

Why Are We Losing Our Young People?

Introduction. In Luke 15:12, a young man said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." His father gave him his portion of the inheritance, and not many days later, he took a journey into a distant country and wasted his substance with riotous living.

Adam and Eve lost Cain and Abel, Aaron lost Nadab and Abihu, Eli lost Hophni and Phineas, and David lost Amnon and Absalom. One of our better human qualities is that we try to warn the upcoming generation of what we think has been the failures of the past. Through this process, we have the ability to change what could be a very tragic situation. The man in Luke 15 could not effect a change in his son; he could only hope and pray for his return.

Satan has many devices and schemes to pull people away from the living God (2 Corinthians 2:11), but the more instruction and exhortation we can provide will give our children a better chance at eternal life. Although there is probably no one single answer that fits every case, we will examine three prominent reasons why we lose our young people.

I. ***Too Few Observable Priorities Set By Parents In The Home***

- A. The kingdom is not talked about in a positive way (Romans 14:17).
 1. Children need to see how it has benefited their parents to be Christians. Love, joy, and peace must be celebrated and talked about as benefits of God's kingdom.
 2. Children need to comprehend the miseries of non-Christians (Romans 6:12, 21).
 - a) As children grow up, they will see people in pain and misery because of sin (Proverbs 20:1; 23:21, 29-35). Children need to be taught at a young age that righteousness is far better (Proverbs 7:1-5).
 - b) Unless they see a danger in departing from God, and unless they see benefits to being faithful to God, they will not see a need for God themselves (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9).
- B. Attendance is not viewed as a great pleasure, but as a burdensome chore (Psalm 122:1).
 1. They will pick up early on the parent's attitudes toward classes and assemblies.
 2. If you would rather stay home and watch television and your children know it, then it will not be planted in their hearts as something to be desired. They will wonder why you can do other activities (shop, attend ball games in the cold and rain, etc.) but use every excuse there is not to attend the assemblies (Matthew 6:33).

3. Do not criticize the people who take part in the congregation's work. Look at the positive side of those efforts, and if you can do better than them, do it, but do not make it a negative experience for those young souls. Compliment them as much as possible on the way home. Talk of how much you enjoy being with God's people.
- C. The "thorn bushes" choke the word in young minds (Luke 8:14).
1. Too many children are raised to learn that the desire for possessions is expected and that they should be given on demand. We feed covetousness and they come to expect it more than spiritual priorities (Luke 12:15).
 2. Do they ever see us giving more when we prosper more (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)? Do they ever see you depriving yourself of a luxury because the work of the church is a higher priority?
 3. If they hear us talk and dream of worldly treasures more than they hear us dream of spiritual accomplishments and heaven, then we have planted the thorns of materialism that will grow alongside any spiritual teaching and choke it to death.
 4. We must work to remove the thorn bushes in our own hearts. If we are torn between two masters, they will see the misery it is causing us (Matthew 6:19-24).

II. ***Too Little Concern For Saving Souls***

- A. Concern for people who have drifted away needs to be mentioned often in the home. Exhort your children by telling them that drifting away can be very easy sometimes, as might be the case with someone in the congregation (Jeremiah 3:6-11, 22; 8:5).
- B. Efforts to save other people will not only help you spiritually in your own personal growth, but it will plant a seed in their hearts that we are to believe that souls are real and important (Acts 8:18-22; Galatians 2:11-15; cf. Proverbs 11:30; James 5:20).
1. If they never see us call someone who was absent, or have a study with someone, or invite someone, or write someone about the importance of the Lord's church, then they will not likely see why it should be important to them (cf. Ezekiel 16:44).
 2. If they know early and all through their lives that you want your family to go to heaven and be there together, they will see the value of faithfulness and its relationship to salvation.

III. ***Too Little Follow-Up When They Leave Home***

- A. More and more children are going away to college, and this is usually where we lose them. Children have new freedoms and new friends

with those who usually do not share the values you tried very hard to instill in them (Proverbs 29:15).

- B. Many years ago psychologist Ruth Berenda carried out an interesting experiment with teenagers designed to show how a person handled group pressure.
1. They brought groups of ten students into a room for a test. Each group was instructed to raise their hand when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. But what one person in the group did not know was that nine of the others in the room had been instructed ahead of time to vote for the second-longest line.
 2. When the nine teenagers voted for the wrong line, the subject would typically glance around, frown in confusion, and slip his hand up with the group. The instructions were repeated and the next card was raised. About 75% of the time, the self-conscious student would sit there saying a short line is longer than a long line, simply because he lacked the courage to challenge the group (cf. Proverbs 1:10; 23:17).
- C. Interestingly, secular education usually has little to do with what habits they form away from home. Certainly, self-developed convictions will lead young people astray, but more are lead away by habits such as staying up late on Saturday nights and taking jobs that keep them from services. Both of these, combined with a lack of spiritual supervision, will cause precious young souls to leave God behind when they leave for college.
1. When moving them into the college away from home, set up a meeting with a member in the nearest faithful congregation and have them to call you if they are not attending.
 2. If they will not be responsible enough to attend, then get them back home and let them attend a local college and remain under your house rules until they can provide totally for themselves. Remember, the welfare of their soul is a far greater responsibility than their education.

Conclusion. It is a wonderful sight to see that some young people are developing their own convictions and remain loyal to Christ through the ups and downs and trials of life. If we want the number to increase, we must begin right now in our own hearts and in our own homes. Remember that there is only a short time to plant the good seed. A lot will fall away in spite of all we try to do. But let us work diligently to do all we can to help save their precious souls and ours in the process.