

We MUST Engage Our Teen Culture Now!

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*For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, The afflicted also, and him who has no helper.
He will have compassion on the poor and needy, And the lives of the needy he will save.
He will rescue their life from oppression and violence; And their blood will be precious in his sight;
-Psalms 72:12-14*

Yesterday my heart broke when America again witnessed on TV students running from their school as students inside are shooting and killing their classmates. This time it was Littleton, Colorado. One Columbine High School student told reporters, "We saw three people get shot," she said. "They were just shooting. They didn't care who they shot. They were just shooting." To hear those words resonate in my ears would make me think I'm listening to a marine returning from a search and destroy mission in Vietnam. The reality of our culture is that the statement came from an adolescent girl coming home from school in a middle-class suburb of 35,000 just southwest of Denver. I do not remember anyone one declaring war in small town America.

But then again, maybe someone did. This generation of youth is plagued by more obstacles than they can possibly handle; shrinking families, fatherless homes, target of violent crime, over saturated by market driven media, possession obsession, and disappearing morality. Education officials say they've been working hard to keep guns out of school by using more metal detectors. Every state now expels students who get caught carrying weapons, and more than 6,000 are kicked out a year. Thom Rainer quotes in his book The Bridger Generation that "In 1989 alone, the juvenile crime rate increased an astronomical sixteen percent. By 1994, juvenile offenses were sixty percent higher than the rate just seven years earlier." Kenneth Trump, School Safety Expert, says, "Prisons are the most secure institutions in our society, yet they still have weapons and gang activity inside. To think that we can completely eliminate these incidents from occurring in our schools is unrealistic."

In addition, the gap is ever widening between the youth generation and their parents and grandparents generation. Most adults are largely unaware to what is going on in the life of today's youth and what they struggle with day to day. To further widen the gap, when they see glimpses of the youth culture, typical responses range from denial that their children are a part to giving youth culture a deaf ear by rejecting it for its lack of conformity to their generation. Unfortunately for the youth today, the deaf ear has stopped listening for the cry for help.

When the Church develops a deaf ear mentality, they abandon their dependence upon the gospel for everyday living. As a result, the mission of Christ to reach the lost with the transforming power of the gospel becomes just a side ministry for people with a special call. In our life as believers, we are called to be servants of Christ in worshipping God, nurturing the body, and being a witness to the world. To live out only two of the three callings will deform the other two.

How can you engage the youth culture to impact someone with gospel? The first step is to keep our mouths quiet and open our eyes and ears. Observe and learn. Ask questions without lecturing. Next, look for the cultural distinctive which make them different. Look for examples of how postmodernism has infiltrated their culture. In the midst of these things, look for evidence of a spiritual quest. Finally, pinpoint inroads for conversation, connection, and ultimately the gospel.