that's still alive or the first step in a new one. Setbacks are part of life's journey of adventure.

That was true for Matt, the young artist introduced at the start of this chapter. When he entered a college art program that enrolled more students than it could train, he found the competition was tough. Professors tried to weed out those who lacked talent and motivation.

In one of Matt's early classes, he labored to please the instructor—sometimes without success. Finally, about midway through the semester, the teacher said, "Maybe you should consider transferring to another major."

Now, *there's* a setback in the pursuit of a dream! Many people might be crushed by such a comment. Matt could have concluded, "Surely this is a dead end, a blocked path."

But Matt believed God had given him a talent. He saw the comment as a bump in the road, not an impassable roadblock—a test of whether he could and would persevere.

He was determined to pass that test. When the next class time came a few days later, he was there with a portfolio of his best pre-college work, which he showed to the instructor.

The professor looked at drawing after drawing, his eyes growing wider with each one. Finally he closed the portfolio and told Matt with a smile, "I guess you belong here after all."

And the dream, birthed and nurtured in a house full of green lights, lived on.

// WITH YOUR TEENAGER

Over sundaes at your local ice cream shop, ask your teen a few questions like these:

- Is there anything new you've been thinking of trying—a sport, a musical instrument, the drama club? If so, how might I help you pursue that?

- If you were to choose today how you'd like the rest of your life to go, based on your interests and the things you feel you're good at, what would that look like?
- I'd like to be more of a "personal cheerleader" to you every day. What kinds of comments do you find especially encouraging?

notes

Chapter 3

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