

While the Church Slept

Teen Issues

Read Psalm 86:11-14

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: "Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth."

Psalm 86:11 (NIV)

Every two minutes a woman in the United States is diagnosed with breast cancer.(1) . . . One American dies from cardiovascular disease approximately every 35 seconds.(2) . . . The risk of an American man developing cancer over his lifetime is one in two. . . . Approximately one of every three American women will develop cancer in her lifetime.(3) . . .

Statistics. They can serve many purposes. Statistics regarding the incidence of heart disease, stroke, or cancer have stimulated many Americans to change their eating and exercise habits. These statistics have served as a wake-up call to many of us.

There are other statistics that should also serve as a wake-up call a wake-up call to the church. I heard some of those statistics recently in a presentation delivered by Josh McDowell.(4) This was one of the most alarming messages I have heard in a very long time. Oh, I knew that the "state of the church" in this country was not very good. I was aware that the percentage of active church members in our country has declined, and I knew that the philosophies of the world, including postmodernism, had infiltrated the church. I did not know how pervasive the infiltration is.

In his message, Josh McDowell presented statistics from numerous surveys that have been conducted by George Barna and other researchers over the years to study religious life in the United States. In these studies, "born again" teens are defined as those who agree that "I have personally trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and if I were to die today, I know I'd go to heaven because He is my Savior, and He has forgiven me of my sins."(4) Keeping that definition in mind, the statistics I heard are astonishing.

The surveys found that in 1991, 52% of "born again" teenagers agreed that "there is no truth apart from myself." By 1999, that number had risen to 78%. Today, this infiltration of post-modernism into the church has resulted in 91% of "born-again" teens saying that there is no truth apart from themselves. Among these same teens, 63% say that Jesus is "a" Son of God, not "the" Son of God. Among the "born again teens," 65% say there is no way to tell which faith is true.(4) If you say that there is no truth, then you can't say that Jesus is "the" Son of God or that any one faith is truer than another faith.

In 1995, only 10% of "born again" young people agreed with the statement that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and true in every situation. Today less than 4% agree. McDowell stated that unless something drastic is done, that figure will be 1% within 50 months.(4)

Barna's research has also found that a majority of Americans make a lasting determination about the personal significance of Christ's death and resurrection by age 12 and that their personal and moral foundations are generally in place by the time they are 9 years old.(5)

McDowell's message was built on the thesis that "relationships engender beliefs that form our values that drive our behavior."(4) He discussed several examples from the Bible. In Psalm 26:3 (NLT), David said, "Your love is ever before me." As a result of that, David said he walked continually in the Lord's truth. In Psalm 86:11 (NLT), David says, "Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth!" Why will he do this? Verse 13 tells us that it is because of God's great love toward him. In John 1:14 (NLT), we read that "the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness." In verse 17 (NLT), John tells us that it was Jesus Christ who came "full of unfailing love and faithfulness."

McDowell noted that no matter how well a father teaches his son or daughter the Word of God, if the child doesn't believe in his or her heart of hearts that "my daddy loves me," the child will walk away. He also said that "unless a child is constantly aware of your unfailing love, they will never live according to your truth," for "truth without relationships leads to rejection," and "rules without relationships leads to rebellion."(4)

Dartmouth Medical School recently published the results of their review of 267 studies done on young people and stated that all scientific evidence shows that from the moment of birth, a child's brain is physically or biologically formed to connect in relationships not emotionally, not spiritually, but physically. The researchers concluded that if you want to pass your values on to your children, to see your own children adopt your truth and follow that truth, then:

1. You must build loving, intimate relationships with them.
2. You must model that same truth and value in the presence of your child.(6)

Just as Jesus and Paul each gave us an example to follow, so we must give our children an example to follow.

The most shocking statistic I heard was this: 85% of Christian teens leave the church within 18 months of high school graduation.(4) Although, given the previous statistics, I probably should have expected this.

How can this be? What happened? Has the church been asleep? Did we not see this coming?

How many times have we read the Old Testament stories of Israel repeatedly turning away from God and thought, "How could they do that? Couldn't they see where the path they were on was taking them?"

Are we so different? Have we also turned a blind eye toward the path our young people are on?

Surely, in the years since Barna's 1991 study and the subsequent studies, someone sounded an alarm. Was I deaf, or did I just ignore it because I do not have any kids? I am listening now. I pray that it is not too late.

If, like me, you have been asleep while our children have been drawn away from the values we hold dear, from the God we love and serve, then let these statistics serve as our wake-up call. Let us start this day to build relationships with our young people and model to them the truths and values of Jesus. If you have no children or they are out on their own, do not think that there is nothing for you to do. There are kids in every community who need a caring Christian adult to

"adopt" them. Find one of those kids and start building that relationship and living a Christlike example before them. Let us not stand idly by while Satan devours our kids.

May God have mercy on us if we fail to act.

Source List

(1) "About Breast Cancer: Statistics, Causes, Symptoms, Surgery Options." (August 10, 2005). www.breastcancer.org. Accessed March 19, 2006.

(2) "Know the Facts, Get the Stats 2006." American Heart Association. (2006). www.americanheart.org. Accessed March 19, 2006.

(3) "Cancer Statistics 2006." (2006). American Cancer Society. Accessed March 19, 2006.

(4) McDowell, Josh. "Relationships that Transform." (March 12, 2006). Message delivered at Calvary Chapel Ocean Hills. www.oceanhillschurch.com. Accessed March 19, 2006.

(5) "Research Shows That Spiritual Maturity Should Start at a Young Age." (January 28, 2004). Faith News Network. www.faithnews.cc. Accessed March 19, 2006.

(6) Brazelton, T. Berry, Coles, Robert, "Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities." www.americanvalues.org. Accessed March 19, 2006.

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