

P.S. The lost boys (calling all 18-34-year-old males)

THE MOST PRIZED TARGET of any advertising executive worth his salt is the 18-34-year-old male. Why? Because males of this age group *spend*, and spend like it's going out of fashion. 18-34-year-old males have, so they tell us, few ties and responsibilities, yet a wandering and insatiable appetite for the new, coupled with a vitality and energy that drives progress. This is the demographic group that first latches onto new trends, fashions and gadgets; the one that can't keep its cash in its pocket; the one that sets the trends for the rest of society.

Yet the advertising executives have a problem. Traditionally, the best way of capturing the attention of their target was to advertise on television. The advertising slots that accompanied the sorts of programmes that young men might watch commanded a high premium. But now the 18-34-year-old males aren't watching television. In fact, they seem to have disappeared. The advertisers are having such trouble finding them that they have termed them 'the lost boys'. A whole generation has gone missing.

The problem, apparently, is that they are each doing their own thing. It's hard to target them any more as a group because they are too busy in their own private lives doing whatever it is that takes their personal fancy. They are still spending, but they are pleasing themselves and behaving as individuals rather than being able to be herded by mass media advertising. They don't behave as a group any more.

This piece is written for our 18-34-year-old males. Perhaps you are one yourself. Perhaps you know one. Perhaps (and this is more serious) you haven't seen one for a while for precisely the same reasons that the advertisers haven't.

Now, of course, we are not advertisers. Nor do we look to a particular age group to set trends and drive change; we have one trend setter, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we do not regard change as an intrinsic virtue. But if it is true (and I leave it as an open question) that we are missing our young men even fractionally as much as the media is, then there is an issue worth exploring.

The advertisers are losing their young men because the young men are doing what is right in their own eyes, looking after and entertaining themselves instead of following the well-worn

paths they have previously followed. There are too many distractions for them now, too many alternative paths for them to lose themselves in. Is it any different when we look within our own community?

Though no more or less indispensable than any other part of the ecclesia, young men have the potential to bring an energy and enthusiasm which, if harnessed correctly, can be invigorating and uplifting. Every age group and demographic sector brings some particular aspect to ecclesial life, and it is this, I would imagine, which is one of the primary fortes of the young male. Then there is the opportunity to learn the skills of Bible study, and perhaps leadership and teaching, which will be so important in later ecclesial and family life. It's a time for activity, for building, and for learning from the more experienced to prepare for the times of greater responsibility which will follow.

For ecclesias, and brothers and sisters, looking out for their 18-34-year-old males, it is as well to recognise the pressure they are under. The world has been forced to recognise it; the lost boys must be found. But whereas the world wants to find them to advertise to them and persuade them to part with their cash, we want to find them because they are vital for ecclesial life, both now and in the future. The Lord Jesus needs them in his ecclesias. We must engage them and encourage them to take on the mantle of service. For this is more worthwhile for them than any number of hours spent in pursuit of self.

For those of us (like myself) who do fall into this demographic sector, what are we about? "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth", wrote Solomon; "but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Eccl. 11:9). We are not free agents, to do as we please. We have the most valuable calling that anyone can have, and we must make it our business to attend to it without delay. For the advertiser, we are the epitome of irresponsibility, with no strings and a short attention span that craves something new. But we don't have to be like that, just because it is the caricature. The Lord Jesus called us to follow him. We can bring much, or we can bring little, as we respond to his call.

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