

### Helping parents understand teenagers and their world

# How Do I Look?

WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



## YOUTH CULTURE HOT QUOTE

*I have had bouts of situational depression, and my heart was broken last year because, unknowingly, I put so much validity in the reaction of the public, and the public didn't react in the way I had expected to... That brokenness, plus me opening up to a greater, higher power and reconnecting with divinity, gave me a wholeness I never had. It gave me a new foundation. It's not just a material foundation: it's a soul foundation.*

**Katy Perry, on how negative reactions to her 2017 album *Witness* deeply affected her, in *Vogue Australia's* August cover story (via [Vogue.com.au](http://Vogue.com.au))**



"Daddy, will people make fun of me?" Yep. . . she really asked me that question. She was my oldest child, yet only five years old. It was one day before she started Kindergarten and I was already a mess about sending her off to school for the first time. Then, she asked the question. And I wondered to myself, "What is she talking about?" "Make fun of you for what?" I asked. Her answer woke me up to how body image pressures had compressed down to the youngest of ages: "Because of what I look like."

That little interchange took place 30 years ago. Now, that little girl of mine is a mommy raising three little children of her own. And if the body image pressure was strong back then, think about what it's like now. The culture and the peer group are pounding even the youngest of the young with compelling and convincing messages regarding how necessary it is to look a certain way if you are going to be liked, accepted, and even loved. In the three decades since my oldest went out the door for the first day of school, the volume and frequency of these life-mis-shaping messages has been turned up through the channels of media, marketing, and the 24/7 presence of social media. And now that your kids will once again be walking the hallways of their school, the pressure will ramp up even more.

The body image frenzy is literally consuming our kids. Lest you think this is just a youth culture pressure, think again. Body image pressure hits us all. And the more we as parents bow to the pressure ourselves. . . usually without even knowing it. . . the more we contribute to our kids' struggle to find their identity in Jesus Christ, rather than in what they look like.

Three years ago, researchers in Britain confirmed what we already know: young children are experiencing dissatisfaction with the size and shape of their bodies that puts them at risk of eating disorders in their teens. My guess is that the data is only exposing the tip of the iceberg in terms of age and intensity regarding these concerns. According to the study, by the age of eight, 5% of girls and 3% of boys are dissatisfied with their body. That number rises with age until 14, when over 32% of girls and 16% of boys

experience at least moderate dissatisfaction with their bodies. In addition, over 35% of the girls and 12% of the boys were already involved in eating disordered behaviors by the age of 14. I wonder how these statistics would differ if the research was conducted today?

It's become increasingly important for moms and dads to push back on this body image pressure. As Christian parents, we can begin to push back by living counter-culturally ourselves (Romans 12:1&2), as we endeavor to find our identity in Jesus Christ rather than in what we see when we look in the mirror. We are called to do the same with our kids. Here are some first steps you can take to help your kids manage the pressure. . .

First, seek and find your own identity in who you are as a person made in God's image and redeemed by Jesus Christ. Contrary to what the world tells you, you are not what you look like. The antidote to our fears and insecurities is found in our union with Christ and finding our value in him. Second Corinthians 5:21 tells us, "For our sake, he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." When God looks at us He sees Christ. In other words, our identity is secure in Jesus Christ!

Second, teach your kids to spot the appearance lies in the 4,000 to 10,000 marketing messages they see each day. Point out how ads tell us that we are incomplete unless our appearance measures up to highly unattainable standards.

Third, do not criticize yourself, your kids, or others about body weight and shape.

Fourth, take stock of how much time you spend on curating your outward appearance. . . and make adjustments where necessary. Have you turned your body into an idol?

Fifth, compliment your kids on their God-given talents and character traits, rather than on their appearance.

And finally, spend time with your children reading and talking about God's Word, looking to discover how what God values turns the world's priorities upside-down.\*

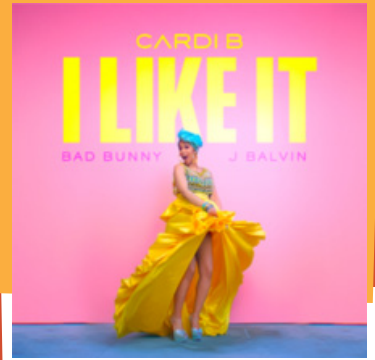
# Songs of the Summer

2018's Song of the Summer Contenders

Source:  
Billboard.com  
Week of 7/28/2018



1. *I Like It* by Cardi B, Bad Bunny & J Balvin
2. *Nice for What* by Drake
3. *Psycho* by Post Malone & Ty Dolla \$ign
4. *Girls Like You* by Maroon 5 & Cardi B
5. *God's Plan* by Drake
6. *Boo'd Up* by Ella Mai
7. *Lucid Dreams* by Juice WRLD
8. *No Tears Left To Cry* by Ariana Grande
9. *The Middle* by Zedd, Maren Morris & Grey
10. *In My Feelings* by Drake



## QUICK STATS

Only 3% of U.S. Adults say that high school graduates are "very prepared" to be successful in college.  
(Gallup)

The number of 25- to 34-year-olds who died annually from alcohol-related liver disease nearly tripled between 1999 and 2016.  
(BMJ & the CDC)

## FROM THE NEWS:

### ENTITLEMENT AND WORK

One of the most alarming trends in today's youth culture is a growing sense of **entitlement**. It's especially prevalent among those children and teens living on the receiving end of a silver spoon. On the other end are parents who feed their kids an endless parade of opportunities, activities, and things - all without ever having to work for any of it. These kids wind up believing that they will never have to work for anything, because, after all, they deserve it. A Harris Interactive Poll found that 90 percent of parents *do* think that it's important for their children to work to pay for the things they want. But the reality is that few kids have jobs. There is a disconnect between the desired end result and what the kids are actually doing. The words of theologian John Wesley are worth teaching to our children: "Work as hard as you can, to make all the money you can, to save as much as you can in order to give away all that you can."



## TRENDS: OVERSCHEDULING

Overscheduling is a huge issue in the world of families and parenting these days. Many well-intentioned parents want to keep their kids busy and out of trouble. Others want them to get a jump on the path to what they believe is a successful college and career experience. Some don't want their kids left out or left behind. Still others want their kids to take as many opportunities for fun and growth while they are still young. But is all the scheduled extra-curricular activity a good thing for our kids? A new study suggests that parents should be mindful of how much time their children are spending in things like sports, clubs, and music lessons. Researchers are saying that a busy organized activity schedule can put excessive strain on family relationships and the family budget. In addition, the well-being and healthy development of kids can be compromised. Parents, are you building in times of rest, relaxation, and unorganized self-play in the lives of your kids?



## LATEST RESEARCH:

## SLEEP AND DROWSY DRIVERS

Several times in the past you've heard me talk about the fact that our teenagers need nine hours and fifteen minutes of uninterrupted sleep for healthy growth and development. One reason for adolescent sleep interruptions is that many kids are sleeping with their phones. This is feeding the epidemic of teen anxiety and depression. Sleep researchers tell us that teenagers are among the highest risk groups in the U.S. for being sleep-deprived. Only about ten percent are getting the sleep they require. We also know that about one in ten car crashes are due to drowsy drivers, with young people ages sixteen to twenty-four accounting for more than fifty percent of these drowsy driving crashes. Parents, the burden for this falls on you. When your children are young, establish sleep habits that will serve them well for the rest of their lives. Teach them to steward their bodies to God's glory and to see getting enough sleep as an act of worship. Monitor your kids and their sleep.

## CPYU'S DIGITAL KIDS INITIATIVE



[www.DigitalKidsInitiative.com](http://www.DigitalKidsInitiative.com)

## Technology: A Good Gift of God

by Walt Mueller



Christians should not be anti-technology. Rather, we need to see technology as a good gift of God which must be used *prudently* and with *conscious care*. Youth ministry educator Matt Elofson has studied how technology is shaping us, our kids, and our family life. Matt voices some timely concerns regarding our smartphones and the spiritual growth of our kids. He cites three particular areas where technology can have a negative effect on our ability to engage in some of the most important and necessary spiritual disciplines.

**First, solitude.** Are we fostering a situation where our kids are so constantly connected that they have no time to spend alone in God's presence?

**Second, silence.** Are we creating a home culture so full of constant digital noise and distraction that our kids are not able to quiet themselves to hear God's voice?

**And third, meditation.** Are we overloading them with technology in ways that make it difficult or impossible for them to focus on God and His Word?

Parents, don't be afraid to set borders and boundaries where necessary.

## New Podcast

### Youth Culture Matters

is a long-format podcast from CPYU. Co-hosted by Walt Mueller and Jason Soucinek.



Listen at  
[www.cpyu.org/podcast](http://www.cpyu.org/podcast).

Be sure to check out Episode 62 for a discussion with counselor Julie Lowe on the topic of disordered eating.

## FROM THE WORD

As your kids head back to another year of school, you are no doubt concerned that they will be listening to their teachers and studying hard so that they might gain knowledge. But while book knowledge is necessary, important, and helpful, it is not the most important type of knowledge we should hope our kids learn.

Because they've been made *by* and *for* God, our ultimate desire over all other desires should be to see them seek and embrace a knowledge that is rooted in their fear of the Lord. In Proverbs 1:7 we read that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." This *fear* is not a terror, but rather a state of being so in awe of God's majesty and power that you desire nothing more than to honor Him in every nook and cranny of your life. As Tim Keller says, the resulting *wisdom* leads us to know how to make "the right choice even when there are no clear moral laws telling you explicitly what to do." To not embrace this kind of wisdom is to be, simply stated, foolish.

**"THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE; FOOLS DESPISE WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION."**  
**PROVERBS 1:7**

This school year, make it a priority to endlessly lead your kids into the Scriptures so that they might see God for who He is, stand in awe of Him, and then grow in the wisdom and instruction of the Lord.

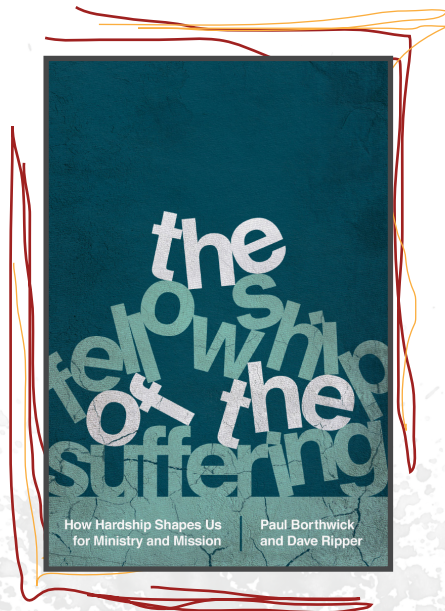
## HELPFUL RESOURCE ←

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings." Philippians 3:10 (ASV)

If we follow Jesus, we will experience pain. It comes with the territory. We might face hardship because of our Christian commitment, or we may have challenges just from living in a fallen world. Either way, Christians follow in the footsteps of our suffering Savior and participate in his suffering.

But that's not the whole story. In *The Fellowship of the Suffering: How Hardship Shapes Us for Ministry and Mission*, missionary Paul Borthwick and pastor Dave Ripper show how transformation through our personal pain enables us to minister faithfully to a hurting world. They candidly share about their own struggles and how they have seen God's kingdom advance through hardship and suffering. Though we naturally avoid suffering, Christians throughout church history have become powerful witnesses to Christ as a result of their brokenness.

Life is painful, but pain need not have dominion over us. Instead, it can propel us in missional solidarity with our suffering world. Come find comfort and renewed purpose in the fellowship of the suffering.



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