

The Making of an Individual – Josh McDowell

January 2006

EDITOR'S NOTE: A handful of homeschool families (and many others) had the privilege of hearing Josh McDowell speak at the College Church in Northampton on October 29. It was provocative, informative and inspirational as Josh challenged us to reach the next generation. A summary of his presentation is offered in lieu of a devotional.

“For the first time in America, there are two distinct cultures. Kids today don’t think like we did at their age,” said Josh McDowell.



He began his three-hour session with a pyramid graphic with four sections. He labeled the smallest part at the apex as “behavior.” He said, “Behavior is the part that you see, but the massive part is underneath.” The next tier down represents values, and the third section is beliefs. Josh said that beliefs form our values that promote our behavior. Statistics show that there is only about 3% difference in behavior between Christian youth and non-Christian youth. “If beliefs are not different than unbelievers, the behavior will be the same.”

To underscore the cultural shift in Christian beliefs, Josh cited surveys on the subject of absolute truth. In 1991, 52% believed there is no absolute truth. In 1994, the figure rose to 62%, 78% in 1999, and up to 91% in 2005! Only 6% of youth in general believe in absolute truth, and only 9% of Christian youth!

To hammer his point home, Josh said 63% of Christian youth do not believe Jesus is the Son of God, 51% do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, less than 4% believe the Bible in inerrant Word of God, and 65% believe there is no way to tell which religion is true.

“The way they process truth is different,” Josh explained as the reason for two distinct cultures. He broke down the process in two ways. In the generations prior to this one,



“truth is discovered” – truth is transcendent to the individual. This generation believes that “truth is created” – it’s all about personal perspective – all truth values are equal. (Truth, by its definition cannot contradict itself, or it is no longer truth...) In a Bible study group, this cultural difference is seen by the questions: It’s not “What does this verse mean?” – but, “What does this verse mean to you?” It sounds like semantics, but the difference is powerful.

There is a second difference in the process of truth (which is the foundation for beliefs – which lead to values – which lead to behavior). Prior generations believe that if something is true it will work. This generation thinks that if something works, it must be true. Again, the difference sounds very subtle, but how the second process impacts truth is alarming. Pragmatism is “whatever works” – so the shortsightedness of youth leads to some very wrong conclusions on truth. It also means that Christians must “walk the talk” to make a difference to a generation led by pragmatism.

This becomes a challenge as all churches are somewhat dysfunctional as their primary outreach is to sinners. As saved sinners grow in grace and truth, it may appear to youth that Christian truth does not work. "All churches have problems. That is not hypocrisy – it's how you deal with problems," said Josh.

"We need to bridge the culture," he said, citing that 88% of young people walk away from church within one year of high school graduation. Josh challenged us to learn the culture of youth the same way a missionary would learn a foreign culture if he or she wanted to impact the people there.

At this point in the talk, Josh addressed the base of the pyramid: RELATIONSHIPS. "We need to build loving, intimate relationships with our kids – or kiss them goodbye," he said. He quoted Psalm 26:3 as the first of many verses to link love and truth. It says: "For I am constantly aware of your unfailing love – and I have lived according to your truth." Psalm 86:11 says: "Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth for your love for me is very great." He cited John 1:14 and 17, and Psalm 85:10. In Ephesians, chapter 4, Paul tells the church to speak the truth in love. God presents truth in the context of His Son's sacrificial death which was propelled by love. We need to do the same with this generation.

Josh cited several scientific studies, including an in-depth one from Dartmouth Medical School. "All research shows that, from birth, we are hardwired to form relationships. It's not nature versus nurture – its nurture," he said. To pass values on to young people, he said we need loving relationships and we need to model the truth/value you want to see ingrained in the child.

"What is the greatest evil to children today?" Josh posed to the audience. After several wrong answers, Josh said, "It is absent or disconnected fathers." He gave several firsthand, heartbreaking stories from young people he had worked with, and said all sociological studies continue to show the impact of fatherless homes. While he encouraged the single moms, Josh stressed the importance of dads.

"Parents need to have convictions," he said. "Kids need to know what you believe, why you believe it, and they need to see you model it." Josh used God as the Ultimate Example of the right parenting. In Exodus 43:14, we see that God is a jealous God – He is passionate about His relationship with you! God's love takes the initiative (John 3:16) and is sacrificial. God's love is all-knowing (Ps 139) and all-encompassing (John 15:9, which says that as much as the Father loves the Son, He loves you!). "He who knows me best, loves me most," said Josh, referring to God's love for him and how he should love his kids.

Despite the differences in generational approaches to truth, kids still want to know: "Is it true?" Josh spent the better part of an hour citing evidence that the Bible is inerrant truth. Much of the material can be found in his book, "More Than a Carpenter" which is highly recommended for junior high and high school youth.

Before giving seven simple principles for parenting through relationship, Josh gave a few notes of encouragement:

- ♥ there are no guarantees to parenting
- ♥ it is never too late
- ♥ some children are just born "hard-to-raise"

- ♥ don't give up!
- ♥ Rules without relationship lead to rebellion

The seven rules are:

1. **AFFIRMATION:** Affirming children's emotions gives them a sense of authenticity. Romans 12:15 says to weep with those that weep and rejoice with those that rejoice. Kid's need to hear, "I'm so sorry, that must have hurt you." They don't want you to try to fix everything.

2. **ACCEPTANCE:** Unconditional acceptance builds security. Romans 15:7 says to receive one another as Christ has received us.

3. **APPRECIATION:** Gives kids a sense of significance. (You've done or said something worthwhile.) In Matthew 3:17, God the Father confirms His Son, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

4. **AVAILABILITY:** Gives kids a sense of importance. Kids spell love, T-I-M-E.

5. **AFFECTION:** Shows kids, "I am loveable." John 15 is all about loving each other.

6. **APPROACH THEIR WORLD:** Gives them a sense you are interested in what they are interested in. I Corinthians 13:5 ...love does not seek its own...

7. **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Gives a sense of responsibility or love. Set reasonable boundaries and hold them accountable. It shows you care.

Josh's love for young people was evident throughout his presentation. He is passionate about reaching them for Christ – and building the faith of Christian youth. He holds "Bold Truth" seminars around the country with powerful, multi-media presentation. More information on these seminars can be found at BeyondBelief.com. Josh has plenty of materials to assist parents to win the battle against truth. He gets no royalties from any book sales – since 1968, all proceeds go to ministry. Visit Josh.org for more information.