

Keeping Kids in the Kingdom

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Progression of Thought

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The young man had come from a “good” family. I don’t personally know much about the mother, but the father I can attest for. The father was a believer, a very spiritual person. He was a man of worship and supported the services of the Lord very generously. The dad was a man of prayer and a man very much concerned for the pure teaching and preaching of the Word. Yes, the son was from a “good” family, at least when viewed from paternal patronage. So what went wrong?

This young man grew up to be a spiritual horror to his family and to his neighbors. Indeed, most of the people in the whole area knew about him. He vandalized the church sanctuary, making sure the blasphemous symbols and sacrilegious objects were in plain sight. He murdered his own sons and got away with it, pleading that god was pleased. He daubed in the occult and tried witchcraft. He consulted with mediums and spiritists. All the poisonous “pleasures” of the flesh were practices he relished. He was a man who celebrated violence, covering his hands with much innocent blood.

Most tragic of all, he was not content to sin so heinously against his God. He wanted others to join him in his “alternative lifestyles and independent thinking.” Because of his family fame, he found willing ears to listen to his sordid enticements. Countless souls were led away from the Savior and led to hell because of this young man. What went wrong?

Perhaps you don’t personally know such an horrific apostasy, but any apostasy is tragic. Dig out your confirmation picture. Look at the faces. How many names can you still attach to those young portraits of promise? How many do you know are still active in the Word? Look at your own extended family and relationship. Are there any “straying sheep” whose names are usually not mentioned at the Thanksgiving table because mom will start crying and dad will silently shudder and leave the room? As called workers, look at previous classes of students that came into your presence day after day after day. At one time you were an integral part of their daily life. Do you still see them, if not daily, then weekly? Or is it monthly? Or is it an occasional Easter breakfast? Look at the confirmation classes on the picture wall in the fellowship hall. Shepherds, walk past those pictures and count the number of sheep missing from the flock today. Is the ratio higher than the proverbial parable of 99 and 1? If so, what are we doing to reach and teach the missing members of the flock?

The topic assigned by your program committee is a very practical concern for each of us. It is a concern that weighs heavily on every pastor and teacher. Early on in our ministries, tears were probably shed and prayers ascended every year at confirmation time. Perhaps, after a decade or two of ministry, confirmation time finds us shrugging our shoulders at the inevitable. This topic needs to sear our soul. As mothers and fathers, as opas and omas, as aunts and

uncles—these are our children. More importantly, these are the Lord’s own, redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb and baptized into the Name at which hell shudders.

Although a menu choice at countless conferences before this gathering, the entree is worth serving again. This doctrinal paper will not present some haute cuisine or program du jour to solve the problem. Perhaps you will hear nothing more than leftovers. But even leftovers can nourish. With apologies to a former co-worker (now retired—he always claimed that kids are goats, and they do not sit in his classroom) let’s pray about keeping kids in the kingdom and may the Spirit bless our work with the Word so that the tragedy of the previous case history not be repeated. Permit a pause for prayer.

Jesus, my dear Master, teach me how to teach; draw me to thee, that I may bring to thee these whom thou has given to me. Our children have been baptized at thy bidding; O, now give me grace to teach them to keep what thou has commanded. Testify thou to their souls; and awaken their hearts to a living faith, that they may embrace thee and give themselves wholly to thee. Prepare them by the power of thy Holy Spirit and also through the instruction and prayer of thy servant for a worthy reception of the Holy Supper. Make them willing to renew their vows to thee and more and more to renounce the devil. Defend them against the evil one, that these souls, redeemed by thy blood, may not be lost nor go astray. They are thine, Lord Jesus; therefore keep them in thy love; stablish, strengthen, settle them even in this hour, and keep them by thy power and grace unto eternal life. Amen.ⁱ

Who are the kids?

After that rather lengthy introduction, can you identify the basic premise I started with? Do you agree with it? Although I never specifically asked the program committee, I assumed that this paper is to address the issue of youth retention in our churches and schools. I imagine that you heard the paper’s title and also assumed that we are talking about youth. To narrow the age focus down even more specifically, are we addressing the post-confirmation drop out? Are we going to examine the “Bermuda triangle” of spiritual activity, that period from confirmation until marriage (and/or the birth of that baby who now needs baptism) when we seem to lose countless souls without a trace? Now that we have identified the premise I began with, can we identify the dangers connected with that premise?

I sometimes feel that our approaches to the teen members of our congregation represent a paradox that puzzles them at best, and alienates them at worst. One pastor wrote, “It is absurd to see people look upon teenagers as immature human beings, but as soon as they have been confirmed to consider them mature Christians.”ⁱⁱ Does confirmation suddenly confirm a spiritual maturity upon young people? After years of being guarded and guided by adults, do we suddenly flip the switch at confirmation and tell them they are capable of personal responsibility for the use of the Means of Grace? Or do we help these young Christians grow into that joyful use?

At the other end of the spectrum is the tendency to pigeonhole the teen members into a third membership category. We have the baptized souls. We have the adult communicants. And then there are the teens. A WELS pastor warned: “Young people do not wish to be catered to or set apart from the rest of the congregation.”ⁱⁱⁱ A question that each called worker needs to ask is whether or not I unconsciously foster a “we-they” attitude between adult members of the congregation and the teen members. Paul said, “so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Ro 12:5) Youth work in our congregations deserves the very best efforts of presenting Word and Sacrament, but never in a condescending manner.

Permit an observation gleaned from *Youthworker* magazine. A Christian pastor by the name of Mark Driscoll is responding to an interviewer's question: "Is the church in trouble?"

One of our services is turning primarily into teenagers, and I asked the high school kids, "Do you guys want a youth group?" And they said, "If you make a youth group, we'll leave this church. We refuse to be in a youth group. We're here because you preach to us, give us theology, give us communion, give us worship. If you treat us like adults, we'll act like adults." These are kids with nose rings, tattoos, Goth-painted faces, skateboarders. These are hardcore punk kids, straight-edge kids. And we think they're not going to church because they hate God, despise community, and don't want teaching? No! their intelligence has been insulted.^{iv}

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not speaking about nor against the need for youth ministry in our congregations, and for well run youth groups. But I am questioning if we have subconsciously sent a message that we never intended to send. The paper's title "keeping kids in the kingdom" could just as easily be stated "keeping souls in the kingdom." The basic premise needs clarification. The issue is not about teens falling away. The issue is about all of us falling away.

We are the kids! You have assigned the passage countless times. "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Co. 10:12) Alexander and Hymenaeus could be my middle names as often as I have fallen in the struggle against sin, and came perilously close to "shipwrecking the faith." (1 Ti 1:19-20) How dare I focus on the danger to others and overlook the danger to my own condition, "so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." (1 Co 9:27) Any discussion about the dangers to apostasy is couched in prayerful humility, with the full realization that such a danger exists for every soul this side of heaven. Satan is not a pussycat, but a roaring lion that thoroughly enjoys a meal of seasoned Christian as well as a snack of tender yearlings.

Yet amazingly, "how great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 Jo 3:1) All of us were born outside of the family of God, indeed born outside of life itself as we came into the world corpses, dead and reeking of sin. Yet God took mercy upon each and every one of us. Through the blood of the Lamb the stench of sin is atomized, and now we give off the aroma of resurrection life that smells cleaner than any sprinkle a day could achieve. Through the precious washing of water and Word we are united into our Savior and declared to be God's own, in whom he is pleased—for Jesus' sake. As we discuss the topic of keeping kids in the kingdom, remember we are the kids, all of us, regardless of age. In heaven there will be no societal or family structure based upon the age brackets or relationship categories that are second nature to us now. My grandfather in heaven is also my brother in the faith. And we are brothers with the Lord Jesus! "Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers." (Heb 2:11) In attitude and in speech, we are to view the younger members of our church family as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

This viewpoint does not negate the position of awesome responsibility that the divine call has laid upon our shoulders. We are called to serve with the Word, through teaching and rebuking, through correcting and admonishing, through instruction and prayer. But our handling of that precious responsibility is tempered with this understanding. "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." (Eph 4:4-7)

Having established that caveat, we can proceed cautiously in our view of the topic. We are speaking about youth in our congregations, who have been baptized and nurtured in the Word. We are not addressing the issue of evangelistic outreach in youth work. The issue is nurture. Perhaps some specifically WELS statistics might be helpful at this point.^v

- WELS pastors confirm 6% of the babies they baptize
- 40% of each year's confirmands will become inactive by the Sunday after Memorial Day
- 5% of our WELS homes have daily Bible study
- 42% of all WELS congregations offer teen Bible class
- 6% of WELS teenagers attend some type of Bible study
- 75% of WELS teens attend public high schools
- At age 19, 38% of our LES grads attend worship
- At age 19, 32% of public school confirmands worship as often as twice a month

How does your congregation fair in comparison? Such contemplation leads us to ask the next question.

What is the Kingdom?

I hope that the above question again forces us to briefly examine the basics. When we speak of keeping kids in the kingdom, are we unified and clarified on the goal? I have no doubt that in our confessional church body there is a proper understanding that we are dealing here with issues of the invisible church. I fear, though, that sometimes the outward attendance by our youth at things of the visible church is joyfully accepted on our part as proof that they are staying with the Savior. What is our goal? Is it maintaining church membership in the congregation? Is it increasing the size of the youth group? Is it tapping the energy and enthusiasm of our youth for service activities in the church that the previous generation now finds too burdensome or boring? Are the prayers that we offer to the Lord Jesus in behalf of the youth peppered with petitions like: "Lord, make our youth eager to come to church." "Lord, bless our youth ministry and the efforts of the counselors to work with the youth." "Lord, keep our youth active in the congregation." "Lord, spare our youth the turmoil of temptation." None of those requests need be wrong. Yet I challenge you to examine your perspective in your prayer life for the youth. "Lord Jesus, teach them to pray." "Lord Jesus, move them to repent." "Lord Jesus, remind them of what you have done." "Lord Jesus, protect them from the evil one and allow them to receive your strength in temptation." "Lord Jesus, make your Word sweeter than honey to their hearts." Make your focus the Spirit's work with the word in the personal lives of the youth, not just, nor primarily, in the congregational lives of your youth.

We wring our hands at the sad statistic quoted above: 40% of each year's confirmands will become inactive by the Sunday after Memorial Day. Do we clasp them in prayer or in resignation? Why should called workers who know their Bible history be surprised at such a statistic? After all, the Scriptures have clearly revealed the tendencies of human nature. It only took 40 days for a whole generation to fall away after seeing and hearing the presence of God at Sinai. Six weeks, and here comes the calf! With a called worker crafting it! The work of keeping kids in the kingdom begins with the Baptist's clarion call, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." It is a call that the youth hear from our lips but also need to see in our lives and observe in our ministries. The call to repentance is a daily and continual fruit of holy Baptism that the Spirit works in the lives of God's people. Is it any wonder that Luther listed it as number one on that

famous list of 95? “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ [Mt 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”^{vi}

And repentance, in the broadest sense, includes also the trust and confidence a sinner has in Jesus as the only answer to the dilemma in the heart and the guilt in the conscience. Through faithful preaching and teaching of the Gospel the soul hears the wondrous news, “Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.” (Mt 9:2, paraphrased) When we speak of the kingdom, we are speaking of the Spirit’s work within human hearts. We are speaking of the second petition of our Lord’s perfect prayer. Refocus on the simple spiritual priority of keeping a soul with the life-giving Word, for then and only then can the Spirit be unleashed. Jesus says, “The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” (Lk 17:20-21) Are we clear on the Kingdom? A word study on the New Testament usage of the phrase “kingdom of God” would bring rich results for called workers by placing sharper lens into the glasses through which we view ministry. In excess of 150 entries are listed in Strong’s concordance for the entry “kingdom.” The Spirit of God has much to say about what we are working in and working for. Let’s make sure our youth understand our prayers for them and the goal we wish to set before them.

When we are able to answer the question “What is the kingdom?” we are also well on our way to answering the next question prompted by the paper’s title.

How do we keep them in the precious kingdom?

We don’t! Peter tells us that we “through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Pe 1:5) Later in the same letter Pastor Peter writes, “The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” (1 Pe 5:10) Pastor Paul also points to God’s work in keeping us close to the Savior. “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being.” (Eph 3:16) These apostles are simply echoing what God himself promised to his people through the prophet Isaiah. God says, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isa 41:10) Make no mistake about it. The work of preservation in the faith is just as much God’s miraculous activity unleashed as the work of conversion to the faith. Let’s not kid ourselves about keeping kids in the kingdom. Only the Lord Christ can protect and preserve. And you know the tools he uses.

Through the Means of Grace the soul is kept safe in the Savior. Specifically, the Gospel is that sword of the Spirit which fends off Satan and cuts through his hellish temptations. Only the Gospel preaches the resurrection victory for victorious living right now. Keeping kids in the kingdom means flooding them with the good news over and over and over again. Bombard them with the creedal truths of salvation. Teens (and adults for that matter) search for identity and a sense of purpose in life. Teens look to role models and seek fellowship. Be a role model and remind them in your life of First Article gospel truths. At a time in life when looks mean everything to the teen, and being part of an “in-crowd” is so important, patiently and loving remind them of what Jesus says. Each and every one of them is a special creation of a loving Father. Each and every one of them, and us, is a person unique in abilities and talents. Each and every individual is someone whose hairs the omniscient Lord has counted daily. Each and every one has the promise of a loving Father who sends his holy angels to walk with them. Identity for the Christian is a wondrous gift of God’s grace. Each and every one of them can be guaranteed a

life of contentment in Christ. God will provide and preserve, and can keep them safe from the tidal wave of greedy materialism. *USA Today*, issue of October 6, 1998, reported on what worries teens. In 1997 53% of teens worried about not getting into college, up from 36% in 1988; 52% worried about not getting a good job, up from 32% the decade earlier; 49% worried about dying, up from 38% in 1988.

Be a role model and in your attitude and speech remind them of Second Article gospel truths. God has purchased them. As his “slaves” they are free, free from sin and death, free from worry and doubt, free to serve in righteousness and innocence now and forever. We Americans always look to the new and like the improved version. Remind them, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Co 5:18) Thanks to the glorious work of Jesus in our behalf, we can look in the mirror and see glory, not just an advertisement for Biore strips.

Be a role model and let them see Third Article gospel truths in your daily conduct. The Holy Spirit of God has changed them, and made them more than eating machines or music addicts. (Tangent—*Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 6, 1998 issue, reported that more than 60% of people aged 14-30 would give up food before giving up music. More than 56% said they would rather be music stars than movie stars or famous politicians. Am I tuned in to what tunes them up?) The Holy Spirit has graced them with his presence. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Co 6:19-20) Look past the bedroom they inhabit and the piles on the floor. Look and see what God sees in Christ Jesus—a temple more glorious than Solomon’s, an eternal temple that will be changed to reflect the glory of God’s own Son. (Php 3:21) Paul says to the Ephesian church, “And in him (Christ) you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” (Eph 2:22) As the temple of the living Lord, what honor they have! What a privilege to go directly to the throne of God in personal prayer. What joy to be cemented together with other Christians in a gathering no gang could ever rival. “In him (Christ) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.” (Eph 2:21)

Such elemental reminders seem almost out of place. Yet do we take the time and make the talk with our youth. Keeping kids in the kingdom means a lot of one on one gospel ministry, showing a soul all the great things God has done for him or her; teaching a soul all the wonderful promises God has placed on the table of Scripture for us to grab. Don’t rely on just a well-run youth program, as vital and Gospel centered as it might be. Take the time, make the time to keep the contact with these souls a priority. Be a visible role model to these Christians, so that they can “remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace.” (Heb 13:7-9)

Such constant Gospel nourishment is desperately needed “because the days are evil.” (Eph 5:16) The world we live in is hostile to the faith. It always has been and always will be. For our spiritual descendants, it is a scary world to be growing up in.

Timeless Temptations and Timely Threats

The father of lies has not changed his basic *modus operandi* since he slithered through that tree and confronted Eve. “Did God really say” is still his powerful and potent poison with

which he infects souls with a me-first selfishness, a damning transgression of the first commandment. Name the temptation that confronts us and our youth today. It is nothing new or different. Sin is a sad rerun of human weakness against the temptation to pleasure, self-indulgence, arrogant selfishness, cold lovelessness, and on and on. Temptations are timeless in the sense that sin doesn't change. Yet Satan does a superb job in repackaging sin for a new generation. That crafty trickster makes the old temptations bright and shiny for a new age. In some ways, the world is a different world than the one we grew up in. Recognize Satan's hand in the attacks to the faith.

Over the past thirty years in America we see a society that is not nurturing of our youth. Stephen Covey^{vii} charts a sad decline:

- Illegitimate birth rates have increased more than 400%
- Percentage of families headed by a single parent has more than tripled
- Divorce rate has more than doubled
- Teenage suicide has increased almost 300%
- SAT scores among all students have dropped 73 points
- The number one health problem for American women today is domestic violence
- 25% of all adolescents contract a sexually transmitted disease before they graduate from high school

It is not a pretty America that we bequeath to our children. But America is not the issue. We Christians understand that "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Php 3:20) We need to remind our youth that the decaying of a society does not mean the Lord has left his throne on high. Rather, it is vivid testimony before their very eyes that the words of Holy Writ do come true, and the signs of the times are being fulfilled.

As our youth grow up in this society they are also experiencing what you and I have struggled with, and they do a far better job of mainstreaming than we do. Our youth wear pagers, have laptops, surf the net, and phone on the run. The speed of life that leaves us puffing can be a rush for the energetic and enthusiastic young adult. So much information out there and so many changes happening so fast is the culture they have matured with. Satan can also use these distractions to prevent them from taking the time for "the one thing needful." If we have a hard time jumping off the merry-go-round, what about our youth whose day-timers are clogged with work schedules, school events, sporting games, and social activities. Who will help them find their own "fig tree" under which to contemplate and pray? Author David Elkind states:

In the past, a clearly demarcated period of development, called adolescence, gave young people the needed respite before assuming adult responsibility and decision making. But this period is no longer available...What is lacking is pressure-free time, time that is free of the burdens designated properly for adults.^{viii}

In addition the youth we seek to teach and reach now live in a postmodern society. Postmodernism is the hot-button buzz word of recent years. It could well be a paper in itself. Permit me a few rambling observations that I believe are relevant to our topic, especially if we see ourselves as teachers of the Truth. George Barna, famed researcher, found that teens reject—by a four to one margin—the notion of absolute moral truth. They favor a relativistic view of right and wrong. 40% of teens state that you can tell if something is morally or ethically right if it works.^{ix} Postmoderns practice a mix-and-match theology, and formulate a personally tailored religion, often combining tenets of faiths that we would find to be strange bedfellows. The most important value in postmodern culture is the value of tolerance. Every person has the right to his

or her own beliefs. Diversity is celebrated—even moral diversity. *Time magazine*, 10/26/98 issue, measured the difference in attitudes about the morality of homosexuality. The comparison was between 1978 and 1998. Last year 58% of teens said that homosexuality was acceptable for others, but not for self, compared with 35% in 1978. Last year 33% said homosexuality was not acceptable at all, a drop from 59% two decades ago. Amazingly, but not surprisingly, 45% of teens in 1998 said that gay relations isn't a moral issue at all. In addition, the postmodern generation is skeptical of everything. There is little trust in authority figures or established institutions. Personal relations are very important to postmoderns, because in many cases they have grown up knowing that they weren't really wanted. Products of the baby-sitting tv and broken homes, they have often felt completely alone. What a tragedy!

Yet before we pass postmodernism off on the next generation, don't underestimate the impact of society upon your own cultural *Weltanschauung*. One author presents this list for your consideration.

“You might be a postmodern if...

- your cd collection includes classical, rock, pop, blues, spirituals, other variety
- your cable tv subscription includes at least 30 channels
- you've used telephone, fax, and e-mail in the last week, but have not written a personal letter in the last year
- you know how to use the internet
- your circle of friends includes people of three or more races
- you've lived in at least four different locations since you were born
- you've belonged to three or more denominations—or two or more religions^x

Clapp, in the same reference, concludes by saying: “Postmodernism is the sea most of us swim in. We live in a postmodern milieu. But it's not some abstract, exotic concept. It's all around us. It's in us. We've met postmodernism, and it's the world we live in.” Strong words, and perhaps words we can debate as to applicability in our personal lives. But I hope that this brief excursion into a broad discussion will highlight a simple truth. The mindset and outlook of many people today is far different than the perspectives most of us grew up with. Satan is a father of lies, and the lie “Did God really say...” is all around us as people reject even the notion of absolute truth. So what's next?

Trust what you use and believe in what you do

I imagine by now most of you wish I would have talked about more practical subjects. What can we do? Families are critical. You might remember the survey stats that floated around a few years back in our circles. In families where both mom and dad attended worship weekly, youth retention was over 70%. Perhaps we need to highlight family ministry issues and give guidance to the parents. Or what about improving our youth ministry efforts. What can be done to begin, sustain, and strengthen youth groups in our congregations? Or we could have spent pages talking about communication skills and learning how to listen to our youth. You maybe have other ideas. All of them could be worth study and reflection. But I wanted to tack against the prevailing winds. I wanted to try and leave you with a different perspective on the view of youth work in our churches. Is it simplistic to say that a called worker's attitude makes a difference? Is it simplistic to say that fervent prayer works? Is it simplistic to say that the key is one on one gospel ministry? Is it simplistic to say that finally, no matter how hard I strive and sweat, the results are in the Lord's hands?

Trust the tools you use. Don't just recite Paul's famous credo about the efficacy of the Word, live by it and prioritize your ministry according to it. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation." (Ro 1:16) Not ashamed means I'll talk about it every chance I get. Get busy planting the word in the students sitting before you, because you know that Scripture says, "Humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can save you." (Ja 1:21) The bottom line is that the only answer to the dilemma before us is to use the word of the living Lord. Law to rebuke, Gospel to restore. Law to crush the sinner, Gospel to comfort. Law to damn, Gospel to deliver. It's hard work, for each soul needs careful diagnosis. But kingdom work is not a factory assembly line where God turns out identical people with identical needs. One on one ministry might seem impossible when you consider the size of your flocks or the number of desks in your room, but "nothing is impossible with God." (Lk 1:37)

Trust the power of the Word of God, for "it will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire," (Isa 55:11) and believe in what you do. The Lord of the Church has called you to serve in a particular way at a particular time in a particular place. God does not roll dice. By the Spirit's grace you are where God wants you. Believe that you can make a difference, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Php 2:13) Confront the heresies of hell with the hope of heaven. Shoot down the perplexities of postmodernism with the peace that only a living Savior can offer to souls in search of belonging.

At the beginning of this paper I introduced you to a young man. Now for the rest of the story. Read about him in 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33. Talk about amazing grace, Manasseh had a change of heart. "In his distress he sought the favor of the *Lord* his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the *Lord* was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea. ...He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the *Lord*, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city. Then he restored the altar of the *Lord*...(2 Ch 33:12-13,15-16) It is never too late for God to work miracles of restoration. I saw it in a young gal crying on a couch in the church entryway. Didn't matter to her how late it was or who might see her? The word planted so many years early brought her to the pastor's office for confession. I saw it in an ICU unit as a man lay stricken with a massive coronary. After years of despising the Word, what was left in his heart? I had walked in prepared to lower the law's hammer on his soul. Before I could start, the man recited his confirmation hymn from 60 years earlier. The Word works, and the *Lord* is "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." (Ex 34:6) Christ's parable of the prodigal son is a beautiful reminder of the Father's forgiveness, and I submit that it is also a reminder of how often the children seek to run. Yet that wonderful parable is all the motivation we need to keep at keeping kids in the kingdom.

ⁱ G. C. Dieffenbach, as quoted *Minister's Prayer Book*, edited by J. W. Doberstein. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

ⁱⁱ Stellick, J. E. (1975) "How to Keep our Young People Moral in the Age of the New Morality." Unpublished conference paper, WLS essay file #210, page 13.

ⁱⁱⁱ Schulz, W. I. (1971). "Ministering Effectively to the Age Group between Confirmation and Marriage in the Decade of the 1970's." Unpublished conference paper, WLS essay file #1367, page 5.

^{iv} "A Few Moments with Chris Seay and Mark Driscoll." Interview published in *Youthworker*, January/February, 1999. Pages 28-30.

^v The following statistics were gleaned from Mr. Gerald Kastens, WELS CYD administrator. At the beginning of February, 1999, he presented a workshop on youth retention at the WLS Mission and Ministry Seminar and shared these figures.

^{vi} LW, 31, p. 25.

^{vii} Covey, S. R. (1997) *The 7 habits of highly effective families*. New York: Golden Books. Statistics are found on page 17 and are adequately referenced for substantiation.

^{viii} As quoted in the article "(Learning not to) Rush, Rush, Rush." *Youthworker*, January/February, 1999, page 22.

^{ix} Barna, G. (1997) *Generation Next*. Regal Press.

^x Rodney Clapp, as quoted in "Perspectives on the Next Generation," *Youthworker*, January/February, 1999, page 27.