

THETA CON 2012

DAVE MIERS' RESPONSE TO MICHAEL JENSEN'S *PAIN, PURPOSE AND WHITE PICKET FENCES*

Pain, purpose and white picket fences is a well-structured, well-argued paper. I personally found it encouraging to consider the Incarnation of the Son of God and how "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

In one sense, the paper has nothing to do with young people; it is concerning all humans. However, the introduction and conclusion place it within a youth ministry framework.

I live and minister on Sydney's Northern Beaches. For many young people the biggest issues they have in life are when the surf is flat or the battery on their iPhone runs flat on their way home from school!

I'm not planning on disagreeing with the meaning of *peirasmos*, *tentatio* or *probatio*! My aim in the next 10 minutes will be to try and tease out some of the implications of this paper's conclusions for our youth ministry practice.

1) "The way of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is not an avoidance of but a facing up to what human life is really like, in all its insecurity and uncertainty" (MPJ)

I enjoyed the different Bonhoeffer *Temptation* quotes throughout the paper. While reading them - I couldn't help but think of Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Ultimately the call in this paper is a call to discipleship.

'When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die'

'The Christian life is a life of crucifixion'

'The cross to which we are called is a daily dying in the power of the death which Christ died once and for all.'

We need to teach young people that trials, temptations and suffering are part of the normal human experience and even more so part of what it means to follow the Suffering Servant. Jesus says in Luke 9:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me"

I remember listening to a John Piper sermon series from 1986 on the book of Job. He says that it is his responsibility to prepare His people for "when" not "if" they suffer.

Are we preparing our young people to suffer for the cause of Christ? Are we preparing young people to deal with suffering when it comes?

Ultimately, are we calling young people to count the cost of discipleship?

One way we are seeking to do that on the Northern Beaches is through a partnership with *Thirteen Three* - the youth arm of *Voice of the Martyrs*.

It's been sobering to see that there are 200 million brothers and sisters around the world living under the constant threat of persecution because they belong to Jesus.

Brad Konneman, the director of 13:3, says that "we need the persecuted church more than they need us"

The reality is that Northern Beaches, and indeed all Australian teenagers need to see the courage of their brothers and sisters around as they stand firm under pressure, that we would stand firm, perhaps under different pressure.

We have begun a program a couple of nights a year called "SOULIES UNDERGROUND". It's more or less copied from "SECRET CHURCH" by Brooks Hill Church in Birmingham USA. David Platt talks about Secret Church in his book *Radical*.

Basically we do underground church. Simple, stripped-back church. (Song. Bible reading. Sermon. Hear about a country. Pray for that country. Repeat 3 more times.) We try for a night to put ourselves in the shoes of persecuted Christians. Our aim is twofold:

Hunger for the Word + Pray for the World

We want to hunger for God's Word like God's people in persecuted places, we want to know what's going on in the world and then pray for it... and ultimately we want to keep calling young people to keep counting the cost of discipleship.

Do our young people know what it will cost to follow Jesus?

2) "The gospel of Jesus Christ does offer a better security than suburban life – for Christ faces the harshness of the real world as it really is and deals with it" (MPJ)

In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer says that,

'The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world'

How are we going at teaching young people that knowing Jesus is better than the notion of happiness offered by white picket fences, middle class, materialism?

Are we teaching them to, Philippians 3:10

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..."

Are we modeling that knowing Jesus is better than life itself?

On the Northern Beaches - on the outside - everything looks great! But you don't need to scratch too far below the surface to realise that there is great pain, hurts, insecurities and uncertainties.

I recently interviewed one of our young adults at an event. He spoke of the fun that he found in the party, pub, alcohol scene - but in the end he realised it was only ever temporary.

Ecclesiastes should be one of the first books we consult in teaching young people to see that things of this world are temporary.

I think the paper could have made more of the idea of hope. Hebrews has much to say about the superiority of Jesus. And Hebrews 10:32-24 has a picture of the lasting security that Jesus brings

"Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great

contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions."

Not only is this view on the world good for the disciple, it's a great apologetic for non-Christian teenagers to see that Jesus and what he offers is someone and something worth losing everything for!

3) "The manner of his victory is itself a model for human response to adversity. He rests profoundly on the Word of God, exercising not his spiritual biceps but instead drawing the depths of the Father's love." (MPJ)

Bible Society has recently released some research suggesting that only 2 in 10 Australian Christians spend regular time in the Word. The statistic for Christian youth is even less. In response, the Bible society have a massive nationwide Bible reading campaign.

When Jesus is tested and tempted - he calls upon and submits to the Word of God.

Are we teaching young people to know the Word so they can submit to the Word? Are our youth ministries really Bible saturated? Or are we distracted from the bread and butter of setting forth the truth plainly?

We live in a world full of modern distractions, how can we make sure that the Word of God is central not just to our gatherings - but that we are equipping young people to make the Word of God central to their daily lives?

3 Ideas:

1) Using New Mediums

Young people spend a lot of time on phones and social media sites. Get the word of God into that world!

Daily Bible Journal

- Prepare notes
- Publish notes
- Short intro video
- Blog post with notes
- Twitter, facebook reminders

SMS

Month of June, a verse a day to

Bible Apps

- Review apps
- Teach people how to use them
- When you ask people to open bibles, ask to open apps too

2) Recommit to Scripture Memory Systems

One of the ways to flee from sin in the context of trials and suffering is to recall the Word of God.

Are there ways that we can have specific

3) Reconsider the use of Catechisms

It might seem outdated and old and stiffing, but perhaps there's a place to even reconsider structured use of catechism.