



Session 12

Lesson 22: Frontline: Lost Children of Rockdale County



Quote

- FRONTLINE's Peabody Award-winning documentary "The Lost Children of Rockdale County" deals with a controversial but important subject matter: affluent suburban teens struggling not only with a rare syphilis outbreak, but also loneliness, disaffection, sexual promiscuity, and substance abuse.

Although "Lost Children" begins with an enquiry into how and why the syphilis outbreak happened, the documentary becomes in the end a wider, deeper examination of the world of teenagers and their relationships with their parents and each other. In surprising frank interviews, a cross-section of Rockdale teens describe the new rules of dating and the sexual promiscuity that stems from a yearning to have friends and fit in. They also confess their desire for attention--and even discipline--from their parents, many of whom admit on camera to being too tired, too busy, or just plain scared to connect with their children. The result is a sensitive, honest--and at times shocking--portrait of the world in which America's teens are coming of age.

-- from *Lost Children of Rockdale County: Teacher's Guide* (<http://www.pbs.org>)



Key Terms

- Teen/parent relationships
- Teen/church relationships
- Dating and sex
- Fitting in



Lecture Objectives

- Describe, analyze, and evaluate issues facing suburban teens today and characteristics of how they and their parents deal with those issues
- Identify Biblical principles and approaches to these issues



To Think About Before You Go On

- As a youth or family minister, what would you identify thus far as the most pressing issue to be addressed in the lives of the kids and families in this film? (It's understood that "they need Jesus." In what specific ways is that need manifested and in what specific ways might the Gospel be ministered in its fullness?)

Discussion of “Lost Children” (Part 2)

Below are students comments as the class discusses the first part of “Lost Children.” Join the discussion online.

What did the church(es) do that was really good?

- “I think they did a good job of trying to present an alternative to, I mean, it was obviously a very boring place to live, and so they tried to, um, present a place where the kids could come and enjoy themselves.”

What were some things that drew kids to “Throne”?

- “Energy”
- Social Event
- “I thought, I thought it was really good, I mean, like you see him and [it] really, really looks like he really is involved in worship and it’s kind of exciting. I mean, when you ... ‘cause you hear his ... it’s sort of happy and sad at the same time ‘cause you, like, you hear his story ... you’ve already heard his story about what he had been through, what his life was and then you see him and then, kind of finding some hope and comfort in the church but then you kind of, you know, the outcome. He’s walked away from it, too, so it’s kind of, sort of, happy and sad.”

- "It seems like that'd be like the ideal kind of person you'd want, you know, like here's the guy with ideas kind of a ring-leader ... you kind of feel like, 'Man, if we could draw somebody like that in, think about who else you could'"
- **The interviewer asked the youth director, "What happened to D.J.?" What was his response and why is that frustrating?**
- ... "And then he said, 'We just kind of drifted apart.' Like, it was like the break, it seemed like the break in the relationship corresponded to him walking away from the church."
- "D.J. thinks he's done with God because He won't give him a tangible sign so he's turning his back and he knows he is."

D.J. says, “God let me down.” – What did the church fail to do in order to nurture D.J.?

- “I think they failed to recognize his struggle and his questions. Think about your model of three to one: at least one person out of that three might recognize that he has that question. Saying, ‘God, I need you to show me.’ Somebody that is stronger in their faith could explain to him. You know, he shouldn’t have been asking that question by himself.
- “And he’s willing, obviously, to share it, he shares it on camera that’s going to be nationally broadcast, so there needed to be somebody there to ask him.
- “They probably looked at him and said, ‘Wow, he’s converted, he looks great, he’s coming, he’s doing fine.’

This illustrates the contrast between ...

Social Ministry ...

and Relational Ministry ...

- “For me: I grew up in a Catholic family, my husband is Jewish, and so when I got saved, church people were the only people that I knew and they sort of like represented Christ to me and if I would get disappointed in something – like I’d hear gossip – then I’d get scared, ‘Maybe this is what this is all about.’ And I can’t imagine a kid ... ‘cause I was a lot older ... a kid who is just coming into it ... is that we represent Christ so much to these people that we are trying to save.”
- “There was just one thing that, uh, kind of struck me about what D.J. had to say as far as, uh, in some way it’s hard to know, you know, kind of where this break down is; but uh, it seems like when he talked about it in terms of his relationship with God, really stressed, ‘... tried to live the most moral life that I could.’ And how he just walked ... kind of, away from all of his friends and stuff. And so, it really struck me as really interesting about what I think, uh, we project as a church ... that that’s sort of the expectation ... and it seemed to be really what he understood as ... and then ... but then what he was really missing was who God really was as evidenced by, kind of, this question
- ... so I think that’s a real burden for us to carry, to use, to not, you know, present that gospel.”

- “And as long as they don’t step outside your boundary, well, my question of the father is ‘What’s your boundary?’
- “I was overwhelmed the whole time with the thought of every parent that was interviewed: ‘Lost parents brings lost kids.’ And just floundering and having no reference point, having no sense of hope; I mean, they truly believe that there was nothing they could do to keep these kids from making these decisions. And there’s an element, in truth, of truth in the mother saying, ‘They have to make the decision.’ But for her to say, ‘I just give my opinion and that’s the best I can do.’
- It does [break my heart] because they have no concept of ... I think they feel a need for something else, but they have no concept of Christ as filling that need. And it’s very painful to watch.
- “One thing you can’t give your kid something you don’t have and if you don’t have a love of God or any discipline in yourself. Ah, but the movie made me furious ... and then the father never took anything ... one tape

- I was listening to one time ... is that, um, the mother is the loving one but the father sets the limits and those limits

are the boundaries giving kids so much structure and stability ... and maybe they had dads like that, too.

- “How do you think the churches could have reached out to the families, because you have all these teenagers, for example, on the Thursday night ‘Throne’. You have all the teenagers coming to that. How could they have gotten in contact with the parents?”
- “Well, they talked about, um, of course, they went through the lines of the rap song .. that make your skin crawl ... and they talked about how disgusting ... and one minute they were smiling and laughing and saying those words, but in a separate minute they were saying, ‘It’s disgusting.’ And, yeah, there’s not continuity there.”
- “They’re going to cling to you, you know what I mean? They’re obviously not coming from a background, they don’t have any spiritual leadership or attention so, I mean, you’re going to be ‘it’! And they’re not going to understand where you’re coming from so they’re going to call you, you know, at nine o’clock on a Saturday night not even think about a second about it.”

- “One positive thing was the mother at the end: at least she took the steps, she quit her job and opened her own business so that she didn’t have to be away a week at a time or whatever, so she saw that, ‘My daughter is more important than my position.’”
- “I thought that was well illustrated in there because the girl at one point, she’s like, ‘I liked it better when she wasn’t there.’”
- “And then she’s like, ‘No, I guess it wasn’t true. I like it better when she is here.’ And so I thought that was really neat that that came up.”
- “... Do you think this video would be inappropriate to use with college age students?”

