

Dear Administrator/Principal,

Earlier in the year, I invited about 200 Christian schools to ask their 7th-12th graders to participate in an anonymous survey that asked penetrating questions that would expose the spiritual needs of the teenagers. Not all could participate, but many did. So often, when we hear of a teenager failing the Lord in a serious manner, we think, "Wow. I never would have expected that from him/her." This survey was designed to help expose what some of those spiritual struggles are that we don't always see so that we might be able to help our teenagers.

I know schools are different. Churches are different. But with so many surveys and statistics about young people coming in from very "broad circles," I wanted to get statistics about teenagers who are from schools that lean more towards words like "conservative," "fundamental," "traditional," or "independent Baptist" to describe themselves. I know it can be easy to think that any disturbing finds or trends about teenagers don't apply to the young people in our schools, but I encourage you to look at what the teenagers within schools in "our circles" are saying about themselves.

I apologize for the length of this email. Hopefully, the title and subtitles will help you scan to the information you want to read.

*** Disclaimer:** concerning percentages, if my results went out to a tenth of a percent, I simply rounded up or down to the nearest percent for simplicity's sake in this report. *

General Observations

348 teenagers, ages 12-19 responded, with a pretty even distribution of guys and girls.

The teenagers were from 10 different states, and most came from Christian schools with anywhere from 25-200 students.

Some Disturbing Finds

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Only 51% of the 350 teens are 100% sure that they are saved. Sure, 16% of the teens were 90% sure they were saved, and 11% of the teens were 80% sure they're saved, but we are dealing with a generation where one out of every two teenagers is not fully sure if he/she is truly saved. The leading cause of doubt for those who are unsure of their salvation is that their "life doesn't look like what [they] think a Christian's life should look like."

DEVOTIONS

About 52% of the teens have "a purposeful time of Bible reading/study and/or prayer" 4-7 days each week. 38% of the teens have devotions 1-3 days a week, and 10% of the teens don't have devotions at all. The majority cited being "too busy" as the reason that prevents them from having devotions every day. But hear this!

- 16% of the surveyed teens don't have devotions because "It's boring" to them.
- 11% of the teens "don't feel that [devotions] help much in [their lives]."
- 21% of the teens said they just "don't want to do [devotions]."

HURT BY GOD

33% of the teens feel that they have been "hurt by God." Many took time to describe tragedies that they have been through, and I found this—children are NOT resilient. They are deeply hurt by tragedies that happen around them, and one out of three of our teens feel that God has purposefully hurt them.

HURT BY PEOPLE

75% of the teens say they have been "deeply hurt by a person." Many teenagers left brief statements/descriptions about abuse, assault, neglect, and molestation that they have been through. Plenty others described being mocked, bullied, fat-shamed, lied about, betrayed, and taken advantage of. Simple truth—our teenagers are not okay. They are dealing with wounds that have gone deeper than we can imagine.

SUICIDE

The question was simple—"Have you ever seriously considered suicide?" 25% of the teens responded with "Yes." That's one out of every four teens. Our young people are very troubled, and they don't always feel comfortable opening up about it.

PEER PRESSURE

28% of the teens are feeling "pressured to do things that displease God." While friends are the primary source of pressure, others feel pressure to a lesser degree from their parents, siblings, cousins, boyfriends, girlfriends, or others to displease God.

DOUBTING CHRISTIANITY

Only 72% of the teens said, "I don't really doubt if parts of Christianity [are] true." That means that 1 out of 4 teens sitting in the Christian schools are not even sure if all of Christianity (including biblical inspiration, Jesus' deity, the Gospel, and miracles) is true. This is sobering!

MORAL LUST

33% of the teens said, "Moral lust or sexual impurity [is] a struggle for [me]." While most of those teens reported the purity struggle being in the mind, many reported they struggled staying pure in their eyes, emotions, and physical body.

37% of the teens said they have viewed pornography. Interestingly, only 14% have found pornography addicting. 12% of the teens surveyed said they "wish someone would help [them] with an addiction to pornography."

HOMOSEXUAL DESIRES

4% of those surveyed said they "feel a romantic attraction to people of the same gender."

GENDER CONFUSION

93% of the teens believe there are only two genders. The remaining 7% either think there are more than two genders or are not sure.

86% of the teens think it is “morally wrong for a person to be transgender.” Again, most of those who didn’t say it was morally wrong to be transgender just aren’t sure what to believe.

The numbers came down even more as only 78% of the teens believe the Bible is not outdated when it comes to its insight into transgenderism.

ENSLAVING SIN

Only 11% of the teens said they “don’t really have a sin that actually enslaves me.” Here were the sins that teens said they are “enslaved” to:

- Wasting Time—62%
- Lack of devotions—54%
- Lack of Prayer—52%
- Sinful Anger—42%
- Ungodly Music—41%
- Bitter, unforgiving spirit—27%
- Rebelling against authority—25%
- Bad Friends—21%
- Disregard for Purity—16%
- Something else—16%
- Pornography—13%
- Unwise dating—7%

Some teenagers marked multiple sins that enslaved them.

MUSIC

49% of the teens said they listen to “Pop” music. I urge you to google who the top “Pop” artists are right now and what their songs are. It might really disturb you to find out what half of our Christian School teens are listening to. 37% listen to “Rap,” 36% listen to “Country”, and 32% listen to “Hip Hop.”

When it comes to Christian music, only 22% of the teens in our Christian schools said that they “enjoy listening” to “Traditional/Conservative” music. The overwhelming majority of teens listen to “Praise/Worship” (72%) while 31% listen to Christian Rap and 34% listen to Christian Pop. 30% said they enjoy “Gospel” music.

9% of the teens flatly said, “I don’t listen to Christian music.”

DATING

17% of the teens surveyed said they “Have done something with a boyfriend or girlfriend that [they] regret.” Note: Not every teen who was currently dating at the time of the survey has done something with a boyfriend or girlfriend that they regret.

PRAYER

Only 5% of the teens said their prayer life was a 10/10. 52% of the teens said their prayer life is a 6/10 or worse.

TV

20% of the teens watch 10-50+ hours of TV a week.

PHONES

34% of the teens spend 15-50+ hours a week on a phone or tablet.

BIBLE READING

62% of the teens spend one hour or less reading their Bible each week.

PRAYER

78% of the teens spend one hour or less in prayer each week.

CHURCH ACTIVITIES (like services, youth group, Sunday School, youth activities, etc.)

52% of the teens attend 3 hours or less of “church activities” in a week.

29% of the teens attend 0-1 services at their church each week.

BAPTISM & CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

41% of the teens have never been baptized, and 28% have not joined a church.

DISCIPLESHIP

59% of the teens have never been discipled at their church.

Some Encouraging Finds

MORAL LUST

I thought we would have found a MUCH higher percentage of teenagers struggling with sexual purity and pornography. Granted, the survey revealed that moral lust is a struggle for a third of the teenagers, but praise God that number was not higher!

While 37% of teens have viewed pornography, only 14% said it has become addicting. While I know we all want those numbers lower, praise God that some who have viewed pornography have not allowed it to become addicting. While there certainly are other forms of sexual lust, 86% of the teens reported that they are not addicted to pornography.

12% of the teens surveyed said they “wish someone would help [them] with an addiction to pornography.” This is good! Some are open to getting help! What are you doing to help them?

HOMOSEXUAL DESIRES

Only 4% of those surveyed said they “feel a romantic attraction to people of the same gender.” I had thought the number might be higher, but, praise the Lord, it’s not! And of those who said they have feelings of homosexual attraction, most said that they know that those feelings are wrong.

GENDER CONFUSION

93% of the teens believe there are only two genders. The remaining 7% either think there are more than two genders or are not sure.

FULL-TIME MINISTRY

12% of the 350 teens have said they desire to go into full-time Christian ministry. Praise God! These teens need to be nurtured and coached through this calling. May God call more!

MUSIC

73% of the teens said they listen to Christian music. How “Christian” this is...I don’t know. But at least it’s a start.

FRIENDS

The teens’ overwhelming responses seemed to trend towards God, their parents, and their pastor approving of their friends.

CHURCH MINISTRY INVOLVEMENT

77% of the teens are involved in some way in their churches’ ministries.

A CARING SCHOOL STAFF

82% said that they felt like their school teachers/staff/faculty “care about you as a person.” Awesome!

Interesting Trends

67% of the surveyed teens plan to go to college, but only 22% plan to go to Bible college.

92% of the teens have frequent access to a device with internet.

FEARS

The teens’ greatest fear is still “What do people think about me?” (68%)

DIVORCE

83% of the teens said their parents are “still together.”

DATING

20% of the teens said they “are dating” (I believe they answered the question with the mindset that they are currently dating).

TRUST

An overwhelming 45% of teens trust their parents above everyone else. 10% said “I trust no one.” 39% of teens do not trust “New people in [their lives].”

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

44% of the teens find it “hard” to understand the Bible.

READING THE BIBLE

It was interesting to note that there was a direct correlation between Bible reading/study and many of the spiritual struggles. For example, teenagers who read their Bible once a week or less are almost 3x as likely to cut themselves (35%) as compared to those who read the Bible 3 days a week or more (13%)! Also, the higher the amount of Bible reading/study in their lives, the lower their pornography viewing was and the higher their assurance of salvation was. Certainly, just reading or studying your Bible does not automatically guarantee assurance of salvation, lack of cutting, or a lack of lust, but how interesting that time in God's Word does have a correlation!

WORK/JOB

Only 18% of the teens have a job that employs them more than 10 hours a week.

BULLYING

12% of teens say they’re being bullied at school.

RULES

58% of the teens say their “school rules feel overbearing.”

WHAT DO YOU WISH YOUR SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STAFF DID DIFFERENTLY?

Probably the two most common responses to this question were pleas to lighten their school’s dress code and a feeling of being overwhelmed with homework.

Some Solutions

As I said previously, this survey only exposes the deep spiritual and emotional needs that our teenagers have; it does not give answers to the problems. I certainly don’t claim to have all the answers, nor do I have an instant solution to improve things by next week. But we do have God’s Word, and we do have the Holy Spirit. Knowing what the needs of the young people are, may I make a few suggestions for you to consider?

FOCUS CHAPELS ON THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS

We already educate our young people a lot. That’s one of the main purposes of school! So, may I suggest that you make a plan that uses chapel not just to educate their minds more but to directly address their spiritual needs. Perhaps look through the “Disturbing Finds” and choose

speakers who can focus on three or four of these spiritual needs that you consider to be the most important this semester and then focus on three or four more of the needs next semester.

DISCIPLESHIP—LIFE TOUCHING LIFE

As Christians, our #1 goal in life is to glorify God. Our #2 goal in life then is to accomplish the Great Commission, which is the evangelizing and then discipling of all people in all places. “Go ye therefore and teach all nations...Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...” (Matt. 28:19-20). The Christian school must not only be a place of general education—it must also be a place of discipleship. “...If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed.” (John 8:31).

Instead of overwhelming faculty and staff with a task this fall of “Everybody has to disciple every person in their class,” maybe you could suggest that each faculty or staff member should pray about one or two students who want to be disciplined. Then, take the semester and pour into those one or two both through intentional and “unintentional” discipleship. When second semester comes, the staff could continue with those one or two or begin with a brand new set of one or two teens. Let your life touch another person’s life, one at a time.

SPIRITUAL EMPHASIS WEEK (CHRISTIAN SCHOOL REVIVAL WEEK) OR RETREAT

Sometimes, I’ve heard Christian leaders say something like, “We don’t really need a big revival week. We just need consistent discipleship.” In my experience, that statement is half right—consistent discipleship is desperately needed in our churches and in our Christian Schools. But can I help you with this thought—teens who have these deep spiritual needs often don’t want to be disciplined or don’t care about being disciplined. It would be much easier to do the Life-Touching-Life discipleship if those being disciplined actually cared about it and desired to grow. THAT is what a Spiritual Emphasis Week or Retreat can do—jumpstart the desire of the young people to be disciplined. After a week or a weekend retreat of revival preaching, I’ve seen many a teenager either get saved or be revived, and, suddenly, they care deeply about spiritual things. Now, they are ready for discipleship!

RESOURCES

* **Disclaimer:** I have not read every single resource here, and I would not endorse every statement of every author in every resource, nor do I endorse every association or stance of every author or publisher. But these are resources that either I or a trusted friend have found to be quite helpful in their respective topics in opening up the Bible to address different needs. *

My desire is simply that some of these resources will give you guidance in your upcoming chapels, counseling, and discipleship.

Topical Counseling

The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems by Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins

The Quick-Reference Guide to Counseling Teenagers by Tim Clinton and Chap Clark

Parental Guides for Modern Teen Needs

<https://axis.org/resource-category/parent-guide/>

Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

<https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/topic-index/>

New Growth Press

<https://newgrowthpress.com/minibooks/?sort=bestselling&page=1>

RU Recovery

<https://rurecovery.com/product/topical-addiction-recovery-booklet/>

The Wilds Christian Camp

<https://store.wilds.org/products/resources/lifelinemini-books/>

Thee Generation

<https://theegeneration.org/battle-plan/>

West Coast Baptist College Counseling Guide

<https://strivingtogether.com/products/the-christian-counselors-manual>

Bob Jones University Resource Sheet

<https://www.bjustudentlife.com/resources.html>

The Gospel

Done by Cary Schmidt

Suicide

Help Out of...The Hole of No Hope by Tom Sooter

Homosexuality

Holy Sexuality and the Gospel by Christopher Yuan

Out of a Far Country by Christopher Yuan and Angela Yuan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lW1zds3ybxQ&t=912s>

Gay Girl, Good God by Jackie Perry Hill

Transgenderism

“In His Image: Delighting in God’s Plan for Gender and Sexuality” (DVD—available on Amazon)

God and the Transgender Debate by Andrew Walker

Lust & Sexual Purity

Lest You Fall by Rand Hummel

The Dark Side of the Internet by Rand Hummel

"The Purity Plan" by Dave Brady

<https://www.purityplan.org/>

Anger

Turn Away Wrath by Rand Hummel

Anxiety

Stress Less, Trust More by Rand Hummel

Depression

Out of the Cave by Chris Hodges

Abortion

The Sacredness of Human Life by David Gushee

Loss

When Your Father Dies by Dave Veerman & Bruce Barton

Music

Can We Rock the Gospel by Dan Lucarini

Dating

Holding Hands, Holding Hearts by Richard and Sharon Phillips

Discipleship

Changed into His Image by Jim Berg

How People Change by Timothy Lane & Paul David Tripp

Bible Studies for Personal Devotions

<https://store.wilds.org/products/resources/bible-studies/>

Bible Reading Plan

<https://biblereadingchallenge.org/join-us/>

Prayer

How to Pray 15 Minutes a Day by Steve Pettit

FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember that just because you don't see any of the "Disturbing Finds" on the surface, please know that you may have quite a few young people who are struggling in these areas but are unwilling to open up yet.

Perhaps you can find a way that would be best for your school where teenagers can feel that they can come and get spiritual help without automatically “getting in trouble.” Certainly, I’m not saying to drop school rules or consequences; rules and consequences MUST be maintained. But I would just encourage each school to consider on an individual basis what your school could do to promote an atmosphere where teenagers feel comfortable approaching the school’s leadership to get spiritual help. After all, as believers, our mission is the Great Commission of evangelism and discipleship.

If my evangelistic ministry could be a help to you and your school’s ministry, please let me know! I have some experience in conducting Spiritual Emphasis Weeks and in discipling teenagers, and I would love to be a help to you if I can. May God bless you as you press forward for His glory!

Matt