

# Twenty-Somethings

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by: *Pastor Dale Raether and Professor Alan H. Siggelkow*

## Twenty-Somethings and Backdoor Loses

A committee of three, Alan Siggelkow, Fritz Horn, and myself have been working on this project since—I don't remember when. We all know there's a problem. But why does this problem seem to be bigger than a generation or two ago? What's different about society, about families, and about twenty-somethings themselves? Sin is nothing new. (Spiritually) dysfunctional families are nothing new. Youthful rebellion is nothing new. Is it perhaps there's just more of these things today than before? On the other hand some may argue things were as bad, if not worse in 1517. So then, how does one quantify the problem? With surveys? With scientific research? But who would do this work and who would interpret it? And after it's all done, would we really know anymore than before? We were doubtful.

After over a year of spinning our wheels, Fritz Horn dropped out of the committee. That left just Alan and myself to spin our wheels. What we were looking for was causes. We wanted to be able to point to some specific thing or things and say, "There! These are the issues." But the more we pursued this course, the more it seemed like we were fighting a hydra. Was there no way to identify this beast much less kill it?

It turns out we were frustrated because we weren't asking the right questions. Instead of trying to sift through what's different about the world or today's twenty-somethings, we need to focus on questions we can answer in the light of God's Word.

## I. WHAT KEEPS A PERSON IN CONTACT WITH GOD'S WORD?

### A. Pressure

Some people hear God's Word because they aren't given (much of) a choice. Examples include:

- Parents bringing their children to church and Sunday School;
- Parents insisting their children sit through home devotions;
- Religion classes in a Lutheran Elementary School or area high school;
- Pre-confirmation instructions;
- Congregations insisting parents attend classes as a condition for enrolling their children in a Lutheran elementary school;
- Weak members who attend once a month to avoid getting a letter or a visit from an elder;
- Teens who attend only when they are scheduled to usher;
- Families who attend only when their children have to sing.
- Guilt
- Peers

This list could go on and on. The goal of such pressure, of course, isn't mere church attendance. And certainly we would want all people to hear God's Word out of a love for it. But the practicality of it is, not everyone's faith has developed to that point. Not everyone's faith matures at the same rate. And so these things can serve as a schoolmaster to keep the young in faith in contact with the message of repentance and forgiveness while they are maturing.

### *B. Rapport with a Mature Christian*

We've all seen this pattern. In confirmation classes, he was among the brightest we've ever had the privilege of working with. After confirmation he enthusiastically helped out with Sunday School or VBS and was active in Youth Group. But by his Junior or Senior year, we didn't see him as much. And now that he's in college, we don't see him at all, even when he's home for weekends.

God's Word does not return empty. Those who later became backdoor loses were not necessarily insincere when they sat in our pews or classrooms. Rather, their faith may not have matured enough to keep them coming on their own, once the pressure was removed. For this reason, young or weak in faith also need rapport with a mature Christian. They need someone who will reach out to them and with whom they feel comfortable. They need someone who can give encouragement and guidance in applying God's Word when faced with difficult temptations, challenges or decisions. Examples include:

- Parents;
- Grandparents, older brother and sisters, and other extended family members;
- A believing spouse;
- Pastors and teachers or former teachers;
- Youth leaders;
- Other Christians.

This concept of mentoring (or discipling) is nothing new.

*"Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up"—Deuteronomy 11:19.*

*"Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" Philippians 3:17.*

*"Then they (older women) can train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure and to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God"—Titus 2:4-5.*

### *C. Felt Needs*

Some have matured in their faith to the point where they no longer need any pressure to keep them coming, nor do they need quite as much one on one personal attention. They are self-motivated to come because the Word, as presented in worship or in Bible classes, is fulfilling felt needs. These felt needs can be many and varied:

- Assurances of God's love especially in difficult times;
- A sense of order and stability in an otherwise chaotic world;
- A moral foundation for their family and for society;
- Answers;
- A need to worship and to serve.
- Support and social outlets

There may be a (subconscious) tendency to rely on felt needs to keep twenty-somethings connected to the Word, because pressure to come is no longer there, and because rapport with a

mature Christian hasn't been sufficiently developed. However there are factors which may make this approach less effective among twenty-somethings. Some youth are too "invincible" to have felt needs. Their focus at this point in their life is the here and now. This is not saying they have no faith. But their faith needs to be nurtured. Their faith needs to grow. Others may have very great felt needs. But the church in their estimation is not addressing those needs. To them it seems everything is geared for families or older adults.

On the one hand the church is uniquely qualified to deal with felt needs. God's Word is all sufficient. On the other hand satisfying felt needs is *not* the primary mission of the church, any more than miracles of healing was the primary purpose of Jesus' ministry. These are things we want to do, because God is merciful. Yet for that very reason, more than anything else, we are sent to preach repentance and forgiveness in his name. Felt needs, then, are opportunities for us to serve. They are also tools God uses, and we can use, to keep people in contact with Law and Gospel, while their faith continues to mature.

#### *D. The Gospel*

We've all seen this. A family is very active in the church 'til the youngest is confirmed, or in some cases, 'til the youngest graduates from an area Lutheran high school. It isn't just the teens and the twenty-somethings who are falling away. It's happening among other age groups. I believe it's all the same process. What is left to keep a person coming is there is no pressure, if there's no one leading him by the hand, and if his felt needs have been met (or aren't being met)? The power of the Gospel!

But there are many attacks against our faith that would keep us from hearing the Word or applying it to ourselves:

- Taking the Gospel for granted and treating the threats of the Law lightly (Revelation 2:4);
- Fear of persecution (Revelation 2:10);
- Permissiveness toward immorality and false doctrine (Revelation 2:14-15);
- Tolerating those who promote immorality and false doctrine (Revelation 2:20);
- Being active in the church without being active in the Word (Revelation 3:1-3);
- Weakness (Revelation 3:8);
- Spiritual indifference that springs from affluence or pride (Revelation 3:15-17).

How can we fight off these attacks when one of the main instigators lives in us? Repent! Be faithful! Repent! Hold on to what we have! Wake up! Hold on to what we have! Repent!

All these admonitions remind us that the struggle against our sinful nature is constant, daily, and life-long. But our weapons and our strength are the means of grace. Luther writes in his Fourth of Baptism:

*What does baptizing with water mean?*

*It means that our Old Adam with his evil deeds and desires should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and die, and that day by day a new man should arise, as from the dead, to live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity now and forever.*

*Where is this written?*

*St. Paul says in Romans, chapter 6, “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*

Where one is confessing his sins before God and believing the promises, every attack to tear the Christian away from the Lord and his Word is defeated.

*“Therefore put on the whole armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand”—Ephesians 6:13.*

Where there is daily contrition and repentance there is also love for the Word.

*“I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord”—Psalm 122:1.*

*“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”—John 6:68.*

And where there is constant contact with the Word, there is growth in faith and in Christian living.

*“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love”—II Peter 2:4-7.*

And where there is growth in faith and in Christian living, there is continued daily contrition and repentance.

*“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall”—II Peter 1:8-10.*

And where there is continue daily contrition and repentance, there is also joy in salvation that wells up into joyful Christian living.

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”—Philippians 4:4-7.*

Naturally we would like everyone to keep growing in the Word out of love for it. But since that's not the case, we can use the first three reasons as opportunities to work on the fourth.

Our mission is to preach repentance and forgiveness in his name, so that through preaching our people will be led to daily contrition and repentance until they become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

## II. What Is Disconnecting People from the Word?

Satan has been working hard to neutralize everything that in the past has kept people in contact with the Word. Each of his attacks works with and reinforces the others.

### A. Youth Are Maturing Later in Life

This is a theory that may or may not be true. But it's something we may want to keep in mind. According to some researchers, children are maturing at a later age than they did a generation or two ago. What they're talking about is "concrete operations" verses "formal operations." Children base how they relate to their world on the concrete, on what they can immediately see or feel. Adults on the other hand can perceive unseen cause-and-effect relationships, and how these relate to their beliefs about life and about themselves. In my reading it was said there are three factors which can delay the transition from concrete to formal operations.

1. Lack of opportunity. Children develop formal operations through studies in language, music, and math and especially through interaction with adults. Yet:
  - The average five year old spends 25 minutes per week in close interaction with his father. That same child spends 25 hours a week in close interaction with the TV. A typical teenager watches about 5 hours of TV per day. By the time a child finishes high school, he will have spent 18,000 hours with the TV curriculum and only 12,000 with the school curriculum.<sup>1</sup>
  - Since 1970 single parent household have increased from 4 million to 8 million (page 253). With all the money-making and household tasks shifted over to the mother, research shows that the average single mother spends one third less time each week on dressing, feeding, playing, and talking with their children than married mothers do.<sup>2</sup>
2. Lack of motivation. Children move to formal operations by having to deal with pain or problems. But in stead of being guided by caring adults, many youth are able to numb themselves with pleasure or things.
  - Statistics vary but the best estimates indicate that there could be more than 4 million American alcoholics under the age of 18. And the age of experimentation is getting younger. Today's junior highers are facing decisions about drugs that were once reserved only for older youth.<sup>3</sup> Note: If kids are maturing later, their ability to deal with this would be even further diminished.
  - Teenagers spent 71 billion in 1989. 12-15 year olds spend \$32.50 per week; 16-17 year olds, \$53.90 per week; 18-19 year olds, \$78.89 per week.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Josh D. McDowell, *Research Almanac and Statistical Digest* (Julian, CA: Julian Press, 1995), p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

- Kids have access to adult pleasures without adult responsibilities. For some, what pressure are they under to grow up!?
3. Stress. Some kids tend to stay in concrete operations as a way of coping with their world, because they lack the skills, and no one is there to guide them. For what it's worth, here is a top-ten list of young adult worries.
- having a good marriage and family life;
  - choosing a career/finding steady work;
  - doing well in school;
  - being successful in line of work;
  - having strong friendships;
  - paying for college;
  - the country is going down hill;
  - making lots of money;
  - finding purpose and meaning in life;
  - contracting AIDS.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Implications to the church*

Formal operations are important in order for a young person to make the teachings of the Bible his own and apply them to his life. Years ago, many of the confirmands would have already been in formal operations when they went through instructions. Also, peers and family would have helped to keep them in the church as they continued maturing. Today, however, according to studies some youth are not developing formal operations until they are well into their twenties. Yet even if we moved confirmation to age 21, we'd still have a big challenge. When young people are in "concrete operations", Bible studies that require "formal operations" will be over their heads. On the other hand Bible studies that require only "concrete operations" will seem boring because it's the same thing they've been hearing ever since day school or Sunday School.

I believe this challenge can be met through the "hook, book, look, took" approach that's being used in the *Christ-light* curriculum. But in our preaching and catechism classes we have to be aware that perhaps not everyone is able to think on as deep a level as a generation or two ago. When teaching the deeper truths of God's Word, we may have to move more slowly when progressing from material that requires concrete operations to material that requires formal operations. One other frightening thought is this: If some of our youth are not developing formal operations until they are in their twenties, at that point in their life, what kind of adults are they more likely to be surrounded by? Christian or non-Christian?

#### *B. Loss of Rapport with Mature Christians*

We don't need a scientific study to know that many of our youth do not have rapport with a mature Christian. The reasons are many. Some are old. Some are new. Some, there's just more of:

- Absentee parents;
- Teens working;

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

- Fast-paced lifestyle of both adults and youth;
- Loss of the extended family;
- Mobility.

### *Implications to the church*

When I think about my congregation, the twenty-somethings who are active are those whose parents brought them along teens to worship and to other church functions. Unfortunately, what used to be done by the family both in modeling and in one on one instruction, now has to be done by the overworked staff of the congregation:

### *C. The Deification of the Self*

You can hardly turn on the TV or listen to a conversation, without hearing about how we need to feel good about ourselves, and we have to do whatever it takes to do so. Because this is what our society teaches, people expect, no they demand that their felt needs be met *now*. In connection with this, beginning with the baby-boomers and continuing with Generation X, people have been taught to judge a book by it's cover. If the production value isn't pleasing to the eye, it must not be worth anything.

### *Implications to the church*

We really have to have our act together in everything we do, including how we dress, how we put the bulletin and newsletter together, and how we present the Word in our services and Bible classes. The sloppy presentation of an overworked pastor or teacher is no longer forgivable, especially when there's a flashier church down the street. Unfortunately, spit and polish take time, time away from prayer and the study of God's Word, and time away from building rapport with His people.

### *D. Idolatry, Immorality, and False Doctrine*

There's nothing new here. Perhaps, there's just more of it, or, there's more contact with it available to our youth. However, our youth may also be becoming more susceptible to it if they're maturing at a later age, if they don't have rapport with mature Christians, and if they've been sucked into the never ending pursuit of satisfying felt needs through the things, pleasures, and philosophies of this world.

### *Implications to the church*

When the church calls for repentance of idolatry, immorality, or false doctrine, the church may be striking at the very thing. a young person feels he needs to get through life. As a result he may feel that the church's message of repentance and forgiveness in His name is both irrelevant and offensive.

There is a blessing that can come from Satan's attacks. My suspicion is that the church on earth has been (or is) relying too much on the first three causes for people staying in contact with the Word and hasn't been doing all that good of job with the fourth. However, before we begin evaluating what we've been doing, I'd like to point out some pitfalls.

## Pitfalls

1. Using pressure to keep a person in contact with the Word without one on one contact to make sure they are properly understanding and applying it to themselves. Possible result: boredom or resentment for being forced to hear it.
2. Removing all pressure before the seed of the Word has been worked into the heart. Possible result: bird (Satan) snatches the seed away.
3. Connecting youth to a person instead of to the Word and to the church as a whole. Possible result: when the person moves on to a new age bracket or a new location, contact with the Word is lost, and the seed is choked off by the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.
4. Trying to compete with the world in satisfying people's felt needs, even though we do have a better product for satisfying felt needs. Examples:
  - Concentrating too much on felt needs in our ministry may be reinforcing the deification of the self. The church must direct people's focus away from themselves to: What has God done for me? What does God want me to do as husband, wife, employee, etc.? What crosses does Jesus want me to carry? How does Jesus strengthen me to carry them? Might this not also serve as a pattern for our counseling?
  - While we want to do our best in presenting God's Word to *his glory* and "to be all things to all people," if we overemphasize production values, we may divert the focus from "preaching repentance and forgiveness in his name." We may also give the impression or even start believing that the power to fight sin and unbelief is man.

Results: while they receive the Word with joy at first, they have no root. When new troubles come along that the church can't immediately fix for them, they fall away.

5. Teaching God's Word without teaching Christ—John 5:39. Having people in church or in classrooms is not enough. We must demonstrate in the teaching of every doctrine how that doctrine exalts God's glory—his holiness and his love. Results of not doing this:
  - A missed opportunity to feed men's souls;
  - Feeding instead man's self-righteous pride;
  - A tendency to push the limits when applying the doctrine, which can result in controversy.
6. Consuming ourselves with fighting issues. When we see lambs and sheep being torn apart, we're tempted to launch a massive campaign to cut off that hydra head. Examples: TV, materialism, pornography, humanism, etc. Results: we may cut off a head, but it will grow back. And even while we're cutting that one off, lambs and sheep are being destroyed by six other heads. Worse yet, by getting wrapped up with issues, Satan draws us away from the one thing that can destroy his power. Every attack we launch must be used as an opportunity to preach repentance and forgiveness, calling forth daily contrition and repentance in all aspects of their life, not just for that one thing.
7. Moving too fast with Matthew 18 on people whose faith has not yet matured. However, patience is not the same as permissiveness. Patience is contacting with the Word at a level we are sure they understand again and again.
8. Making our people busy instead of making our people spiritual



- Spaghetti dinners, etc.;
- Unending tournaments, practices;
- Band and music programs, practices.

All of these can be used as opportunities to connect people to the word and to build rapport between youth and parents and other Christians. Let's make sure we're doing it.

### **Conclusion**

We know who this beast is and we know how to destroy his power. Instead of looking for "new" things as causes of backdoor loses, we have to make sure we haven't unwittingly let go of the "old" things. "*Fear God and give him glory.*" In everything we do and in every aspect of our ministry, that's what it's all about. May God grant that we are among those privileged to be doing this when he returns.

### *DISCUSSION QUESTIONS*

1. How is pressure that keeps people in contact with the Word different today than it was 50 years ago?
2. We don't hesitate to use pressure on our children. We simply make them come to church, etc. What pressure may parents or the church use at what age?
3. Consider all the various programs of our congregations and schools. Do they encourage or hinder families in talking with each other about the real issues of their faith? In what ways?
4. How can congregations foster rapport building within the family? with other Christians? What opportunities for rapport building can be created?
5. How can congregations stay in tune with the felt needs of their youth and twenty-somethings? What approaches can be used to address those needs?
6. Is it better to have separate Bible classes for twentysomethings, or is it better to join the whole body of Christ into one Bible class? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach? How can we have the best of both?
7. Going back to Revelation 2 and 3. Do our twenty-somethings understand that these attitudes in them need to be watched out for and repented of (with the exception of fear of persecution and weakness—there they need to hold on)? Do they also understand they need to flee from these attitudes whenever they run into them in society? How can we increase their awareness of these dangers?
8. In our preaching and teaching how are we doing in presenting at a level people can understand: - specific Law that condemns; - specific Gospel that forgives; - specific Law that guides; - specific Gospel that empowers and equips? What can we do to improve?
9. How can our people be trained to look for these things in their personal and-family devotions, and to use them for discipline and encouragement of one another?
10. What kind of training and encouragement are we giving to our people to examine themselves in the mirror of God's Law, to confess their sins before him and to one another, and to apply the Gospel to themselves for comfort and strength? How can we do this better?

11. How can we more effectively use the opportunities we already have (baptisms, pre-marriage counseling, family crisis, hospitalization, funerals, etc.) to lead our people to daily contrition and repentance?
12. What new opportunities can we create in using pressure, rapport with mature Christians, and felt needs to keep twenty-somethings in contact with the message of repentance and forgiveness in his name?

## **TWENTY-SOMETHINGS—COMMENTARY, SUGGESTIONS**

*By: Alan H. Siggelkow - BPS*

Pastor Raether describes an emotional wrestling with this topic. I share his experience. Emotional!—Personal!

For years the three-panel painting of the Prodigal Son by Professor J. P. Koehler stood against the wall of the Synod Archives at the Seminary. When they ripped it out of the wall at St. John's Wauwatosa, they left the nails in it. One had to be careful not to get too close to the paintings as they leaned against the wall in the archives. The nails bit you if you did.

The whole issue of Twenty-somethings is like that. It is an emotional issue that threatens to rip us up with fear, with guilt, with self-blaming and blaming of others, and with the real pain of and the real sorrow of seeing our children—our future whom we love—leaving their only hope for peace on this earth and their only hope for joy in eternity.

This issue is one that is personal; that is very emotional.

What can the Synod—more specifically, the BPS—do about twenty-somethings losses? We are tempted to say, “Very little!” The issue is too personal. It takes the personal mentor. It takes the time of a person of God working with another child of God face-to-face, one-on-one, with the Word and with issues surrounding the Word. It takes personal faith-driven Law toughness and personal Gospel-soaked patience. It takes personal Christian maturity, love, and caring to seize the opportune time to proclaim, to remind, to rebuke, to listen, to repent, to encourage repentance, to absolve, and to encourage the fruits of repentance.

*Galatians 6:10 There fore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

*II Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Often, for the issue to be resolved, it takes time for the rebellion of immaturity and the mutual parent and child anger of nest-launching to clear from the relationship. But time is not the healer, repentance is.

### **The Parable of the Prodigal Son—The Repentance Model**

In the parable of the prodigal son we see neither son acting out of mature faith. One tests the father's love by squandering wealth and licentious living. The other tests the father's love with his unforgiving attitude. The lessons are huge for how the church deals with those who have fallen away.

The contrition part of repentance is always the recognition that our greatest fear is true. We have not been able to do it on our own. We have not been able to live without our Heavenly Father. We have tried and we have failed—repeatedly—damnably. We are no longer worthy to be called the sons of God. We have no pride left. We are miserable sinners. Contrition brings us face-to-face with the reality of our own sinful mortality.

*Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death.*

This is what the specific proclamation of the Law of God does. *Thou art the man!* This is something that is probably best done personally. It certainly is often best received when it is done personally.

*Matthew 15:18-19 Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.*

Recall in your own life: It is not easy for the launchee in a time of rebellion to say, “I’m sorry.” At such an emotion-charged time it is also not easy for the launcher to say, “I forgive you.” Both sentences are very personal and very emotional. Much of the problem with twenty-somethings and their relationship to the church of their parents may have to do with their relationship to their parents. The ultimate act of rebellion is the act of outwardly rejecting the faith of one’s parents. It will hurt them more deeply than any other act of rebellion. It can be the hardest for parents to cope with. It causes the most pain and the most guilt and the most concern.

The prodigal son rejected the morality of his father. He squandered his father’s inheritance. He had the live-forever syndrome of the young. He had the know-it-all attitude of the protected child. He would be used, abused, and tossed aside in a sinful world, but he did not know that yet. He would learn it. Sometimes that has to happen. When it does happen, we need to be there in the time of crisis.

It is my experience that there is a remembrance of grace on the part of many of the twenty-somethings. It is sometimes a remembrance of cheap grace. But in the despair of the *valley of the shadow of death* many remember: “My Father loves me!” For many who have gone through our system there is still the hope of objective justification in them. It is a hope that we need to strengthen. It is the remembrance of the precious grace that we need to strengthen! It is the remembrance of the grace won by the holy, precious blood of the Son of God shed for us.

What made the son come *to his senses*? The harsh law of God was preached to him by the terrible mess that he had made of his life. But in his despair, he trusted his father to rely on his father’s mercy and compassion. He knew the record of his father in dealing with his hired men. *Objective justification* needs to be at the heart and soul of all of our preaching and teaching. The cross of Christ for all sinners is God’s theme for our ministries.

Be there for the twenty-something! Be close enough to the family or train the parents to tell you that the time of crisis is there so that you can come to talk to their child, or train the parents to do it themselves. In those times of crises in the life of the twenty-something.

*Listen in love.*

*Proclaim objective justification.*

*Apply specific Law.* Upon contrition,

*Apply specific Gospel.*

*Talk about the fruits of repentance.*

It is true what they said about Jesus: *Luke 15:2 This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.*

It is true of the shepherds of the Good Shepherd.

We need to say a few words about the “fear of returning syndrome.” “What will people say when I first come back to church?” “My parents will be the winners then.” “They will never forgive me.” “I could never go back to that church!” One wonders about contrition when one hears those words. Yet, we need to train our church council members and our people to be joyful about the return of the lost. We need to show the joy of the father, sometimes more quietly, but still communicated carefully to the returnee. In our welcome we need to live objective justification.

This brings us to the reaction of the stay-at-home brother in the parable. The brother *refused to go in* to the feast the father was holding for the returned brother. He seemed to be jealous. He seemed to hold the father’s mercy and compassion and forgiveness against him. He could not forget the anger that had grown inside of him when he saw how his brother had hurt his father. He did not understand grace. Perhaps he did not understand his own imperfection—sin. “How can my brother be treated this way by my father when my brother has hurt him so? How can my brother get what I don’t get—what I deserve because of my faithfulness to my father?” Work-righteousness and self-righteousness are obvious here. Anger is in opposition to love and concern for souls. Works are in opposition to grace.

The father has it right. There is joy and love for both sons. Gently the father chides his unforgiving son:

*Luke 15:31-32 My son... you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*

We are a church that lives *God so loved the world!* We are a church that lives *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ!* The world includes the fallen away, the lost, the rebellious twenty-somethings with their lackadaisical attitudes. These are not our shame. These are our opportunities.

We need to communicate to each other that we have a responsibility of love to express the Law in love and the Gospel in love to all the much maligned *dead-wood*.

We need to be much less institutional and much less concerned about numbers. We need to be much more concerned about souls. We need to devise ways and methods to be more personal and better communicators of the love of the Good Shepherd which is expressed in both his Law and his Gospel. In our eagerness to reclaim the lost we view them as not our problem, but as the opportunity to serve our Savior as his undershepherds.

### **The BPS and the Opportunity**

We are moving away from the personal. We cannot move away from the emotional. The following list is not all-inclusive. It is not very creative. It may be that you are all doing all or much of this already. You certainly will have better ideas than this relative outsider. We do not mean to offend by our bluntness or our ignorance or our naiveté.

*Develop an awareness - a sensitivity*

- To the opportunity to show love and concern and caring for God's people who are struggling with maturing, with rebellion, with Satan - whether they are twenty-somethings or older or younger.
  - Study to be able to alert people to the signs and the process of falling away
  - Teach early intervention with the Law and the Gospel.
  - Teach patience
  - Teach people to keep in contact with those who fallen away - a contact that does not compromise God's Word but that does show a caring heart.
- To the opportunity to serve the parents of these young people. They are the people experiencing tremendous, and often hidden, shame, fear, guilt, frustration, and pain.
  - Develop a realistic ministry to parents that shows sympathy, concern, love; that is encouraging, that teaches them how to pray, that prays with them, that removes the anger and replaces it with forgiveness and forgetting.
  - Teach and counsel parents to seize every opportunity to renew the ties with their child.
  - Encourage parents to keep in contact with their child. Emotional cutoff is not Christian love no matter what the child has done to you. This does not mean that we will be teaching our parents not to rightly apply the Law. We will be teaching them that it is not "me vs. my child" or "my child against me-" It is Satan against my family, my child, and me.
  - Encourage pastors to keep in contact with the twenty somethings. Encourage them to develop the attitude that this is a fight against Satan and not against the twenty something.
- Teach congregations practical ways to keep the contacts with twenty-somethings strong and active.
  - Develop stronger and more specific training in ministry to the lost at WLS and in continuing education to pastors and teachers.
  - Train congregations to welcome back with joy those who have been dead and now are alive.
  - Encourage congregations to exercise more patience in dealing with twenty-somethings—but with the reminder that patience does not include a neglect of contact, a neglect of the use of Law, a neglect of the joy of the Gospel.
  - Research practical and Scriptural ways to do mentoring in a congregation. Tacitus complained that the early Christians must be incestuous because they called each other brother and sister. Mentoring is more than father to son, mother to daughter. It is also and especially generational and congregational. Use active twenty-somethings to be in contact with the inactive. Develop materials to make it work. Train the elderly to mentor the twenty-somethings in the congregation.
  - Train congregational secretaries to delegate a program of contacts with all members Re.: birthdays, baptism days, confirmation days, wedding anniversaries, etc.
  - Train and encourage our pastors to preach to all members and all age groups regardless of marital status, gender, sports preferences, age, economic situation. Get our sermons briefer—15 to 17 minutes, better organized, better memorized,

lively, personal (to the member), and exuding Law and Gospel rightly applied. Do the same with worship.

- Family Ministry
  - Encourage and comfort parents and children dealing with the reality of the pain living in or living apart from a fighting and feuding family
  - Teach issues dealing with forgiveness, family relationships, forgetting, healing, communicating in Christian love.
  - Teach how to call to repentance. This is a Christian Communication Skill. -how to use specific law in love without name-calling.
  - Teach how to communicate the Gospel in Word and deed in pressure situations.
  - Teach about fruits of repentance and how to talk about them
  - Develop materials for non-traditional families, for singles of all ages
- Use the events in life as a time to call back to the church—to the Word
  - Train parents to let the pastor know about those events in a timely manner
    - graduations
    - away at college
    - military moves
    - new jobs
    - family funerals, loss of grandparents or other close relatives and friends who were or were not members of the congregation
    - marriages
    - family weddings
    - new home, apartment, move out of the house
    - children
    - the need for the children to be Baptized
    - school for children (Sunday School)
    - new car
  - Train pastors to seize the above opportunities of life and maturing (see list immediately above) as a time to show love and concern and caring
    - souls are at stake - its worth the time
    - train in life events spiritual counseling
- Use elderly
  - to mentor
  - prayer-chain
  - as recipients of youth services - shopping - telephone contacts - chores
- Brainwash the children - Christian training while we have them
  - Christian education - LES, SS, Home
  - memorization
  - repetition
  - application
  - modeling care and love and concern
- Use modern media
  - even the internet
  - keep in touch in every way possible
  - Be alert to warn against the influence of a corrupt society communicated through media

- Be prepared to counter the pride of the young intellectual who is being taught that wisdom exists without or apart from God's Wisdom.
- Continue to emphasize soul conservation tools available through CSM—get contacts, keep the communication line active and open - parents to church to CSM, etc.
- Continue to emphasize campus ministry—get contacts, keep the communication line active and open
- Develop a system of WELS Counselors to help pastors and parents. Train these counselors in Law/Gospel Repentance Counseling and in Christian family issues.
- Use the WLC&FS Care Line
- AODA issues
  - training of called workers
  - availability of counseling

The BPS needs to be sensitive to the pain of those who need this ministry and to the outward callousness of others who need this ministry. The BPS needs to be sensitive in all it does to the fact that this is a personal, loving, care for souls.

## Psalm 32

1. Blessed is he  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.  
2 Blessed is the man  
whose sin the LORD does not count against  
him and in whose spirit is no deceit.  
3 When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.  
4 For day and night  
your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.  
5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the LORD"—  
and you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.  
6 Therefore let everyone who is godly pray  
to you while you may be found;  
surely when the mighty waters rise,  
they will not reach him.  
7 You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance.  
8 I will instruct you and teach you in the  
way you should go;  
I will counsel you and watch over you.  
9 Do not be like the horse or the mule,  
which have no understanding  
but must be controlled by bit and bridle  
or they will not come to you.  
10 Many are the woes of the wicked,  
but the LORD's unfailing love  
surrounds the man who trusts in him.  
11 Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you  
righteous; sing, all you who are upright in  
heart!

## The Repentance Model

- A. (1-2) Confidence is given that God does forgive sins because of Christ. Objective Justification.
- B. (3-4) Specific Law is spoken and heard
- C. (5a) Sin is acknowledged. The sin is against God. True contrition.
- D. (5c) Specific Gospel is spoken and heard.
- E. (6-7) Faith in God's forgiveness in Christ is confessed. Absolution is proclaimed.
- F. (8-10) Sanctified Christian living is discussed. The fruits of repentance.  
  
(vs. 9-10 are a warning not to produce fruits that are driven by Law, but by the Gospel.)
- G. (vs. 11) The joy of Christian living is experienced.