

What's Happening to Our Youth? – Christians Should Be Concerned

You've probably heard for some time that the youth from our churches have been having a tough time when they make the transition from high school to adulthood, whether that is to college, the workforce or the military. Josh McDowell addressed this in his latest book, [*The Last Christian Generation*](#), where he documented that research indicates that anywhere from 69 to 94 percent of our youth are leaving the church after high school. And few are returning.

Other organizations suggest the figure is between 55 and 88 percent. Either way, the picture isn't good. Our youth are in trouble and we need a vigorous and coordinated response. Recently I attended a meeting of national youth and college ministry leaders to help forge a response to this growing problem. Hosted by the folks at Youth Transition Network, YTN, (www.youthtransitionnetwork.org) some troubling observations emerged.

Many in our youth culture are living double lives. One life is meant to be invisible at church (they know the right behaviors and speak "Christianese" to pass as good kids). In the other life they follow worldly pursuits in secret, away from parents and church leaders among friends who accept them as they are. This is motivated by what YTN director Jeff Schadt calls a triangle of discouragement (see: www.liveabove.com/NewsReadyText.aspx?thispage=1)

One leg of the triangle is the burdensome sense of guilt over their moral failures coupled with a sense of isolation. They don't feel free to talk with anyone about their guilt. Basically they feel like a spiritual failure.

The second leg of the triangle involves what they feel is a disconnect between a gospel of grace and expectations of perfection from parents and church leaders. They're not smart enough, spiritual enough, attractive enough, etc. They just don't feel like they measure up.

The third leg brings all this together in an overall sense of not feeling trusted, believed in or accepted, warts and all. That's a pretty nasty triumvirate.

Add to this the fact that 93% of graduating high school seniors can't name even one college ministry. Therefore, they mistrust what they don't know and fail to get connected. Most college freshman also feel unprepared for the level of freedom college affords and are frequently overwhelmed by the level and difficulty of work the university expects.

As Josh McDowell also points out, the majority of our graduating youth don't believe Jesus is the one true Son of God, don't believe Jesus rose from the dead, don't believe in Satan and don't believe the Holy Spirit is real.

I learned a lot at this meeting. What struck me the most was the universal reaction from both high school youth leaders and college ministers. They all admitted that the problem was not new, but that they didn't realize how large and universal it was. One college worker asked Jeff Schadt if any of the 800 students he interviewed said anything about being motivated by love. Without hesitation, he said "No!" This only increased my resolve for Probe Ministries to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem. Our week-long [Mind Games Conference](#) will continue to prepare high school juniors and seniors for the challenge of college—but with a greater emphasis on the available resources and an even bigger helping of trust, acceptance and love.

Check out these additional resources for more information and help in making this critical transition easier and more

fruitful:

- www.youthtransitionnetwork.org: Official site for Youth Transition Network.
- www.liveabove.com offers resources for youth leaders to help their students make the transition and offers help for students in locating a campus ministry and even a Christian roommate.
- college101seminars.com offers informational programs for churches and secular institutions on helping their students make a profitable transition.
- [Conversations CD](#) this information page introduces a tool designed to help navigate the pitfalls of higher learning, construct a biblical worldview, answer life's toughest questions and make great grades. The well-done sections on making better grades hosted by Dr. Walter Bradley are worth their weight in gold.
- www.boundless.org/college contains links for articles designed to help Christians survive and thrive in college (and beyond). "Ask Theophilus" is particularly helpful.
- TrueU.org is a general site for students of faith.

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"How Do I Overcome My Hurts and Disappointments From My

Church?"

I have been a Christian for over 14 years. I love God very much, but I have become truly discontent with church. I have suffered from many hurts and many disappointments. I know this may sound childish but I have been badly hurt by people who say that they are trying to be more like Jesus.

When my husband and I lost our 4th child at 11 weeks, I was accused of having an abortion. I was told to "stay in my calling." When I asked for the youth leader position I knew my call, my children (I have six) knew my call, but my pastor refused to acknowledge it. Over the next several years, more than a dozen different people took that position, and I cried each time the position went to someone else. I was told that I was not faithful enough.

I always was ready and willing to help where needed but was pushed aside. I am very outspoken and speak when God says to, which produces a lot of friction. I have been lied about, talked about and pushed aside. I have cried over so many lost hopes and dreams.

I left that church, but am still suffering from the things that I endured. I feel like I don't fit in anywhere I go. I live in a small town and feel that no matter where I go my "reputation" precedes me. How can I overcome this? Or should I just wait and not go back to church? I can't move from this area.

I have been told I will do great things for God. That I am called. But I can't do it here. I am always under someone's microscope. Is there hope for me?

I am so very sorry to hear your story! My husband and I know personally how the wounds from one's church weigh heavily on the heart. You have my complete sympathy. I hurt for you, and I am asking the Lord to bring comfort and peace to you.

You ask, "How can I overcome this? Or should I just wait and not go back to church?" Not going back to church is not an option if you want to walk in obedience, since God's word tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). The only way to overcome this pain is to forgive those who hurt and disappointed you. I suggest you make a list: ask the Lord to show you every person you are still hurting over, every person you are still holding a grudge about. Write down his or her name, along with everything they said or did to hurt you—or that you took as hurtful. (Sometimes, our perception is different from what people intended, but we can't know that unless we do a reality check with them. For your purposes, though, if you are still hurting, you are still harboring unforgiveness, and you need to deal with things as you perceived them.)

Before the Lord, remember that Jesus was tortured and crucified for every single one of those sins and hurts. He paid for them all. In His strength, release each of those offenses to the Cross, and let go of them. Forgiveness means choosing to let go of our desire to make the other person hurt or pay for what they did, and the reason we can do that is because Jesus both hurt and paid for what our offenders did.

Sometimes, people hesitate to release the offenses because they so deeply want the other person to *understand* how much they hurt us. We have no control over making another person understand; but we can know that Jesus understands. He was there, receiving into Himself, everything that happened to us. (Remember what He told Saul on the road to Damascus? Every time he persecuted Christians, Jesus said he was persecuting HIM.) Not being understood, not receiving compassion from One with a full knowledge of what happened and how much it hurt, is not an obstacle to us forgiving because Jesus does understand, and His heart is filled with compassion.

I do hope you will get before the Lord and forgive those who hurt you. Otherwise, you will be stuck in pain and the

temptation to wallow in self-pity.

One other thing that I wanted to mention, which I wonder might not be a major cause of your difficulties: you said, “I am very outspoken and speak when God says to, which produces a lot of friction.”

Uh-oh.

I understand the importance of obeying God. However, people who see themselves as outspoken can be blunt to the point of being needlessly insensitive and abrasive. I’m not saying this is true of you, since I don’t know you—but I am just making an observation based on years of watching people. Since you say your outspokenness produces a lot of friction, do you think it’s possible that you have set yourself up? Is it possible that you have been prevented from serving where you feel called because the friction you cause disqualifies you as a leader? Consider what the Word commands us about what we say and how we say it:

Speaking the truth in love. . . (Eph. 4:15)

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Eph. 4:29)

There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Prov. 12:18)

She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. (Prov 31:26)

Let me just ask you: as the mother of six children (bless your heart!!), how prone are you to give a lot of responsibility to a child who causes friction among his or her siblings? Why would it be any different for those in church leadership?

I am praying as I type that God will soften your heart and enable you to receive this letter, since I know it must be painful to hear that you might be responsible for some of the pain and disappointment you are experiencing. (Again: I do not know this is true since I don't know you.) I do pray that you will have grace to hear my words as coming from a sister who longs to encourage and bless, not to inflict more pain. Please invite the Lord to give you His perspective on my answer and ask Him for help to lay down any defensiveness and sort out what is true.

The Lord bless you and keep you today, _____.

Cordially,

Sue Bohlin

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