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. Thats 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 CDthis 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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