Going Deeper

WITH

A Life That Matters

Reaching the Global Youth Culture

BY RON HUTCHCRAFT

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Are you content to let young people go on living and dying without Christ?

Nearly 50% of the world is under 25 years old. At least 75% of those who ever come to Christ do so by the age of 18. In spite of the fact that there are so many young people, they are the most urgent people to reach for Christ. They are the future of our world, and the impact of the Church and the world's evangelists on this age group has been tragically small. At the same time, the impact of the decadent youth culture of the West on this generation has been massive.

Almost anywhere you go in the world, young people are listening to the same music, watching the same videos and TV shows, visiting the same websites, wearing the same clothes, making the same tragic mistakes, and needing the same Savior. While young people speak the same linguistic language as their parents, they speak the same cultural language as their peers around the world.

While the dark, angry, and immoral messages of the West's youth culture are shaping young people in country after country, often they have yet to hear the message of Jesus in a way they can understand. Often, those of us who represent Christ feel as if we do not know where to begin to break through to this generation that are so different from all those before them. We don't understand them, they can seem intimidating and spiritually disinterested, and they are way outside our personal comfort zone. We settle for doing what is comparatively easy—focusing most or all of our ministry on adults, with whom we feel more comfortable and compatible.

If we do, we are forfeiting the next generation to the darkness. We are abandoning those who are the most likely to respond to Christ. No one with their Master's heart to "seek and save what was lost" (Luke 19:10) can be content to let young people go on living and dying without Jesus. If anything, this massive, most reachable, age group must be a major focus of the Church.

Today's generation of teenagers is so different from past generations. Today's young people will not respond to the traditional outreach approaches with which we are comfortable. If we go on doing what we have been doing, we will reach as many young people as we have been reaching. Given the percentage they are of each nation's population and given the small likelihood of them ever knowing Christ after their teenage years, we have the urgent mission of finding effective ways to "tell the next generation" (Psalm 78:4).

Today's young people may be the single greatest challenge facing the Church of Jesus Christ today, but they may also be the single greatest opportunity facing the Church today as well. They have often been more influenced by the worldwide youth culture than by previous generations. They are increasingly disconnected from previous values and previous religious loyalties. From the young people of Russia to China to indigenous peoples, they are—unlike the generations before them—spiritually "up for grabs." They have not decided what to believe, what cause to commit to, or who to trust with their heart. Satan surely knows that, and he is fully mobilized to capture their hearts. We who serve the living Christ can do no less.

Leaving the Life-Saving Station

They call a treacherous stretch of coastline off the Outer Banks of North Carolina in the United States "The

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Graveyard of the Atlantic." Hundreds of ships have gone down there over the past three centuries. Many lives that otherwise would have been lost were saved by the heroic rescuers of the United States Life-Saving Service, which established a series of life-saving stations along the Outer Banks. Each one was a big white frame building, built far enough back from the ocean to be protected from the fury of powerful Atlantic storms.

During a Park Service demonstration for tourists, I watched how a station's eight-man crew carried out their rescues. Many of those rescues were amazing, as Life-Saving crewmen would go out into violent surf and storms to bring back people about to die on a sinking ship. Their exploits exemplified the courageous motto of the Life-Saving Service—"You have to go out. You don't have to come back."

I was deeply affected by what I saw and heard at the Life-Saving Station. It wasn't just because of a glimpse into maritime history. I knew I had seen much more. I had seen a living picture of what it means to rescue lost young people from the death and destruction that is claiming so many.

The rescue effort begins when you hear the cries of dying people. What was it that gave the men of the Life-Saving Stations such a sense of urgency about their mission? What made them abandon their concerns about their own safety and comfort? It was the realization that if they didn't do something, those people would die! When we let God show us the life-or-death situation our young people are in—that they will die forever if we don't get to them—we will do whatever it takes to rescue them. We will move beyond what is safe or comfortable to "rescue those being led away to death" and to "hold back those staggering toward slaughter" (Proverbs 24:11).

Once we hear the cries of the dying young people around us, we will realize that we have to do what the Life-Saving crewmen had to do. We won't wait for dying young people to come to us; we will go where they are to reach them. Never in the history of the Life-Saving Service did a drowning person ever come to the door of the station and say, "Would someone please rescue me?" In the case of every rescue, the rescuer left the safety of the life-saving station and went into the surf and the storm to bring back a dying person. Our spiritual "life-saving station"—our church, our religious meetings—is a good place to get rescuers built up to go out. It is a wonderful place to bring people after they have been rescued, but it's not the best place to rescue many dying people!

Most lost young people will never come to us at our "life-saving station." We will have to go where they are—geographically, culturally, methodologically—or they will simply go on dying. No one was ever rescued by a rescuer who wanted to stay in a safe place, beginning with Jesus who left heaven to save us from eternal death. For Jesus and for us as His life-saving team, the motto of the Life-Saving Service captures our mission: We have to go out. We don't have to come back.

Understanding Their Culture

In the days when some of the Israelites were "of one mind to make David king," the "men of Issachar" were some of the key players. Living at a decisive moment in history and fighting for the rightful king to take his place, they exhibited two traits that made them "make a difference" people. It is said of the men of Issachar that they "understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Like them, we have been assigned by God to live at a decisive moment in history—perhaps even in the final quarter of the game. We, too, are fighting for the rightful King, Jesus, to take His place in every

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heart He died for. It is a time and a mission that is crying for servants of God who understand their times and, as a result, know what to do.

Nowhere are those requirements more vital than in the life of one whose heart is broken for lost young people. Because so much has changed so rapidly, we need to first try to understand who these young people are that we are being summoned to rescue. Then, we can know what it will take to rescue them. To try to understand the children of the new worldwide youth culture is to do what every effective missionary in history has done—learn about the culture of the "tribe" you want to reach so you can know what approach will reach them.

In order to prepare ourselves to impact the next generation, we need to stand back and see who they are and why they are what they are to see the needs behind their deeds. Some of that becomes apparent as we consider ten sentences that define a generation.

Loneliness Runs Deep

No word more accurately describes most modern young people than the word "lonely." With family support systems weakened or devastated by divorce, neglect, abuse, fatherlessness, economic and political upheavals, the emotional harbor of home has become a battlefield for many. Increasing numbers of young people are, in the words of the movie title, "home alone." They spend endless hours raising themselves, often "parented" by television, music, the Internet, and their friends. Deprived of the closeness a family was supposed to provide, many young people feel very alone in the world.

Some seek a short-term sense of closeness and intimacy by getting sexually involved. Others carry their loneliness into a gang or counterculture "family" of their peers. They are starved for a loving feeling and will do almost anything to get it, and to keep it. Lonely young people are extremely vulnerable to peer pressure and destructive choices because they will do anything to feel accepted, even if it is only for a night. Often the people they find most accepting are not Christians, but peers who don't care about much at all—peers who will almost surely take them down with them. Loneliness defines so many young people and drives them to awful compromises and deadly mistakes.

Although their loneliness is an open door through which counterfeit love can come, it is also a door through which Christ's love can enter. Young people need to hear about a Savior who offers them the only "unloseable" love in the world, who has promised, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Many times it has been my privilege to tell a lost teenager, "From the moment you give your heart to Jesus Christ, you have just spent your last day alone." In addition, lonely young people will be attracted to a leader and an atmosphere where they feel loved. In fact, for many, whoever loves them first will have them!

Boundaries Don't Matter

The global youth culture of our young people portrays life as a field with no boundaries. Any sporting event that was played on a field like that would dissolve into chaos and hostility. So many young people are playing out their lives on a field where there seems to be "no bounds," and there's chaos, hostility, and confusion.

In post-Christian areas such as Europe and North America—as well as in many pre-Christian areas where the Gospel is not understood—sin is a non-issue. Where moral lines are unclear, contested, or nonexistent, young people have little sense of violation when they break the laws of God. When we come with an answer for man's "sin problem," we are addressing an issue they may well not know about or care about. How do you

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share what Jesus did about our sin to a generation to whom sin is a non-issue? That question will be addressed when we look at “knowing what to do.”

Worth is a Struggle

You throw away paper plates, but you take very good care of China plates. What’s the difference? Obviously, paper plates aren’t worth much, so you throw them away. Fine china is valuable, expensive, and not something to trash.

Tragically, many young people around us feel like they are paper plates and they’re throwing themselves away! Because of how they have been treated, because they may not feel very loved at home, and because they have been hurt so much, they feel like they must not be worth much. If you’re a paper plate, it doesn’t matter what you do to yourself, what you put into your body, or what you have to do to feel good for a little while. There are so many ways for young people to throw themselves away—academically, sexually, alcoholically, socially, suicidally. Adults who care about them are saying, “Don’t do that. It will hurt you.” The “paper plate kids” are responding inwardly, “Why not? I’m just garbage anyway, and it doesn’t matter what you do to garbage.”

The truth is that God didn’t make any paper plates! However, they don’t know that unless we get to them with the Gospel that shows them they were “created by Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16), that they are “God’s workmanship” (Ephesians 2:10), and that God thought they were worth the life of His one and only Son!

Escape Isn't a Solution

Today’s young people are carrying around emotional ‘suitcases’ filled with pain. Many see their identity as ‘victim,’ and many have been. Rather than dealing with the pain in a healing way (talking it through, seeking counsel, reaching out to other hurting people), they choose to sedate the pain with alcohol, music, drugs, sex, and other things. For a little while, their “anesthetic” masks the pain, but it doesn’t remove what is causing the pain. Tragically, when you deal with your pain by running from it, you usually end up creating more pain. You still have the problems you wanted to escape plus the additional problems caused by what you used to cover your pain. This is a generation desperately in need of a Savior who not only forgives your sin and takes you to heaven, but the Savior who was sent "to bind up the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1).

Anger is Rising

It is evident all over the world that young people are becoming more and more like volcanoes ready to blow. In North America, that full cup of anger has exploded in eruptions of campus shootings. Across the world, young people are often in the forefront of mob violence, sometimes gathering in gangs and destructive street groups, frequently exploding on their peers and their families. The anger is, in most cases, the symptom, not the problem. The problem is the often unspoken, long-accumulating pain inside. Until the source of the pain is dealt with, the anger will keep on erupting.

Music is Their Language

A survey taken among American young people asked them where they turned to cope with their pressures. Out of 53 choices, “my music” came in number one! One rock star said, “When I was a teenager, my music was my best friend.” That speaks for many of the young people we want to reach. For this generation, their music is more than entertainment or diversion; it is the language that ties them together and expresses the deep feelings of their heart. As believers, we enjoy listening to praise music because it says what is in our soul. When we wonder why

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a teenager is listening to music that seems angry and dysfunctional, we need to realize that the screaming man on the stage may very well be expressing what's in that teenager's soul. When we attack a young person's music, we are, in essence, attacking that young person since their music is so much a part of who they are. When we put the Gospel in a musical style that they relate to, we are doing what effective missionaries have done for 2000 years—putting the message in the language of the person we're trying to reach.

Life is Pointless

A young man with little hope left, sat down at his computer, and ended up at an Internet site we are associated with. In his desperation, he had typed four words into an Internet search engine: "Why am I here?" Thankfully, that question led him to a Christian website where he gave his heart to Christ. His question is the question haunting the young people of today's youth. Life to them seems like a continuum of one meaningless day after another, most of them the same as all the others. Separated from their Designer, life seems so hollow. Some decide there is not even a reason to stick around for another meaningless day. They desperately need the One they were made by and for, and they need someone to tell them they were put here to, as I have often told my children, "Go MAD"—that's Go Make A Difference!

Now is What Matters

"The future is too far off, and it may never come." That's the unspoken feeling behind many young choices. Bombarded with a youth culture that promotes instant gratification and short-term pleasure, young people do not think much or care much about the future. For many, life is about emotional or economic survival. When you're "surviving," today is about all you can handle. Modern young people often are not particularly concerned about heaven or hell. Some think it's not real and others think it's "out there" somewhere. When they hear about Jesus, their unspoken question is, "What difference will this make now?" It's important for spiritual rescuers to answer that question. The Savior we offer a young person changes our eternity—and our days, as well.

Hardness Comes Sooner

Because children are exposed to so much sin at younger and younger ages, innocence dies young and hearts turn harder sooner. At a youth workers training conference in Africa, some children's workers told me, "Almost everything you're saying here about teenagers applies to the children we work with." With the accelerated exposure that media brings, children are becoming teenage "wannabes"—little teenagers minus puberty. While 75% of all those who come to Christ do it by the age of 18, the majority are coming at younger and younger ages. It is urgent that we who carry the Good News about Jesus get to them before the "closed" sign is hung on their heart.

They are Ready for Jesus

"This is pretty depressing." That would be a natural response to all this bad news about the heartbreaking lostness of the next generation. After all this, there is some wonderful good news. Although modern young people know less about Jesus than ever and they are farther from Jesus than ever, they are more ready for Jesus than ever! In fact, the very things that have made them so lost have made them so ready.

Their disappointing relationships have made them ready for a Savior who offers "unloseable" love. Their pain and anger have made them ready for a Jesus who heals the wounded and turns them into wounded healers of others. The fact that they have made so many mistakes so

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soon in their lives makes them ready for the Savior who offers to forgive all that. For young people who have found life meaningless, the fulfillment of a relationship with their Designer offers hope. Young people who cannot beat the monsters of anger, depression, and addiction are ready for this Jesus who sets people free and gives them supernatural power to change.

In Jesus' announcement that "the harvest is plentiful" (Matthew 9:37), "harvest" means ready. Jesus said that His problem is not getting lost people ready to hear about Him, it's getting His people ready to go tell them. All over the world, we are surrounded by young people very ready for our Jesus. The question is: Will you go to them in His Name and bring them to His cross?

The Heart Before the How

Obviously, the question "But how?" looms large when it comes to reaching young people who are so lost so soon. The issue of the 'how' is secondary to the issue of the heart. The story of Nehemiah reveals an essential characteristic in any man or woman who wants to make a difference in their generation. Nehemiah was challenged by a situation in his day that was, in some ways, similar to the urgent youth challenge confronting the 21st Century Church.

As he carried out his duties in Persia's royal palace, Nehemiah received word that "the wall of Jerusalem is broken down" (Nehemiah 1:3). The walls were down, and anything and everything was getting in. In our lifetime, the walls that once protected our young people have been "broken down"—the stability of the family, of spiritual heritage, and of moral boundaries. Anything and everything is getting into their lives.

There is an enemy of God who wants the next generation to be vulnerable. In fact, he led the breaking down of the walls. That is allowing him to have his way with millions of young people—to "steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10) their worth, their hope, their future, and their eternity. As in Nehemiah's day, the enemy will have his way, not because he is so strong, but because he is unopposed.

Nehemiah was in another country, apparently not a likely candidate to make a difference. It may be that you feel as if you're too far from the need of dying young people, that you're too old or too busy or too 'uncool.' It is not age, charisma, or being 'cool' that makes a man or woman God's chosen person to push back the darkness; it's a heart.

Nehemiah got word of the "great trouble and disgrace" of a new generation, and something happened in his heart. He said, "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 1:4). Nehemiah could never have imagined that God would summon him to lead "the turning of the tide." What qualified him to be God's person to challenge the enemy and rebuild what had been broken down was a broken heart.

In the battle for the next generation, it will be your broken heart that propels you into a battle you may have never thought you would fight. Would you dare to offer yourself to God to be His "Nehemiah" for a dying generation of young people? Then pray the prayer that can change your life and ultimately the lives of many lost young people: "Go ahead, Lord, break my heart for the young people of our area and our nation." Ask the Lord to help you see what He sees, to feel what He feels, and to weep over them as He weeps when He looks at the young people where you are.

Nehemiah proceeded to then pray passionately and persistently about the need that had broken his heart. As you regularly pour out to the Lord your heart for young people, do not be surprised if

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He then does for you what He did for Nehemiah who wrote about "what my God put in my heart to do" (Nehemiah 2:12). This "make a difference" man had no idea where to tackle this overwhelming need when he first began to weep and pray over it, but God responds to a broken heart. He hears the prayers of someone who cares and He begins to plant in that person's heart a dream and a plan for how to meet the need. He will do the same for you if you open up your heart.

Leave the Walls

The Bible tells us that the heroic men of Isaachar first "understood their times," then they "knew what Israel should do." Having tried to understand what is happening in the hearts of lost young people in these unprecedented times, we are ready to pursue what to do to rescue them where they are.

After so many years of praying and working to reach young people in North America and on four continents, and after watching young people become the "sheep without a shepherd" of today, I believe there are principles for reaching them that are universal and that transcend culture and race—especially in a young world that is increasingly tied together by one global youth culture.

Let's discuss eight imperatives to rescue dying young people. The first one is to leave the walls.

When Jesus wanted to reach Samaritans, "He had to go through Samaria" (John 4:4). It was always His strategy to go where the dying people were, not to wait for them to come to Him—just as every rescuer has to do. The mission statement of Jesus was that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). You can't save them if you don't seek them! That means presenting the Gospel, not in a religious setting where you feel comfortable, but in a neutral setting where a lost young person feels comfortable. To recall the heroes of the Life-Saving Service, you don't sit in the Life-Saving Station and wait for the dying people to come; you leave the station and plunge into the storm and the surf where they are!

To connect with the young people who need us most, we need to meet them in their world—on the basketball court, on the street, at the skate park, at school activities, where they shop, on Facebook, or on the Internet. Wherever possible, we should get Christian adults involved in roles that will bring them into natural contact with unreached young people—helping at school events, providing transportation, teaching, coaching, or tutoring.

Once we take the risk to leave the safety of the Life-Saving Station, we will be right where Jesus wants us to be—outside the walls where the dying people are.

Focus on Jesus

When the Apostle Paul, the master theologian, went to unreached people, his message was simple and uncluttered: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). That is a powerful model for someone burdened for unreached young people—stick to Jesus and His cross!

Modern young people are not interested in our religion, our denomination, our theology, or our rules. Our message is not an attack on their lifestyle. They aren't going to clean up until they know the Cleaner-Upper! As Jesus moved among some of the most overtly sinful people in His culture, He issued a simple call: "Follow Me."

As I have had the privilege of presenting Christ to young people from a variety of cultures and over the dramatic changes of the last four decades, there has been one constant: Jesus is a powerful magnet for a

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searching young heart! It's not Christianity, not church, and not religion, but Jesus. I am so grateful that Jesus reduced the central issue to an unmistakable "Follow Me." Many young people have problems with the hypocrites they have seen, with the system of Christianity, and with one religion trying to convert another religion. Jesus' invitation answers all those objections. Jesus didn't say, "Follow My followers" or "Follow My religion" or "Follow My rules." He said, "Follow Me!" It's all about Jesus!

That is a critical factor in bringing hope to dying young people. We need to tell them the stories of Jesus. Many, if not most, don't know those stories; they don't know who Jesus is. I have found it most effective to talk to young people from the Gospels where they can see how Jesus treats people, what He expects of people, and what happens to people when they meet Him. How many young people are like the woman of Samaria, whose lifetime search for fulfillment in a series of disappointing relationships finally ends when she meets Jesus? How many young people are like Zaccheus, the man who felt little all his life until the day Jesus came into his world? How many are like the adulterous woman, surrounded by people with rocks in their hands, desperately needing the love and forgiveness only Jesus can give?

As you tell them about Jesus, make much of the cross. I have spoken in many situations over the years where the young audience was inattentive, rowdy, and sometimes almost out of control. Over and over I have watched an amazing phenomenon occur. As soon as I begin to tell the story of the cross, a holy hush falls across the crowd, and you can hear a pin drop. It was not the power of a human speaker, but the power of Jesus' cross!

When you speak to lost young people, stick to Jesus. Don't encumber the Gospel with anything else. Remember that your central mission as a rescuer of dying young people is to take them by the hand, lead them up Skull Hill to the foot of Jesus' cross, and let them see for themselves how very much God loves them.

Start With Their Need

When Jesus began to talk with the Samaritan woman at the well, He didn't start with her sin or even who He was. He started with a need she cared about—her physical thirst, ultimately her emotional and spiritual thirst.

The Word of God provides us with a powerful example of how to bring Christ into the lives of young people who are so far from Him. Like us in our youth rescue mission, Jesus had major gaps to bridge in getting through. There was a huge religious gap, a moral gap, a gender gap, and a racial gap between them. Jesus neutralized all those barriers by beginning with a need this woman cared about. At a time when the gap between the world of the church and the world of lost young people is wider than ever before, we need to follow this gap-bridging approach of the Master.

We confronted the disturbing reality that sin is a non-issue to most young people, and that poses a daunting challenge for those of us who are presenting a Savior from sin. If sin is a non-issue, will a lost young person have any interest in what Jesus did about their sin on the cross? If our message begins with their sin problem, probably not. If our message begins with a need they have because of their sin problem, they may realize the Good News about Jesus is for them.

Very few people walk into a doctor's office and say, "Doctor, I have cancer." They are more likely to come with a lump, with headaches, or with unexplainable pain. In other words, what gets people to the doctor is not a disease, but a symptom. While sin may be a non-issue to modern young people, the damage sin does is all

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over their lives. They don't care about the disease of sin, but they really care about its symptoms. What are some of those symptoms they have because of sin?

- Loneliness – No relationship ever fills the hole in their heart because they were "created by Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16).

- Uncontrollable dark feelings – Anger, depression, selfishness, and addiction are a scary "dark side" that can only be tamed by a Savior.

- Pointlessness and despair – There is a sense that life has no meaning because the One who gave them life is on the other side of a sin-wall.

- Emotional pain – Because of the sins against you and your sins against others, this is pain that can only be healed by the Sin-Forgiver and the Burden-Bearer.

- Failure and guilt – Young people who have barely started to live already have a past they're ashamed of. They want to be clean and they want a new beginning.

As we lovingly speak to young people about a need they care about, we have touched a sin-symptom that opens their heart. Then we can sensitively show them that they have the "lump" because they have the "cancer." The lump is not their biggest problem. They have to deal with cancer that eventually will destroy everything they care about, and the cancer is sin.

Some who address the felt needs of young people make a costly mistake—they talk about the symptom, skip the disease, and move right to the cure. The Gospel is not, "If you're lonely, Jesus loves you." Jesus did not die for loneliness, for emotional pain, or for depression. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:4). While it may not be effective to start with sin, it is a betrayal of the Gospel not to get to sin. Without talking about the symptom a young person can see, they may never care about the sin they cannot see. Without explaining the disease of sin, a young person can never understand what Jesus did on that cross for them. Once they understand the terminal spiritual cancer of sin, they will understand what incredible Good News the death and resurrection of Jesus are for them!

Say it Plainly

Christians speak their own language, and I call it 'Christianese.' Unreached young people have no idea what we're talking about! Every missionary to a different culture knows that you must translate the message into the language spoken by the person you are trying to reach. When you go to reach the young people around you, you are becoming a cross-cultural missionary. Those young people are the 'inhabitants' of a global youth culture that is radically different from our Christian culture—and widely separated from it. If we are going to break through to dying young people, we must do what every effective missionary does—we must translate Jesus' message, not just transmit it.

Jesus provided a wonderful example for us as He jumped all the cultural gaps to reach the woman at the well. He did not talk with her in religious words. He talked in plain language about "living water", being "thirsty again", and "a spring of water welling up" (John 4:10-13). Jesus communicated life-or-death truth in non-religious language, and that is how we can introduce a young person to Jesus.

Words such as 'born again', 'saved', 'accept' or 'receive Christ', 'sin', 'believe', and 'become a Christian' are either not understood or misunderstood by most lost young people. If they are from another religious background, those words are

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either unfamiliar or convey a totally different meaning from what they mean Biblically. If they have no religious background, 'Christianese' sounds like a foreign language to them. If they have some Christian background, they may be immune to the Christian words they have heard so much but never acted upon.

It is critical for a 'missionary' to young people to speak in words they can understand by retraining himself to avoid 'Christianese' and to explain the Gospel in plain words. When Paul asked his friends to pray for his presentation of the Gospel, he asked them to "pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should" (Colossians 4:4). When Jesus told the parable of the four soils, He pointed out that the only difference in the fourth, truly fruitful, response to the seed was this: "The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it" (Matthew 13:23). All of the "soils" heard the word; the only one that truly bore fruit was the one that understood it. That is why we who communicate the life-or-death message of Jesus must translate it from 'Christianese' into words a lost heart can understand.

For example, I have found it helpful to explain that:

- sin is running your own life when God was supposed to,
- believing is grabbing Jesus like a drowning person would grab a lifeguard and saying, 'You're my only hope!',
- repenting is turning your back on 'my way' living to living 'God's way', and
- a Savior is someone who rescues you from a deadly situation that you cannot rescue yourself from.

Many a young person who may appear to be rejecting our Savior may actually be stumbling over our vocabulary. When the message is life-or-death, we have to do whatever it takes to make sure that message is clear.

Present a Relationship

If there is one issue that matters to young people anywhere in the world, it is the issue of relationships. Young people are, in a very real sense, defined by their relationships. They are also disappointed by their relationships. There is a nagging awareness that, no matter how many relationships they have, it always feels as if someone's missing. Someone is.

One of the most graspable ways for a young person to hear about Christ is to hear the Gospel presented as a relationship—actually, how to have life's most important relationship. As Paul challenges us to be "Christ's ambassadors", he says, "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19, 20). It is a message about a broken relationship with God and how it can be repaired.

Over the years of struggling to make the Gospel understandable to young people in any culture, I have landed on this simple presentation:

> There's a relationship you're created to have. Colossians 1:16 says we were "created by Him and for Him." The hole in our heart is there because only the One we were made by can fill it.
>
> It's a relationship you don't have. According to Isaiah 59:2, "Your iniquities (wrongdoings) have separated you from your God." Because you have run the life God was supposed to run, there is a wall between you and the One you were made for. That's why there's never enough love, so little peace, no real meaning, and no chance of heaven—unless God accomplishes

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a spiritual rescue.

It's a relationship you can have. You can have it because of what Jesus did on the cross when "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous (that's Him) for the unrighteous (that's us), to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18). We did the sinning, and Jesus did the dying for it so the sin-wall can come down.

It's a relationship you have to choose. When you are ready to trade in 'my way' for 'God's way', then "to all who received Him (welcomed Him in, realizing Who He is and why He came), to those who believed in His name (grabbed Him in total trust), He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

As Jesus' personal ambassadors to young people He died for, we have the awesome privilege of introducing them to the Person they have been looking for their whole lives—Jesus, the One they were made by and the One they were made for.

Package it Attractively

Advertisers know how important a package is in selling their product. They invest large sums of money to develop commercials and attractive packages. As we look at the young people around us, it breaks our heart to see so many of them buying what the prince of darkness is selling, even though his product has nothing to offer but disappointment, slavery, and death. He has some of the brightest packages in the world. Why is it that most young people are ignoring or rejecting the message of Christ that offers the love and answers they are looking for? Could it be because we have wrapped that message in some very boring packages? Young people may not be rejecting the 'product' of the Gospel at all; they are probably rejecting the package it comes in.

The Apostle Paul understood the importance of the package in which the Gospel is offered. While He never changed His message, He constantly changed the package that message came in. Why? "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:20-22).

Our passion to save some dying young people 'by all possible means' will drive us to reevaluate—and probably redesign—the package in which we have been presenting Him. A 1950's package will not reach a 21st Century young person.

There are several ingredients that go into the kind of package that a lost young person will respond to:

- Meeting on neutral ground. An outreach needs to be where the lost feel safe, not necessarily the found. It is important that non-religious settings like a gym, a basketball court, a village gathering place, a beach, a home, or a public building be used.

- A social 'hook.' Spiritually disinterested young people need to be given a social reason to come, like free food, seeing themselves on screen, sports, seasonal parties, 'make a difference' projects where they work together to meet a community need, and trips.

- Relevant music. The 'inhabitants' of the global youth culture get many of their life-messages through their music. They 'speak' the musical 'languages' of their generation. Depending on where they live, that 'language' may be rap music, rock music, country music, or rhythm-and-blues music. Thinking like a missionary to a different culture, we need to put the message in the 'language' of the 'tribe' we are

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trying to reach. It may not be the music 'language' we speak, but it is the 'language' lost young people speak. We don't have to use music, but if we do, it should be music the unreached young person can relate to. Our choice is either to capture their musical language for Christ or forfeit that language to be used exclusively by the enemy to communicate his deadly messages.

- Media accelerants. Young people today are plugged into a digital world—Internet, Facebook, i-Phones, cell phones. That's where you find today's young people. Many Christian leaders never think beyond reaching people they can reach in person. That approach alone leaves too many young people without a chance to hear about Christ. We need the creation of relevant, online outreach strategies that deal with youth issues and can rapidly accelerate the spread of the life-saving message of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is too dynamic, too life-giving to be trapped in a boring package. If we will dare to create a 21st Century package, we can draw far more 21st Century young people to the Savior their eternity depends on.

Build a Team

As Nehemiah carried his rebuilding burden to the place of the broken down walls, he knew he could never do it alone. He showed the people there the city's desperate need, and soon he had everyone sharing the vision God had planted in his heart.

That is a model for those of us whose hearts are broken for the dying young people around us. While the vision usually begins in one broken heart, it cannot be accomplished alone. A modern Nehemiah needs to be committed to building a team of people who will go with him into the battle for the next generation.

Nehemiah did not ride into Jerusalem presenting a program he wanted everyone to participate in; he presented a need. That must be the mission of a missionary to lost young people—to paint a picture of the lostness of young people for Christian adults and to challenge them to get involved in reaching them. Some will commit themselves to be prayer warriors for dying young people. Some will use their talents to help in outreaches—organizing, music, photography, cooking, driving, building, graphic design, computer skills. Others will take on a particular youth subculture with whom they have an affinity—athletes, gang kids, computer types, musicians. Our mission, as God's Nehemiah, is not to be a solo performer trying to reach thousands of young people, but a recruiter, mobilizer, and equipper of an army of caring adults. After all, part of the work of the evangelist is "to prepare God's people for works of service" (Ephesians 4:12).

This mobilization step also includes Christian young people. It is their generation and their friends we are committed to rescue. They need to be challenged to see that they have been positioned by God where they are to help some of their friends go to heaven with them. Rather than allowing Christian young people to be spectators and watch us adults put on a youth ministry, we need to challenge them to 'get in the game' and help rescue their friends. Many Christian young people have been under-challenged; that's why they are spiritually bored! Our mission is to awaken them to the need of their generation, to show them the power of the position they have, to equip them to make a difference, and to give them positions of responsibility in the rescue effort.

I have seen the power of this vividly exemplified in our ministry's outreach to young Native Americans in the United

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States. They have been described in a national report as “the most devastated adolescents in America.” There have been very few Indian young people who belong to Jesus Christ. Knowing they would respond best to someone who was their age and who has faced the same struggles they have, we put together a team of Native Christian young people called “On Eagles’ Wings.” Convening whole villages with sporting events, music, and free food, they have powerfully presented their “Jesus-stories” to a generation that has largely rejected all other missions’ efforts. The response has been unprecedented, as Native young people have led Native young people to the Savior—by the hundreds! I believe that the use of teams of trained, indigenous young people, going right to where their lost peers are, is one of the most powerful, untapped resources for accomplishing the Great Commission in the world!

If one person’s broken heart multiplies into the building of a team of youth rescuers, the impact will exceed anything we have seen before. “The Lord announced the word, and great was the company of those who proclaimed it” (Psalm 68:11).

Pray it Done

Those who go to war for a generation of lost young people are directly engaging the forces of darkness who enslave them. Prayer must be our primary method of getting the job done—not a supplement to our methods, but the primary method. It will not be our programming, our packaging, our promotion, or even our preaching that wins this battle; it will be our praying! Believers trying to reach young people ought to be the prayingest people in the Church!

It is prayer that softens young hearts (Acts 16:14), it is prayer that opens closed doors to their lives (Colossians 4:3), it is prayer that draws workers into the youth harvest (Matthews 9:38), it is prayer that shows us how to reach them (James 1:5), and it is prayer that “ties up the strong man” (Matthew 12:29) so we can take back the young people he has stolen from Jesus. Anyone who is a rescuer of lost young people must make prayer mobilization the starting point for his or her strategy and be sure that they have a dedicated team of prayer warriors covering them every day. Wherever possible, an attempt should be made to have every young person in an area prayed for by name on a regular basis.

In the words of one seasoned servant of the Lord: “Prayer strikes the winning blow. Service is simply picking up the results!”

In every neighborhood, every village, and every corner of this world, the battle for the next generation is raging. The winner owns the future!

Now is the hour for those who care about the lost and who care about introducing them to the Savior who died for them. It is time to focus our future ministry on those who are most likely to come to Him—on the young people Jesus weeps for! Christ is summoning us to join Him in the rescue mission for which He died, to “care for the lost”, and to “seek the young” (Zechariah 11:16). They are our greatest challenge. They are our greatest opportunity.

In the invincible name of Jesus, we go to rescue young people who do not know Him and to summon to battle those who do. The time is short, the need is urgent, and the mission is clear. In the words of Amy Carmichael, “We will have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but only a few short hours to win them.” We are in those few short hours.

They are the largest generation of young people in history, the most unreached generation in history, and the most reachable generation in history. If today's young people leave their early years

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without Christ, they will probably live without Christ, die without Christ, and spend eternity without Christ! No one who has answered Jesus' call to "go into all the world and preach the good news" (Mark 16:15) can ignore half the world—especially the half who are, by far, most likely to come to Christ. Let's begin reaching the global youth culture today!

About Ron Hutchcraft

Ron Hutchcraft is committed to communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost in their language and to motivating and equipping believers to communicate Christ to the lost in their world. In all he does, he seeks to reach the lost and the young with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ.

As President of Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, Ron and his team specialize in developing authentic, relevant, and creative tools to reach people with the message of Jesus. A veteran of over 48 years of youth and family work, Ron has presented the Gospel across North America and around the world. Mr. Hutchcraft is also involved in work with Native Americans, and is founder of the On Eagles' Wings® Native leadership program.

For more information about Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, visit www.Hutchcraft.com.

To find out how you can begin a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, please visit www.ANewStory.com or call 1-888-966-7325.

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