



Parent Newsletter – May/June '09

Pleasant Street Student Ministries

Dear Parents,

Earlier in this decade, a team of sociologists, led by Christian Smith, set out to discover what American kids really thought about religion and spirituality. Their findings, documented in the book “Soul-Searching” revealed some interesting things:

- Most American teenagers have a benignly positive view of religion
- Most American teenagers *who go to church* have difficulty articulating what they believe
- The default religion of American teenagers is moralistic therapeutic deism (MTD) which says:
 - Good people go to heaven
 - I am a good person as long as I’m not a murderer or child molester
 - God’s job is to make me happy by giving me what I want or rescuing me from trouble
 - God is far off, and unless I ask, He won’t get involved in my life or make demands of me
- The most common word that *Christian* teenagers used to describe Jesus was “nice.”

That’s not good news. What’s more disturbing is that Christian Smith believes that teenagers reflect where the American church at large is. And so, we have a benignly positive view of a nice guy who doesn’t really care how we live. Who would give their life to a cosmic butler?

Contrast that with the Jesus we read about the gospels. Some of my youth workers and I are reading a book by Rick Lawrence called “Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry” in which Rick makes the following observations:

- Jesus spent more time praying than speaking
- Jesus enjoyed spending time with self-confessed sinners
- Jesus said we’d know we were starting to make an impact when people started insulting, persecuting and defaming us because of Him
- Jesus hated it when people hid themselves behind religious rule-keeping and he told his followers to plunge themselves into the mainstream culture like a lamp in a dark room
- Jesus spoke openly about hell and warned there are real consequences for those who cling to self-sufficiency and unbelief
- Jesus hated it when people prayed or served or sacrificed to boost their profiles or feed their egos
- Jesus was quick to forgive those who were repentant and quick to condemn those who weren’t
- Jesus bluntly told his followers they could not be motivated by love of money and love of God at the same time.
- Jesus told us to ignore people who take big but don’t act big
- Jesus flaunted scores of societies conventions
- Jesus loved celebrations and enjoyed himself so much that the religious rule keepers accused him of public drunkenness
- Jesus said we should be more loyal to him than we are to our families, and our traditions and practices
- Jesus said our biggest problem is that we forget to remember who God is and what He’s done

So here are a few questions for every adult who cares about the spiritual condition of our kids:

- Do we worship the *REAL* Jesus, or some neutered version of Him that our culture has created?
- Are we helping our kids to see and know the real Jesus?
- Are we showing kids, everyday, that Jesus saturates our lives and changes *everything*?

Grace and Peace,