

When I Was Your Age - 3 Things Missing

When I was your age ... those words precede many sentences to children and young people. I don't wish to shatter any adult illusions but it doesn't actually matter what follows those words as young people aren't listening. In a sense they feel they have heard it all before.

Maybe it is worth a moment to consider if we ever were their age; or more appropriately what has changed in society since the time you and I were teenagers.

It has been suggested that three things are missing from society today that were around when I was a teenager [a mere 20 something years ago]. The first is a loss of love and security. You see, when I was growing up the incidence of divorce and family breakdown was far more rare, somehow families stuck together. Today it would be irresponsible to ask a group of teenagers if they still lived with their real mum and dad, but if I did there could well be less than half. Many young people I know feel let down, unloved and unwanted by the absent parent and certainly suffer from a lower than average self image and a higher than average insecurity. Some of them feel a real sense of not belonging. When I was their age I was secure in knowing my family structure was stable.

The second thing is that there is a loss of truth. Young people aren't hearing anyone standing up to say - this is what you should do. Parental control is lighter [see above] and certain politicians and leaders are pointing the way but then not living the same as their talk. I never remember being told what was right and wrong it was somehow picked up as I went along, there was also the incentive that if I did anything that I shouldn't do then somehow, someone knew my parents and the message got back home usually before I did. Today things are different. Some young people I have worked with are quite relaxed about explaining why they had to take the car from its owner and seem to think it is quite acceptable. Kevin could wax eloquent about how he was hungry and they had two videos; so it made sense to him to steal for his stomach. [He conveniently forgot that he didn't have any food or money because of his drug addiction; and that he took both video recorders as well as other items]. When I was their age ... people seemed to have a more acute sense of conscience

Finally, and perhaps most pointedly, is the fact that there is a loss of hope. Young people leaving school don't find it easy to find work and need more and more qualifications to gain employment. I remember employing a young man as a fork lift truck driver who had a degree in human geography [whatever that was]. When I was their age ... I had a choice of jobs when I left school.

The consequences of feeling that they don't belong, they have no future and that there are few moral guidelines can be seen in the media on a regular basis.

But what has all that to do with church and life? Well I believe that these missing ingredients can be found in the gospel. The Bible states that God is love; Jesus said I am the way, the truth and the life. In the book of Jeremiah God says that he has a plan for us to give us a hope and a future.

There should be no more accepting or loving environment than your local church, a place here the love of God is both talked about, lived out and shown to other people. The Bible doesn't just say that God has love but that God is love; and out of His love to us we can minister to other people.

Guidelines for a good, upright life are found in the same book. More than the 10 commandments, it provides a moral blueprint for life. Of course it is possible to be accused of talking the talk and not walking the walk but that doesn't negate the fact that the guidelines are there and it is our responsibility to set the good example based on the Christian teaching.

Many people feel a sense of being hopeless today, it isn't just a young people's phenomenon, they are looking sometimes for a purpose to even stay alive. When we spend time considering eternal things; looking beyond the day to day to our very roots as humanity we find a God who cares and is able to provide us with that reason to live, that hope for the future.

Having said that just because the answer is available doesn't mean that it is easily found or even accepted. The function of the church is to point the way and not merely point the finger. Then we won't need to say 'when I was your age', but we will understand that life is different today - yet the answers to life's issues, even those of the 21st century, can be found in God.



About Nigel

Nigel has been paid to work with young people since 1991 and did it voluntarily before then. He actually believes he hasn't been to work since then because he enjoys himself so much. He is available for private consultation and coaching as well as having resources available e.g. **Understanding Teenagers A-Z**.

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