



PARENTS **PARKids** CHRONICLE

Growing in Grace at Grandview Park

## EMERGING ADULTS

BY GREG LONG

A version of this article was originally posted 10/13/09 on the [garbcquest.org](http://garbcquest.org) blog (<http://garbcquest.org/?p=646>).

A few years ago, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton wrote a book titled *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*.<sup>1</sup> In it they detailed their research into the religious beliefs of American teenagers. They summarized their findings by describing the predominant religion of American teenagers as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”

Moral Therapeutic Deism is characterized by the following beliefs:<sup>2</sup>

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

It is obvious that this perspective does not describe the God of the Bible and runs antithetical to the true Gospel.

Now Smith has written a new book, this time focused on religious beliefs and practices of “emerging adults” (Americans 18–29 years old), titled *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*.<sup>3</sup>

Katelyn Beaty recently interviewed Smith for *Christianity Today*,<sup>4</sup> and I found the interview both sobering and stimulating.

Here’s how Beaty summarizes Smith’s findings:

*In a new life phase that sociologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett labeled emerging adulthood, Americans ages 18–29 enjoy more options for work, marriage, and location than perhaps any previous generation. They are also one of the most self-focused, confused, and anxious age groups, led into an “adulthood” that prevents a majority from committing to people and institutions.*

Beaty asks Smith about emerging adults’ religious attitudes, and he responds:

*Most of what happens in emerging adulthood works against serious faith commitments and putting down roots in congregations. Most emerging adults are disconnected from religious institutions and practices. Geographic mobility, social mobility, wanting to have options, thinking this is the time to be crazy and free in ways most religious traditions would frown upon, wanting an identity different from the family of origin—all of these factors reduce serious faith commitments.*

But to me the most striking question and answer is the following:

*Q: What are the traits of religious American teenagers who retain a high faith commitment as emerging adults?*

*A: The most important factor is parents. For better or worse, parents are tremendously important in shaping their children’s faith trajectories. That’s the story that came out in Soul Searching. It’s also the story that comes out here.*

*Another factor is youth having established devotional lives—that is, praying, reading Scripture—during the teenage years. Those*

*who do so as teenagers are much more likely than those who don’t to continue doing so into emerging adulthood. In some cases, having other adults in a congregation who you have relationships with, and who are supportive and provide modeling, also matters.*

*Some readers are going to be disappointed that going on mission trips doesn’t appear to amount to a hill of beans, at least for emerging*

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*adults as a whole. For some it’s important, but not for most. But again, we emphasize above everything else the role of parents, not just in telling kids about faith but also in modeling it.*

We know that there is no foolproof way to ensure our children will come to know, love, and follow God their entire lives. Only the Holy Spirit can effect that work in their lives. But one of the means God uses to draw children to Himself is the godly instruction and training of parents (Eph. 6:4). How are you doing in this area?

Also note the importance the author places on teens having “established devotional lives.” Do you model personal devotions before your children? Do you encourage them to do the same, in an age-appropriate way?

<sup>1</sup> Oxford University Press, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> See Gene Edward Veith, “A nation of deists”, *World Magazine* (6/25/05), <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/10775>.

<sup>3</sup> Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Katelyn Beaty, “Lost in Transition”, *Christianity Today* (10/09/09), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/october/21.34.html>.

## RESOURCES FOR DEVOTIONS

Here are some resources for devotions, both for kids and for families:

- *The Big Picture Story Bible* by David Helm
- *The Beginner's Bible*
- *The Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes* by Kenneth Taylor
- *Bible Stories for Preschoolers* by Weaver Weidmann (Chariot Victor)
- *Herein Is Love: A Commentary Series for Children* (Shepherd Press)
- *Children's Bible Basics: Questions Kids Ask About Belief* by Carolyn Nystrom (Moody)
- *A Faith to Grow On* by John MacArthur (Thomas Nelson)
- *Kids Questions About...God and Jesus* (Regular Baptist Press)
- *Kids Questions About...the Bible and Creation* (Regular Baptist Press)
- *Kids Questions About...Sin and Salvation* (Regular Baptist Press)
- *Kids Questions About...Church and the Future* (Regular Baptist Press)
- *Keys for Kids*, a free daily devotional guide ([www.keysforkids.org](http://www.keysforkids.org))



## READ MY QUIPS

HUH?

### Spot the Typo

#### Newspaper Headlines

- POLL SAYS THAT 53 PERCENT BELIEVE MEDIA OFFEN MAKE MISTAKES
- HOTEL BURNS; 200 GUESTS ESCAPE HALF GLAD
- UNEASY CLAM SETTLES OVER MICHIGAN
- SOCKS LOWER IN TOKYO
- LITERACY VOLUNTEERS COMBATS PROBLEM OF ILLERACY
- ARE YOUNG AMERICANS BE GETTING STUPIDER?

#### Newspaper Articles

- The centerway lot will follow the pattern of other lots as far as parking lots are concerned. The meters will permit parking for ten dents per hour.
- Each evening will consist of a four-course menu.
- A recipe for beef tenderloin in the *Washington Post* Food section included "two pounds baby, stems removed and discarded."
- They were married and lived happily even after.
- The new Miss America will be drowned later before a nationwide audience.
- Mr. Ballard, who has been very ill this past week, is still under the car of Dr. Goldman.
- Women's Elf-Defense Class Scheduled

#### Classified Ads

- Dairy Queen seeking person with supervisory and fat food restaurant experience.
- HELP WANTED: Law firm needs secretary. Excellent benefits, including tension.

From *The Bride of Anguished English* by Richard Lederer (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 173-176.

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