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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Reclaiming Lost Children 02**  
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Well this is the second of a series of presentations titled, *Reclaiming Lost Children*. And in this series we're focusing on those young people who have left the faith and what we can do to help them return. In the first of this series we saw that God loves our children with a ferocious, determined, unrelenting love. He *never* gives up on them, even if they're not responding to Him. He's patient with them – waiting for them to respond to His love. And we read the story of the lost son whose father ran to meet him when he returned to the family. And we saw also a modern day example of a young woman who became a prayer warrior for one of her friends who was in deep trouble and that he eventually returned to the faith.

Several years ago I went on a four-day educational seminar. There was a master teacher in town named David Langford. And for four days he kept us all spellbound with his amazing ability to teach. He had an exercise that we all had to do. We were all to get with the people that came from our school and sit around a round table and make a list of the problems the school had. Then we had to prioritize the list. Well, the top problem that we identified at our school was a lack of parental involvement. I had heard a lot of people complaining about the parents of the kids in that school – how they just wouldn't get involved. Well, then he asked us to list all the possible reasons for the problem. And then he asked us to sort all of these reasons according to the ones that we could do something about directly and the ones that we couldn't. So parental bad attitudes went in the “can't do anything about it” category. And the kids who don't take their newsletters home from school went in the “can do something about it” category. Then he told us to set aside all the ones that we couldn't do anything about and decide which was the most important thing that we *could* do something about.

You know, it was amazing what we came up with as this exercise continued. What we decided we could do was that we had a lack of communication coming from the school to the parents. And that was the *major* thing that we could change. And most of the people, as we sat around the table, began to realize that we were the problem, not the parents – which was pretty amazing really! Pretty interesting.

He told us to make up a plan to do something about our own lack of communication. And while we were sitting around this table, I just noticed the difference in our attitude at the beginning and the one we had at the end when we all got involved in figuring out what could actually be *done* to change things. What I propose in this series is a plan to examine the situation that we have in the Church of God and a way to do something about the problem based on what we see when we think about the problem.

Now, there was also another exercise that he told us to make a list of strengths and problems. Then set aside the strengths. He said, “You focus on the problems. The strengths don’t need fixing.” So that’s what I would like to do today. And I know focusing on the problems, sometimes, can be a downer, but later we’ll talk about how to fix them. So, I apologize if it might seem a bit negative today. But if you want things to get better, you always have to tackle the problems and deal with them. The strengths just take care of themselves. They don’t need fixing.

Again, the problem that we’re going to be talking about is why our young people leave the church and what can be done to bring them back. Now, let me begin by saying the attrition that we have experienced over the years has happened in spite of God’s love for our children. There’s never any doubt that He loves them. We saw that last week. It’s not that He’s given up on them. This has happened contrary to the purpose for the church. We read that in the book of Acts last week – that the promise is given not only to us, but to our children as well. This has happened contrary to the will of God. We saw that last week in the story about the lost son.

So, this departure from the faith, it’s not supposed to have happened. It’s not what God wants. It’s not a good thing that’s happened. It’s not just nature taking its course. And it did not happen for no reason. There are hard reasons why so many of our young people have left.

And the next thing to think about – after we think about that – is, who is responsible for our church the way it is? Is it God, because it’s His church? Or are *we* responsible for what has happened? That’s a very important question to ask and to answer. Some people, when you show them a fault, say, “But it’s God’s church and He determines what happens in the church.” Think about that for a minute with me. “It’s God’s church and so He determines what happens in the church.”

I’ll give you an example. For years the ministry of the churches of God did not actively engage people in the church’s work. We talked about that during our Bible study this morning. Consequently, none of us know anything about performing the mission of the church, do we? We had somebody else do it. We talk about evangelism, but very few of us are actually *doing* anything that works, because we don’t know what to do. And a lot of people say, “But that was God’s will. He’s in charge.” I’m sorry. That was *not* God’s will. That’s *us* not doing God’s will. That’s what that was.

Have you ever read Revelation 2 and 3? In those chapters where Jesus evaluates the seven churches? He lays out their strengths and then he puts the spotlight on their key weaknesses. And He commends them for their strengths and *criticizes* them for their weaknesses. Now,

how could He do that if it was all *His* responsibility? If everything about the church was God's responsibility, He wouldn't have any right to criticize those people. No, no, no. The church is largely what we make it. God does not make us do anything. We get to decide how the church is going to be. So it's what we make of it. Our congregation is largely what we make of it. Our family is largely what we make of it. Are we going to live by godly principles? Or are we going to live apart from them? And God watches us. And He watches us learn from our misguided and flawed human strategies. Now I say they're flawed, because usually the strategies that don't work spring out of our *own* needs and desires, instead of out God's.

So as we discuss the kind of church environment that causes young people to leave, resist the temptation to blame God for it. Instead, look at your own contribution to the environment as it is – whether it's good or whether it's bad. If we're not willing to do that, we'll never figure out what the problem is. Because the problem is with us. And we do, obviously, have a problem. So many of them have left. But do we know why? I think most of us don't. Do we have a strategy to solve the problem? Well, no we don't. We don't even talk about it. Why don't we have a strategy? Because we don't understand what the problem is. We just know that they leave and continue to leave.

So, we don't know what to do and we don't know why we have the problem. What we need is a new way to look at this problem – just like David Langford taught us in that little circle – how to look at a problem and figure out a new way to look at it so it can be worked on. That's what we need in the Church of God – related to the loss of so many of our children.

I'm going to propose a new way to view this problem to you today. And it has to do with the concept of encouragement. Now, when we use the word *encouragement* in common usage, we think about saying something positive or uplifting to someone. "You're such a nice person," or "I really like the way you did this or that." And when we say someone is *discouraged*, we usually mean that they're ready to give up on something. They're discouraged. They're kind of down.

When we use the word *encourage* today, we want to use it in a different way than that. And when we talk about *discouragement*, we want to talk about it in a different way than the way we normally talk about it – with a different and much *deeper* meaning to it. If we think about this word in a new way, it may help us understand not only the problem, but it may also point to the solution.

What does the word *encouragement* mean? It means literally *to add courage*. To add courage. To encourage is to help people have courage. And we can think of God encouraging Joshua and the children of Israel. Let's just turn over there quickly – Deuteronomy 31:6 – where they were getting ready to cross over Jordan, and now they were going to have to *take* the land that God gave them. So they're going to have to do something courageous here.

**Dt. 31:6** – And God says, "*Be strong and of good courage, and do not fear or be afraid of them, for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you, and He will not leave you or forsake you.*" So that's more like what I'm talking about when we talk about encouragement.

That was encouragement there – where God was telling them that they should be strong and have courage and go and *do* what He told them to do. That’s the point of it, isn’t it? To do the right thing.

Now, there are four elements that help people have courage. And you may be wondering what courage has to do with our young people leaving. Well, stay with me. I’m not off track. We’re going to put it all together and wrap it all up as we go. But there are four building blocks of courage – four aspects of social life that encourage people and give them the courage to live their life to the full, to be the best person they can be and before others and before God. What are they? Well, the first one we can call *inclusion* or *inclusiveness*. Some other words to describe this term can be attachment, or belonging, or connection, or involvement. When people are included, they are encouraged – that is, they have the courage to participate.

I’m still in the warm glow of a visit to Kansas City, where I spoke to a congregation there. While I was there I met all the teens and young adults and had a couple of really interesting discussions with them. One of the discussions was about why young people leave. I wanted their input on this issue. And so they talked with me about this for a good forty-five minutes. And everyone, from the youngest one – who appeared to be around thirteen – to the oldest one – who was twenty-four – all contributed in a very spirited way to that discussion. And one of the things that came up over and over again in this discussion was their inability to overcome some of the politics between their congregation and another one. They told me this story about how the adults in the other group tried to keep their kids separated from these young people. Every time they would plan a church activity, this other group would plan a youth activity at the same time so that their kids couldn’t come to the one across town. They were pretty frustrated about that. Well, several days ago, one of the adults from that congregation wrote me an email and mentioned that three of these teens attended the regular business meeting of their congregation and wanted to be more involved now in the church – in the congregation. And said he thought it was a result of that discussion that we had. See, just listening to them, and valuing their opinion, and including them in that process – I told them, “I’m trying to talk about this in the church and I wanted to *include* their input in my thinking.” So they’re being included all of a sudden. It encouraged them to get more involved in their congregation. It gave them the courage to take some action on their own behalf. So that’s one of the building blocks of courage – *inclusion*. It gives us social courage to participate.

The second one is *competence*. Other words for this one could be called achievement, or mastery, or skill development. When people have a skill, or a competency to bring to the group, they tend to be encouraged about their role in the group. It gives them courage to participate more. I was thinking about Karin – the young woman who played the flute for us several weeks ago. After services I was talking to her and I asked her how long she’d played the flute. And she said, “Since the sixth grade.” She mentioned to me that she hadn’t played anything at church in over a year. And yet she was able to stand up before strangers and play well on just a few moments practice. She’s very competent on that instrument – very skilled. And that competence gives her the courage to do what she was able to do there. So that’s an example of how when you bring a skill to a group of people and you can use that to better the group, it makes you feel more a part of it. And it makes you have the courage to use your skill

to participate. The same thing is true with spiritual gifts. God gives us spiritual competencies so that we can be a part of His church successfully, because He knows that we need to be that. And He knows that will encourage us to be a part of it.

The third one is *autonomy*. Other words that might fit here are independence or self-direction. When people have a choice about their involvement, and they choose to involve themselves, and they choose *how* to involve themselves, it gives them courage to be more involved. They know that they choose to be there and that begs the question, “Why? Why am I here?” And the answer is to be involved in most cases.

I was talking to a friend last night on the phone who’s a teacher. And she’s a very specialized teacher who works with mentally disturbed children in a public school setting. She was telling me that her new principal has taken away from her the ability to discipline the children in her classroom. She wants them all sent to the office when there are infractions. Most teachers would be deliriously happy to send everybody to the principal. And most principals I know would rather take a beating than have to do all the discipline. So I’m not quite sure what’s going on with this principal. But my friend *wants* to do the disciplining, because it’s all part of a system she has worked out to deal with these mentally disturbed children. And she’s very good at what she does. She uses this system to get the kids to do their work and to control themselves. So, in effect, the principal has taken that away from her. She’s going to have to completely change how she does things. So the upshot of it is, she’s less independent and she’s now dependent on the principal for this important component that she’s integrated into her teaching system. And as I was listening to her talk, I could hear the increasing frustration with the situation. If she were just left alone to make her *own* decisions about how to run her *own* class, she would feel so much more a part of the school. It’s funny how you can leave people alone and it makes them feel more included. And it’s also interesting that all the other teachers are starting to feel that same way. They’re feeling *distanced* from the school. The morale is starting to deteriorate, because their ability to make choices about how they participate in that system is being reduced. And it’s always that way. When people can exercise their free choice on behalf of whatever system they’re in, they always feel more a part of it. They feel like they’re able to contribute their unique approach to things, and so they feel more a part of it.

The fourth building block is *purpose*. Other words that we could use for this one might be altruism, or generosity, or service. When people have a purpose, and the group helps them fulfill it, they are encouraged to participate in the group, because it helps meet some of their deep-seated social needs.

I’m thinking, of course, of Camp Outreach, where we assembled to help other people. And we had about twenty people working. We remodeled portions of six homes while we were there in a week. Everyone worked really hard. And they also got along really well, even though we were working very hard in very humid and hot conditions. I was thinking about why that happened. The focus was off of self and on to a common purpose. We were all trying to get the same thing to happen. So we were unified in that purpose that we had. So when we do focus off of ourselves and onto the purpose of the group – or a common purpose – that tends to encourage people to participate and be a part of the group.

Now, here's the interesting thing. When we turn that around and we look at the opposite of these things, those are the things that cause *discouragement*. We said that we needed a new way to look at this problem. And if you look at the negative side of these four qualities, it is *most revealing*, when you think about the young people who have left. The opposite of inclusion is alienation and rejection. The opposite of competence is failure and frustration. The opposite of autonomy is helplessness and defiance. And the opposite of purpose is selfishness and indifference. If we don't have a higher purpose, it always becomes about us.

Now, does that paint a picture for you of what's happened in the church? When we think about the individuals that we know that have left, many of them feel rejected and alienated. Many of them feel like they're very frustrated because they can't find a way to contribute – you know, they failed at that. They're not competent. Many of them feel helpless and defiant because they're not allowed to make choices in the religion that they are a part of. And many of them have become selfish and indifferent, because we have not presented them a higher purpose.

Let's look at these things one at a time and start thinking about what's happened in terms of these four building blocks of courage – or the four building blocks of discouragement, as we're talking about. Alienation and rejection is the opposite of inclusion. Do you know any young people who feel alienated from the church? I was talking to some young adults recently. It was a casual conversation. They were telling me that they felt uncomfortable at church and had all their lives. They didn't feel like they belonged. They didn't feel included. They couldn't find a place to fit in. They didn't have the hope that they could be. Well, that's discouraged, isn't it? That's discouraged. When people feel alienated, they don't feel included.

We presented a picture of the church to our kids as a picture-perfect church – perfect organization with perfect people in it that use perfect strategies for living. And when they are young, they believe us in that. And when they become old – or old enough – to see the fallacies of this position, they become discouraged. They feel like the truth was kept from them – that they were excluded from that inner circle of reality. And so they feel alienated and rejected.

Have you ever heard somebody talk about how they were disillusioned about some aspect of the church experience? Well, you know, before a person can be *disillusioned*, they must first be *illusioned*. They must have a *false* picture – an *illusion* of what the church is like. And then when that illusion is shattered by reality, they become *disillusioned*. They lose the illusion. That's what's happened to a lot of our kids. Many of kids leave disillusioned because of this false-perfect picture that we have presented them about the church. Church has always been seriously flawed and always will be, because there are people in it. And we like to think we follow God's ways and follow His principles, but quite frankly, most of the time, from my experience, usually we're following flawed strategies that are flawed because they were created by imperfect people.

There was a teenager in the central valley of California about fifteen years ago who committed suicide. She left a note and all it said was, "Nobody cares." She went to a church of about four hundred people – there were about sixty to seventy teenagers roughly her own age there – with a big sports program, a whole fleet of ministers in that congregation. And somehow not one of them was able to make any kind of meaningful connection to her. I'm not saying that that's all their fault. I'm just saying that that's an example of what happens, sometimes, when people feel excluded. They get discouraged about their participation.

Let's look at the second one – failure and frustration – the opposite of competence. So many young adults that I talk to feel they know nothing about explaining their faith. They know nothing about studying the Bible. They don't know that much about how to live God's way. They feel like a failure. They feel spiritually incompetent.

Elaine and I were in the Cincinnati airport one day. There were a whole group of teens in the airport with green T-shirts on. I don't know who they were, but after a bit, two of them approached a woman, who was sitting beside us, and they asked if she would be willing to take a survey. And she said, "Yes." So one of them sat down beside her and one sat on the floor in front of her – very casual. They were very friendly with her, and they asked her what she thought the word *grace* meant. So she told them what she thought. And then they engaged her in a very pleasant discussion about what that word meant to them – kind of compared their understanding of it with hers. After a bit, they excused themselves and they ran over to a tall young man, who gave them a high five and big hug. He was obviously the youth pastor, and he was training them how to talk with people about their faith – how to talk to strangers about it. We've never done anything like that with our young people. And many of them. . . . I'm not saying that we have to go to the airport. That's not the point. The point is, that we've never worked with our young people on how to talk about what they believe. And many of them feel the lack of it.

We were talking about that this morning, weren't we, in our Bible study. We've been talking a lot about home fellowships and home Bible studies, where we invite friends. And many of the young people I've talked to express a reticence to do that, because they don't believe they know enough about explaining what they believe. They're afraid they're going to get asked questions they can't answer and then look foolish. So many of them don't feel they're doing a very good job of following Jesus' example.

They also know – this is another thing I really think is a major part of this – they know they can't really talk about their weaknesses and problems because we have been so critical and judgmental of those who have problems in our church. So they suffer on in silence and self-doubt. There's lots of people that could help them, but they're not willing to talk because they're afraid they're going to get put down. So they're unable to take the step they need to take in order to blossom spiritually. What would that be? They need to open up to someone who's been there and start processing those feelings and learn what to do – help them realize they can be accepted and understood, problems and all – lift the weight. Talk to the people who love you. That's what they need to do. It feels so good to become authentic in our communications with others who love us. And then we can start working on the problems. If

we don't know how to explain the Sabbath, we can sit around and practice with each other. It's not that hard.

Let's look at this third area – helplessness and defiance as opposed to independence. If you don't give people room to grow, they either fail to grow and become dependent, or they defy you so they can grow. Got that? They will, one way or the other, resolve the issue. They'll either give up and become dependent, or they will defy you so they can grow.

A visitor to our *LifeResource Ministries'* Website wrote us a comment on one of the editorials I'd put up there. He was talking about why so many had left, and he said, "Maybe they leave so they can grow up." They're so over controlled. Think about all the decisions made that affect our young people that they don't get to participate in. Think about how little they are included in the decision-making process. I told you before about this thing where the Kansas City group – the kids – were concerned because every time they planned an activity, they would invite their friends, only to find that the pastor from the other group would organize an activity for his group. I asked them if that was a coincidence, and they said, "Well, it happens every time." So they didn't think it was. Their take on it was, the adults were trying to keep them apart. I said, "What can you do about that?" They said that what they decided was to invite their friends out in smaller, informal groups to have informal activities. They decided that they could pull that off better – just kind of bypass the church politics – and see if that would work. Some of our young people really have a lot more read on what the church really is. It's *not* a corporation. It's the Holy Spirit *in* people. And that cuts across all organizations. So, their instinct to pull people together is a lot more spiritual than the instinct to keep people apart. They also thought, after thinking about it – I *really* loved this – that they could probably work more closely with the adults in their group to see more cooperative activities. They realized they couldn't take on the pastor of this other church, but there might be some people that they knew that *could* talk to him in a way that he could.... They had some hope for that. He's not a terrible person. I don't even know who he is, but I'll bet you, if we sat down, we'd all probably get a pretty good impression of him. He just thinks he's doing what he needs to do.

Think about one of the numerous church splits that we've been involved in from the perspective of a young person. They don't get to choose where they will go. They have to go with their parents. They don't have any say-so in the matter. It's all out of their control. It is. They don't get to choose. When they get older they do, but while they're young, they don't. And all this wrangling we do comes with a price. It discourages them, because it points up the fact that they don't get to make any decisions about how their life is going to go and who they're going to get to associate with. That's very important for them at that age.

The last one – selfishness and spiritual indifference, which is the opposite of spiritual purpose. When people have no great purpose, the focus always goes toward self and what we can get and what's best for us. That takes the focus off of church and off of spirituality, and people become indifferent. Indifferent people have no reason to maintain a relationship. It's neither here nor there. They ask, "What good does the church do me?" And if the answer is, "Nothing," they're going to leave. So what purpose have we provided for our young people? What activity do we provide that helps them experience pure religion, for example? What



activity do we provide so they can experience *helping* someone come to Christ? That's a pretty good experience! I've had that experience quite a few times in my life, because I used to visit a lot of people that were interested in the church – back when we had a lot of media evangelism going. And it's a lot of fun to sit in somebody's living room and take out a Bible and help them understand things out of the Bible that they never understood before, and then watch them month by month become converted. That is a *great* experience. What do we do to help them experience that?

When you take a young person shopping, they understand that it's all about supplying their needs. When you take them to church, at some point, they're going to get mature enough to understand that it's all supposed to be *bigger* than their needs. And they start to develop a hunger for that – for a spiritual purpose – and what are we providing to help them fulfill that spiritual longing? When we don't provide it, they go looking elsewhere to fulfill that void that's in them.

When you think about those four building blocks of encouragement, and you go negative on them, it really paints a picture of what's happened in our group, doesn't it? So, are those four things my idea? Is the idea of encouragement as a social motivator my idea? Where did that come from? And where did the four foundations of courage come from? And the four problems of discouragement? Did I think those up last night while I was trying to think of something to talk about? Actually no, it's not. The first person to talk about encouragement this way – to think about what moves people to be social and to seek social connection and to be spiritual beings – was a man named Alfred Abler. He was a student of Sigmund Freud, I believe, but he broke away. He believed in God. And he developed a model of human behavior based more on Christian principles. He was a very interesting person. He's responsible for a lot of the things that we have in our culture today. You know, the idea of life-style? He was the first one to talk about that. The idea that where we're born in the birth order in our family has lifelong effects on people. He was the first one to recognize that. We hear about wellness today. Where did that come from? That was another one of Alfred Abler's concepts – that happiness is not just in the body, but also the mind and the spirit as well. Unless you deal with the whole package, you're not going to be well. The concept of natural and logical consequences for children in parenting was Alfred Abler's idea. That is so universally used today! You can't buy a book on parenting today that doesn't have that approach in it. It just works! Incredibly effective parenting principles used by everybody.

So why am I telling you this? Well, because the idea of encouragement has been around for a hundred years – the Ablerian idea of it. And it has been tested and researched and practiced “six ways from Sunday.” And they *know* that these are highly motivating things for human beings. Psychologists know it's fundamental to the understanding of the way human beings work! And the four universal values – inclusion, competence, independence and purpose – well, they're the components of encouragement. These four are *universal values* common to all humans.

We've had a lot of good brain research come out in the last ten years – this imaging stuff is really getting good. And it helps them to understand the way the brain works and how people work. We used to think that people, who were shy and didn't like to be around other people,

that something was wrong with them – that happened to them when they were a kid or something. But a lot of times, it's just being an introvert. An introvert is someone who is genetically wired that way. And what the wiring is, is that they're more sensitive to dopamine, which is the pleasure chemical in the brain. So a little bit of social stimulation makes them feel really good, and a little bit more is way too much. Whereas those of us who are extroverts, we just can't seem to get enough dopamine. And so we need more social contact than someone who's an introvert. This is a whole different way of thinking about people and why they are the way they are.

Now these four things – inclusion, competence, independence and purpose – brain research is revealing that these things are wired into all humans at the genetic level! It's a part of your DNA! We come this way. You know what you and I think about DNA, don't you. We know that that very complex helix that is DNA was not something that just evolved. It was *designed* by God. And so the point of that is that inclusion, competence, independence and purpose are things that are hard-wired into us. We all seek it. And if we can find it at church, then we will become a part of that church. They are like *handles* that God put on all of us so that we could be drawn to him.

These four things – inclusion, competence, independence and purpose – are so deeply ingrained in us that some brain researchers and scientists are now calling them the human resilience code. When people have these – when these things are provided them – they have the courage to meet the challenges of daily living and to face the exceptional major challenges as well.

Notice what God say in Colossians 3:21. We're going to develop this scripturally more later, but take a quick look at Colossians 3:21.

**Col. 3:21** – *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.* That's what God's worried about in parenting. He doesn't want us to discourage our children. He wants us to *encourage* them. Isn't that interesting? That that word is used there? If you look back in the context earlier, it's talking about bringing them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord, and not to provoke them lest they become discouraged – not to cause them to be frustrated and alienated and all those other things.

Again, what does this have to do with people who have left and are leaving the church? Well, I hope, as we pass through the four areas of discouragement, you recall in your mind many vignettes similar to the ones I told you about – the source of the problem. And those who leave us do feel discouraged, because they have been alienated, have been taught no spiritual skills so they can participate, do feel helpless and defiant, because they've not been allowed to participate in decision-making, and have found no purpose in the church, because they weren't taught it. You could sit down with every last one of them and find their departure rooted in one or more of those four problems. And just as surely, you can find the solution for the future on the positive side of these four things as well.

Now, let me ask you this question? Are these the kinds of things that we can do something about? Yes, they are! See, that's what's so great about being able to take something like this

and bring it down to its simplest components and understanding what people need in specific terms, instead of just kind of blue-skying it and being vague. These are things that we can do something about. This attrition that we are experiencing *can be stopped!* And when we begin to include our children more, when we begin to teach them spiritual competencies, when we allow them independence in the process of church, when we provide purpose, they will be encouraged to stay.

It's been a curiosity to me over the years to see so many young people become discouraged with the church and leave it, and even more curious is the response of those of us who are older. It seems as though, to me, that this trend can't continue if our faith is to continue, that this is a *hugely* important issue, and yet no one has mobilized to do anything about it. Nobody talks about it. It seems that we would rather squabble about who's going to be in control or about petty doctrines. Of course, I have an idea about that, too. I think that those of us who are older are also discouraged – discouraged because we don't know what to do – because we don't know the spiritual competencies *we* need to solve this problem. We don't feel competent to solve it. It's like it's too big for us. It's like we've gone into denial. It seems like our attention is focused on one or more petty issues. But I think, at some level, we know that we have a problem. And every time that we look into the eyes of a child, we are being faced with a moral challenge. Will we provide for that child what he or she is genetically hard-wired to crave spiritually? Will they find inclusion with us? Will we teach them the spiritual skills they need to participate in the church? Will we give them enough freedom to learn by doing? And will we provide them an over-arching purpose in which *they* can participate and feel fulfilled? We have *failed* to do these things. And we are out of harmony with the nature of humanity that God created. We're not meeting the spiritual needs hard-wired into every child. And when we start meeting them, things will get much better.

Turn with me to Psalm 31, verse 24.

**Psa. 31:24** – *Be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD.* Very short verse but a powerful sentiment. There are solutions to this problem. We do not need to stick our heads in the sand any longer. There are things that can be done. And we need to be of *good* courage. We need to be encouraged that we can solve this problem and change things.

But again, what does all this have to do with those who have already left? How is changing the environment going to help them? If we want to understand how to help them come back, it's really important to know what they left in the first place. And the next time – our next presentation in this series – we're going to detail a plan to create a church environment that encourages young people spiritually. And in the presentation following that, we will talk about how that can affect those who have left. Of course, they are all in God's hands – and that's a very good thing – but just as we have a part to play in how our families and congregations are, we also can play a role in helping those who have left to return.