
WHAT'S IN THE MAGNET EFFECT

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PART 1

ONE

Hit the Bull's-Eye: Targeting Kids

Ricky, his brother, and his sister each have different last names. His mom got pregnant with his older brother when she was a teenager. The father never stayed around, so no one knew him. Then his mom had Ricky. He, too, was born out of wedlock. Ricky's father stayed with his family a couple of years, but it didn't work out. Later on Ricky's mom married a man who abused her. She endured that for a year before she left. Now Ricky is a senior in high school and the only child left at home. His mom has a new husband, the fourth man in her life. His brother and sister refuse to speak to Ricky because he refuses to get close to his stepfather. His comment: "You know, after having so many dads, it's hard to get close."

Hurt. Disappointed. Stressed. Depressed. Dysfunctional. Angry. Frustrated. Bitter. Insecure. Sexually active. Rebellious. Undisciplined. Uncommitted. Drinking heavily. Pressured. Distrusting. Suicidal. Kids experience incredible pain today. Outwardly they appear normal — friendly, open, cool, eager, funny, energetic. But just below the surface they desperately struggle with themselves and their relationships.

You can connect names and faces to students who fit these descriptions.

A whole generation of students desperately needs the touch of Jesus Christ. That will happen when an army of people who have had a life-changing encounter with Jesus (the true church) sees teenagers the way God sees them, and seeks teenagers the way God seeks them.

SEE KIDS THE WAY GOD SEES THEM

Traveling in Romania with a group of twenty-three high school students can get a little ragged at times. On planes. Off planes. On buses. Off buses. On trains. Off trains. That's where it gets hairy. Usually the train stops for two to three minutes. All kids and all luggage need to get on or off quickly, very quickly. On more than one

occasion I got on the train, which was already moving down the tracks, and wondered: “Did we get everybody and everything?”

On a trip like that, one bag inevitably has essentials, such as passport, visa, money, message notes—irreplaceable stuff. One particular night we had all boarded the train in the dark and in a big hurry. Somebody else put my bags on the train. After all the bodies settled, I began to look for my backpack with the essentials. Nope. Not in this berth. Must be in the next one. Not in this berth either. “Has anybody seen my backpack?” Now I was scrambling, searching, frantically asking, “Where’s my backpack?” I looked everywhere. No backpack. IT WAS LOST!

My panicked tone of voice moved all twenty-three students into action, looking for the backpack. My mind raced: *What if it was left at the train station. I’ll never see it again. You can get lots of money for an American passport. I was pacing, wringing my hands, and feeling nauseated just thinking about it. No passport or visa, I may never see my family again. All that money. . . My message notes, years of work down the drain. I can never replace it. And it’s lost!* I yell out: “Look again! We’re not going to rest until we find that backpack!”

Similar emotions (without the panic) must have motivated Jesus since His entire purpose for coming into this world as the Son of Man was “to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Jesus looks at today’s generation of students and sees them the way He saw Zacchaeus that day he sat in the tree—**lost!** He is still on a search-and-redeem mission. God desires that we see kids the way He sees them—**lost**.

Unlike my search for my backpack, from God’s perspective, lost doesn’t have to do with distance, but with relationship. Jesus told a series of three parables with one point masterfully woven together to describe the nature of a person who is outside of a relationship with God. Certainly Luke 15 describes the present “lost generation” of young people.

Looking down the corridors of time at the younger generation, Jesus pictures them as **lost sheep**. A sheep puts his face down in the green grass and begins to nibble. Enjoying the green grass in front of him, he wanders around doing what satisfies him at the moment. He has no sense of purpose. A dog, a cat, a horse, a cow will all

come back. Not a sheep. He keeps on nibbling until he nibbles himself over the side of an embankment. At that point he becomes a “cast” sheep.

Philip Keller, in *A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm*, describes a cast sheep. If a sheep loses its balance, it rolls over on its back and cannot get up. The sheep paws the air frantically to get back up, but cannot do so. Gases build up inside its body. Circulation is cut off from the legs and, unless the sheep is rescued, it dies.¹

Jesus sees the younger generation as sheep who have “gone astray and turned everyone to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). Nibbling only at the pleasure in front of them, with no sense of purpose, they wander farther and farther away. Teenagers today, like cast sheep, are in grave danger.

Again, looking at this generation in Luke 15, Jesus describes it as a **lost coin**. A coin is not supposed to get lost, but instead it is supposed to be invested or spent. Its purpose is to turn a profit. But when it gets lost, it becomes “unprofitable.” That’s how the Apostle Paul describes a person outside of Jesus Christ: “All have turned away, and together they have become worthless” (Romans 3:12).

Like the woman searching for the coin, Jesus holds this generation in high value. God created today’s teenagers to be invested or spent for His glory - His profit. But because they are outside of Christ they have lost their usefulness. Why did the woman light a candle? Because the coin got lost in a dark place. Why did she sweep the floor? Because the coin got lost in the dirt. Kids in this generation have gotten lost and in the darkness and dirtiness around them they have lost their usefulness.²

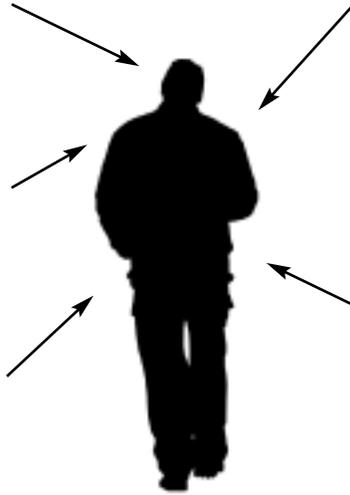
Then again in Luke 15 Jesus describes the current youth generation as a **lost son**. The Prodigal Son wanted to spend his inheritance immediately. He got what he wanted and split. At first he lived “high on the hog.” But when he had squandered his inheritance, he fed the pigs. He was desperate, depressed — in the pits. He set out to “get it all,” but lost everything. What a vivid picture of this generation.

Lost. Yep. We all agree. The vast majority of this generation is lost. But, on an individual basis, what does that mean? Just as Jesus picked out Zacchaeus as an individual, He sees each one in the younger generation individually. And each one is lost individually. But what does a teenager who is lost look like? Can we get a composite that will help us understand more clearly how God sees each one, and how we need to see them?

MENTAL — Experiences low self-esteem and boredom with life, resulting in depression.

EMOTIONAL — Feels aching loneliness and distrusts love, leading to stress.

PHYSICAL — Lacks self-control, resulting in poor habits such as abuse of alcohol, sex, and drugs.



SOCIAL — Interested in relationships, desperately wanting acceptance and performing to please peers; but short-circuits them by putting self first.

SPIRITUAL — Crippled by guilt and fear of death, leading to hopelessness.

As a result of these debilitating problems in their lives, a “philosophy of life” has developed that most students follow:

- *There is no right and wrong.* Students have no absolutes, only opinions and circumstances. They are their own value system. What they think and believe is the ultimate authority.
- *If it feels good, do it.* The value used to be: “If it feels good, do it; as long as no one gets hurt.” Now that value has been twisted into “If it feels good, do it; who cares who gets hurt.”
- *The mind does not matter.* Due to the influence of MTV, CD’s, and television, entertainment is more important than education. The continual drop in SAT scores underlines this.
- *Relationships are important if they help me.* And it follows then that “If they do not help me, I get out.” They have learned this from parents who get divorced and from living in a “throw away” environment.
- *I’m my own boss.* Authority makes no sense. Some young people actively rebel against it. Others just don’t pay any attention to it. What parents, teachers, and

police say has no bearing because peer authority reigns. “I make my own rules.”

- *I'm living for today.* Having not fulfilled their dream of “personal peace and affluence,” they try to enjoy life today with no thought for tomorrow.

From this composite we can see why kids have such serious problems individually. When we multiply this to every student in the nation and in the world, it becomes clear that we have a mess on our hands. What underlying issues aggravate their problems?

The Apostle Paul got to the heart of it when he exclaimed, “We have worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). In Romans 1 the apostle goes on to explain what happens as a result of that root problem.

Education without Truth. Paul says that “wicked men suppress the truth [v. 18] . . . their thinking became futile [v. 21] . . . although they claimed to be wise they became fools [v. 22].” Because the environment that our kids live in every day has forsaken the search for the truth, anarchy reigns in our school systems. In jest students used to sing the old grade-school song:

We have gathered here together for the burning of the school.
 We have tortured every teacher, we have broken every rule.
 We have set the school on fire, we have killed the principal.
 Our truth is marching on.

That song is a joke no longer! The National Institute of Education estimates monthly

- 5,200 junior and senior high teachers are attacked.
- 6,000 students are robbed by force.
- 282,000 are assaulted.
- 112,000 robberies occur.³

A generation ago the top offenses in the public schools were:

1. Talking
2. Chewing gum
3. Making noise
4. Running in the halls
5. Getting out of turn in line

6. Wearing improper clothing
7. Not putting paper in wastebaskets

Today the top public school offenses are:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Rape | 10. Vandalism |
| 2. Robbery | 11. Extortion |
| 3. Assault | 12. Drug abuse |
| 4. Burglary | 13. Alcohol abuse |
| 5. Arson | 14. Gang warfare |
| 6. Bombings | 15. Pregnancies |
| 7. Murder | 16. Abortions |
| 8. Suicide | 17. Venereal disease ⁴ |
| 9. Absenteeism | |

As a result education has been significantly disrupted. In a survey of 17-year-olds conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress:

- One-third thought Columbus reached the New World after 1750, and the same proportion couldn't identify Abraham Lincoln.
- Sixty-two percent were unable to place the Civil War in the years between 1850 and 1990.
- Half could not calculate the area of a rectangle, and one-third could not identify the countries the U.S. fought against in World War II.
- One-third did not know that the Mississippi River flows into the Gulf of Mexico, and only 20 percent could write a simple one-page letter to a local supermarket manager applying for a job.⁵

Atlanta journalist Dave Sloan attended high school graduations for three straight days and reported that "the vast majority of graduating seniors were unable to add $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4}$ ".⁶

The same lack of knowledge exists among teenagers concerning biblical information. Some of their humorous statements include:

- Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree.
- Noah's wife was called Joan of Ark.
- Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night.

- Jesus was born because Mary had an immaculate contraption.
- Jesus enunciated the Golden Rule, which says, “Do unto others before they do one to you.”
- The men who followed Jesus were the twelve disciples, and the epistles were the wives of the apostles.
- Jesus said a man should have one wife. This is called monogamy.

It doesn't take much research to conclude that many, even most, teenagers have a weak grip on knowledge and biblical truth.

Sex without purity. Very logically the Apostle Paul shows us the results of lostness when he says, “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity . . . and shameful lusts. Women (and men) exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones and received the due penalty for their perversion” (Romans 1:24-27).

As a result of living in our sex-crazed society, kids participate in sex at younger and younger ages. By their 18th birthday, 6 in 10 teenage women and nearly 7 in 10 teenage men have had sexual intercourse.⁷ Nationwide, 6.6 percent of students reported initiating sexual intercourse before the age of 13.⁸ Nearly one million teen girls get pregnant each year. Nearly 4 out of 10 young women get pregnant at least once before they turn 20. Each year the Federal Government alone spends about \$40 billion to help families that began with a teenage birth.⁹

And so the sad story of students lost in the wrong use of sex goes on.

Society without God. Our society and its effect on the younger generation line up pretty well with what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1.

“He gave them over . . . to what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity” (Romans 1:28-29).

A society that fits this description has produced the present generation of students. Four primary forces shape their lives. One is their peers, which we will not discuss here. Certainly the other three have a dominant effect.

Parents. With well over half the teenagers living in single parent homes, and over 65 percent of all mothers working outside the home, it is little wonder that parents don't spend time with their kids. According to George Barna, among teens whose father is present in the home, the average amount of time discussing things that matter is less

than 40 minutes per week. (Ten percent say they spend no time at all in such discussions.) In homes where the mother is present, the amount of time spent with her discussing matters of interest to the teen averages 55 minutes per week.¹⁰ Only 52 percent of 15- to 18-year-olds say they are satisfied with their current family situation.¹¹

William Bennett, former Secretary of Education, summarized the situation this way:

Where are the fathers? Generally, the mothers are there struggling. For nine out of ten children in single parent homes, the father is the one who isn't there. One-fifth of all American children live in homes without fathers. . . . Where are the fathers? Where are the men? Wherever they are, this much is clear: too many are not with their children.¹²

It doesn't take long for kids to realize "If I'm going to survive, I had better look out for me."

Television. The American Academy of Pediatrics urges that children should not watch television more than two hours a day in order to limit the damage caused by violence and sexual programming. On average, young people watch 16 to 17 hours of television weekly, beginning as early as age two. When video game and videocassette usage are added, some teenagers may spend as many as 35 to 55 hours in front of the television set. While watching television, young people view an estimated 10,000 violent acts and 15,000 sexual references, innuendoes, and jokes. Furthermore, alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs are present in 70 percent of prime time network dramatic programs. And for every "just say no" or "know when to say when" public service announcement, teens will view 25 to 50 beer and wine advertisements.¹³ No wonder such heavy exposure to television sex, violence, drugs, and alcohol results in kids imitating those same acts in real life.

Rock Music. The Illinois Academy of Family Physicians reports that music plays a significant role in adolescent socialization between grades 7 and 12. The average teenager listens to 10,500 hours of music, which is slightly less than the cumulative hours spent in the classroom from kindergarten through high school.¹⁴ Evidence is rampant that certain types of music contribute to emotional dysfunction in kids, including drug abuse, premarital sex, and violence.

As I write I'm staring at a *Newsweek* cover entitled "When Is Rap 2 Violent?" Featuring the latest popular rapper, the cover comments: "His album hits the top of the charts this week. Last week, he was indicted for murder." It's not hard to figure

EVERY 24 HOURS ¹⁵

17,297	students get suspended from school
7883	students are reported abused or neglected
4248	students get arrested
2861	students drop out of school
1329	babies are born to teen moms
367	students are arrested for drug abuse
180	students are arrested for violent crimes
9	students are victims of homicide
5	students commit suicide
1	student dies of HIV infection

* Based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven hours each) © 2002 Children's Defense Fund

out why kids are killing each other, and why others are frightened to walk down the hall at school or go into the restroom.

Without much effort we could get depressed about this generation. But a more proper response is to get our heads out of the sand, see the situation in our society as it really is, understand the intense pressure kids face as a result, know from the biblical perspective that they do not have the internal resources to handle it because they are lost, and then take the challenge to help “find” them through introducing them to Jesus Christ.

We can do all this with great confidence because, in spite of all the complications in kids' lives, Jesus really is the only answer. Pascal, the great French scientist and philosopher, was correct when he said: “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.”

As we see teenagers the way God sees them—**lost**, with all of the accompanying pain and hurt—He will give us a deep desire to seek them the way He seeks them, so they can be found!

SEEK KIDS THE WAY GOD SEEKS THEM

On that train in Romania, frantically searching for my valuable backpack, all of us tore up the place to see if we could find it. We were intense, focused. We had our “game faces” on. We organized into teams, each team taking a berth. All of us, at the same time, were focused on the same objective—find the backpack.

And we did! It had been placed behind two or three other boxes and suitcases. When we found it we shouted, then we laughed. I let out a big sigh of relief. I was excited to have it back. Finding that backpack made my day.

Those same kinds of emotions must have flooded over Jesus when Zacchaeus came down from that tree. The Bible says that Zacchaeus received Jesus “joyfully.” Certainly they rejoiced together when Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9).

When something or someone is lost, we see a pattern:

Intense concentration ⇒ Joyful celebration.

Isn't that true with the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son? After the intense concentration to find what was lost, Jesus says, “there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

Finding what is lost is God's nature. Adrian Rogers put it this way:

When we see Jesus going out after the sheep, we see the rescuing nature of Jesus. When we see the woman with the lost coin we see the revealing nature of the Holy Spirit. When we see the father welcoming the son back, we see the receiving nature of God the Father.¹⁶

When we have had our lives radically changed by the seeking Savior, then we too have built into our new nature that same desire to see people who are lost become found.

What distinguishes one youth leader from another? Both have the same gifts and abilities, both have the same human resources, but one attracts kids like crazy and the other one does not. What is the difference?

A burden for those who are lost!

The following graphic story illustrates where many of us are in our burden for the lost.

As I watched the evening news, a young man named Cecil walked into the picture. Suddenly, he sat down on the curb in front of the whirling camera and set himself aflame. When the pain became more than he could bear, he jumped to his feet and raced down the street. Before the camera turned away, all one could see was Cecil totally engulfed by the flames. I sat there stunned. Then the question! Were the cameramen more interested in taking a picture than in saving Cecil from the horror of being burned alive?¹⁴

That story nails many of us! Indifference indicts us. How strangely different Jesus' burden was from that of many twentieth-century youth leaders.

- “He had **compassion** on them, because they were harassed and helpless” (Matthew 9:36).
- “Jesus **wept**” (John 11:35).
- Jesus was “**deeply moved in spirit and troubled**” because of the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11:33).
- Jesus cried out: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . .how often I have **longed** to gather your children together” (Luke 13:34).

Not allowing the love of the Spirit of Jesus to flow through us, we express apathy about Christ and about people. Therefore we come across to lost students in a way that causes them not to want to be found! Yet when we are empowered by the love of the Spirit, we are charged with enthusiasm about Christ and we find ways to love other people. Therefore we become attractive to lost people who, then, want to be found. When we are empowered by the Spirit we exhibit the qualities of Galatians 5:22-23.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Dr. William Abraham focuses the issue for us in his remarkable statement:

We live in a world where people are addicted to drugs, to greed, to racism, to terrorism and to a host of sins that will not be tackled without the fullness of the reign of God in our midst . . . What is needed is not just more talk, or more programs - - - but the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit....

As we allow the Holy Spirit to empower us, He will release in us the love and compassion that will give us that burden for students. Then we can pray this profound prayer:

LORD, break my heart with the things that break your heart.

I have experienced the reality of that prayer. Having completed my message to a group of 600 students at a Christmas conference, I watched them as they responded. It was beautiful to see all those potential-laden lives so eager to please God. I was ready to sit down when suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, emotion overwhelmed me. I began to weep in front of those kids. It took several moments to bring myself under control. Through tears these words came out: “I want to ask you to forgive me and my generation for leaving you the lousiest legacy in American history. Your generation has some severe problems because of what we have done to you. But I want you to know that I, for one, have committed my life to see that you become whole again. I believe that God not only wants to restore you, but also to release you to become the generation that finishes taking the message of Christ to the ends of the earth—that fulfills the Great Commission.”

None of that was planned or contrived. Simply, God was breaking my heart with the things that break His heart. I realized I had a burden for those students and the generation they represent. God desires for us to see kids the way He sees them, and then to seek them the way He seeks them. When we do, they will become our target and we will become their magnet that draws them to Christ.

ACTION POINTS

1. Spend an hour alone with God this week asking Him to help you see kids—particularly lost kids—the way He sees them. Write down what He shows you.

2. Spend another hour with God asking Him to break your heart for kids—or continue doing so—in a way that will cause you to seek kids the way He seeks them. Write down what He tells you to do.

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5. National Center for Political Analysis, *Tests Show Students Don't Know Facts*, <http://www.ncpa.org/pi/edu/may97c.html> viewed on 12/18/02.
6. Dave Sloan, *75% Cannot Add 1/2 Plus 1/4*. www.davesloan.com viewed on 12/17/02.
7. The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), *In Their Own Right: Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of American Men*, New York, AGI, 2002; AGI, unpublished tabulations of the 1995 National Survey of Adolescent Males; and AGI, unpublished tabulations of the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth
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9. National Campaign To Prevent Teen Pregnancy, <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/teensfacts/fact1.asp> (December, 2002)
10. George Barna, "Today's Teens: A Generation in Transition," newsletter, 10.
11. *Ibid.*, 9.
12. William J. Bennett, *Our Children and Our Country* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 64.
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14. Matthew and John Clarke, IAFP Annual Meeting 2002. Illinois Academy of Family Physicians, www.iafp.com/Annual%20Meeting/teensmoke.htm viewed on 12/11/02.
15. Children's Defense Fund, 2002. Based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven homes each).
16. Adrian Rogers, *Ibid.*, 2.