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**WHY SOME MINNESOTA BAPTIST YOUTH DEPART
FROM THE FAITH OF THEIR FAMILIES**

by

IVAN FISKE

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

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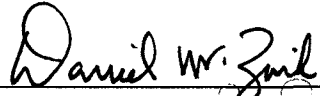
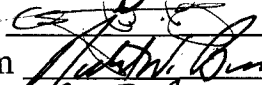
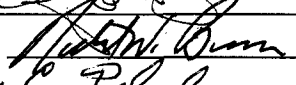
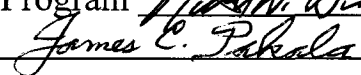
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to determine why certain Minnesota Baptist Conference (MBC) youth rebel against the faith of their families so that parents, teens, pastors, and denominational leaders might better understand the problem and seek correction based upon the Word of God.

Many writers consider the problem of teen rebellion to be very serious. This view was observed during the research phase of this project. First, a literature review was conducted that involved both Christian and secular sources. This review indicated broad agreement that youth rebellion is a major problem in the church. In addition, it showed that there are many encouragers of rebellion such as peer pressure, consumerism, and sexual pressure. Also, there are checks to teen rebellion which include prayer, sound adult relationships, and a good dose of truth.

Second, twelve interviews were conducted involving both parents and adult children who had rebelled and returned to the faith within the last ten years. The interviews took place in a variety of settings. Most were conducted in person, but a few were interviewed over the telephone. In the interview process, questions were asked based upon two main headings. The first heading sought to identify contributions to rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth. The second sought some checks to rebellion.

These interviews confirmed many of the findings from the literature review and even provided some unique data on the matter of rebellion. With respect to warning signs, teen withdrawal and the existence of two worlds (or more) for youth were identified. Withdrawal was mentioned in the literature, but not as emphatic as in the interview data. Regarding encouragements to rebellion, peer pressure, culture, parenting

issues, indifference toward God, and a self-centered worldview emerged as important themes. Unique data included ignorance of cultural influences, by both parents and youth, and teen personality issues. Regarding checks to departure from the faith, prayer was very significant in the minds of the adult children and their parents. Other themes included parental and/or adult support and the direct intervention of God. Although the latter was observed in the literature review it was more prominent in the interviews.

This project confirms that teen rebellion within the church, and in particular the MBC, is a serious matter. The author strongly believes that conference pastors and other leaders should educate their congregations on teen rebellion and provide care and encouragement for struggling parents and their rebellious teens. Follow-up work is suggested to further establish and expand on the findings of this study.

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Chapter One Introduction

“Nearly 90 percent of evangelical children leave the church after high school-and many never return.”¹ This shocking quote is from the pen of Dr. Tim Kimmel, respected author and advocate for the family, who points to the serious problem of youth rebellion in the evangelical church. This problem weighs upon the souls of numerous families and church leaders.

Early in my ministry, I met a family who were active in a local church. Two of the daughters, Mary and Sally, contributed significantly to youth ministry. Many people in their church watched with joy as the girls grew in their faith. One day, I encountered Sally and her parents. They were deeply troubled because Mary was spending time with an older man who was not a believer. She was not listening to their counsel and was avoiding ministry and church attendance. Not long after this conversation, Mary left home and began living with the older man. About a year later, they were married. Sally and her parents were devastated. When news of Mary’s departure spread throughout the local community, pastors began to share their stories with me of youth who had departed from the church in open rebellion. I was struck by the number of ministers whose own children had embraced the pleasures of the world.

Since that time, an increasing number of cases involving youth rebellion have come to my attention. Even though specific statistics are not available, leaders within my own denominational district, the Minnesota Baptist Conference (MBC), agree that the

¹ Tim Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2004), back cover.

problem is significant and should receive greater attention. It is my hope that this paper will stimulate prayer, conversation, education, and action on the issue of teen rebellion within the MBC and other Christian groups.

Over the last thirty years, efforts have been made by researchers and writers from secular circles and various denominations to determine the main reasons for the rebellion of youth in the American church. Tim Kimmel's book, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, has contributed to a heightened awareness of the matter, but the volume of books and articles on rebellion appears to be much less than such popular topics as marriage, family, self esteem, and church growth. In addition, the number of works that are theologically sound seems quite small.

Some authors place the reasons for rebellion on the shoulders of parents and suggest that the best way to encourage positive change in a rebellious child is for a parent to seek change in his or her own life.² Others focus on the rebellious child and problem attitudes such as apathy.³ Another group of scholars sees a period of questioning and doubt as a normal part of adolescent development.⁴ Along with these voices, a number of writers point to the negative influence of the western culture.⁵

George Barna, a well known observer of the Christian community in America, writes that "teen America's confusion regarding truth is a reflection of the distorted and contradictory teaching and modeling they receive from adults."⁶ Mardi Keyes, a thoughtful writer and commentator on youth culture, points out that adults have placed

² Ibid., xi.

³ Sean Dunn, *Bored with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 11.

⁴ Cathryn I. Hill, "A Developmental Perspective on Adolescent 'Rebellion' in the Church," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 14 (1986): 306

⁵ Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 12.

⁶ George Barna, *Real Teens* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 93.

stumbling blocks in the path of the youth, defining them “by sex and social life.”⁷ Like Kimmel, both Keyes and Barna see adults (parents included) as the primary contributor to youth confusion and rebellion. In concert with such reasoning, Tom Bisset, a passionate writer on the topic of youth and rebellion, challenges believing parents to “stop making Perfect Christian Kids the ultimate goal of Christian parenting.”⁸ Such parents are classified by professors Roger Dudley and Randall Wisbey as authoritarian (demanding and unresponsive). One danger of authoritarianism is that it can “produce offspring who are discontent, withdrawn, and distrustful.”⁹ Researchers Leslie Francis and Harry Gibson add to this opinion by emphasizing that “adolescents are unlikely to maintain the practice of church attendance without clear parental example and support.”¹⁰ Noted pastor, author, and tested parent C. John Miller challenges parents to support their teens by touching their inner lives. He writes: “The master principle is simply this: Confront the conscience – and don’t be impressed by outward conformity.”¹¹ In addition, Miller points to the fact that a youth’s rebellion may be due to the person’s being lost. Parents must not forget that “no one grows into grace through a Christianized environment. No one gets to God by moral self-improvement.”¹² According to the above comments, parents must recognize their contribution to youth rebellion in order to slow the rate of departure from the faith. Other writers and experts, however, look beyond parenting practices for explanations.

⁷ Mardi Keyes, “Who Invented Adolescence?,” *Critique*, May 1994, 7.

⁸ Tom Bisset, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith* (Nashville: TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 143.

⁹ Roger L. Dudley and Randall L. Wisbey, “The Relationship of Parenting Styles to Commitment to the Church among Young Adults,” *Religious Education* 95 (winter 2000): 40.

¹⁰ Leslie J. Francis and Harry M. Gibson, “Parental Influence and Adolescent Religiosity: A Study of Church Attendance and Attitude Toward Christianity among Adolescents 11 to 12 and 15 to 16 Years Old,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 3 (1993): 248.

¹¹ C. John Miller and Barbara Miller Juliani, *Come Back, Barbara* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 30.

Sean Dunn, a minister to students between ages twelve and twenty-four, identifies youth apathy as the central reason for rebellion in the Christian home.¹³ He does not see the young person as a helpless victim, but as one in need of challenge. Dunn writes: “When apathy has infected students to the point that they ignore God’s conviction, they must be held accountable for their choices and encouraged to make better ones.”¹⁴ In concert with this point, one young woman from a small city in Minnesota declared in an interview with the researcher that her parents, during the time of her rebellion, “took me to jail. They gave me room, but I was still responsible for my actions.”¹⁵ Furthermore, Rex Rook, a Christian psychiatrist, also believes that the primary contributor to rebellion is not the parent, but the child. However, in contrast with Dunn, he does not see apathy as the central issue. According to Rook, rebellion “is basically the expression (in actions, words, or thoughts), on a conscious level, of unconscious envy. Because envy is inherent from birth, envy manifests itself continually and repeats itself in attacking love, creativity, and the good. Adolescence, however, can be an expression of envy at its best.”¹⁶ According to these opinions, the young person is the major contributor to rebellion. But pointing fingers at teens or their parents does not adequately explain youth rebellion according to other writers.

Some authors take a developmental perspective when it comes to youth and their rebellion from the family faith. For instance, Cathryn Hill, a research psychologist at Biola University, believes that questioning and doubt “is a normal part of adolescence

¹³ Dunn, *Bored with God*, 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁵ Child BD, interviewed by author, 31 May 2007, Cambridge, MN, tape recording, author’s possession, Brook Park, MN.

¹⁶ Rex L. Rook, “Disobedience, Rebellion and Defiance in the Believer as Exemplified in the Adolescent Stage of Life,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 14 (1986): 57.

and for some individuals, if not all, this may be necessary for them to achieve the full development of a mature, personal, internalized and steadfast faith.”¹⁷ Along this line of thinking, a parent of a former rebel from Minnesota said that “rebellion is not something that is intended. It is a reaction to something that hurts. They probably don’t know why they are fighting.”¹⁸ Highly regarded psychologist Mary Pipher asserts that youth turbulence, especially for girls, is partially due to their inability to think abstractly. She believes that the “immaturity of their thinking makes it difficult to reason with them. They read deep meaning into casual remarks and overanalyze glances.”¹⁹ Kathleen Engebretson, a researcher from Australian Catholic University, points out that identity development among adolescents is linked with the “well known tendency to reject authority.”²⁰ Those who emphasize a developmental view often call for understanding from both youth and adults. But understanding is not enough for some thinkers who draw attention to the negative pressures of the western culture on the lives of teenagers.

In her book *Reviving Ophelia*, Mary Pipher writes: “For many adolescents, smoking and drinking stand for rebellion and maturity. The media contributes to this illusion, linking sophistication with self-destructive, unrestrained behavior, not prudent, thoughtful behavior. The characters with self-control are often portrayed as boring geeks.”²¹ Pipher then argues that girls are especially vulnerable to cultural influences. She declares that teenage girls in America are growing up in a girl-poisoning and media-saturated culture that pressures them “to be beautiful and sophisticated, which in junior

¹⁷ Hill, “A Developmental Perspective on Adolescent ‘Rebellion’ in the Church,” 306.

¹⁸ Parent BW, interviewed by author, 31 May 2007, Cambridge, MN, tape recording, author’s possession, Brook Park, MN.

¹⁹ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 59.

²⁰ Kathleen Engebretson, “Young People, Culture, and Spirituality: Some Implications for Ministry,” *Religious Education* 98 (2003): 16.

²¹ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 202.

high means using chemicals and being sexual.”²² Susan Linn, an instructor in psychiatry at Harvard, adds her voice to Pipher’s and asserts that the media in America is encouraging rebellion in children by diminishing adults. She notes that kids who “watch a lot of television or movies are immersed in a world in which the adults...are largely absent, ineffectual, and stupid.”²³ Adjacent to the impact of the culture is the influence of peers. According to respected psychologists Pamela King, James Furrow, and Natalie Roth, peer communication and activities are as important as parental input to an adolescent’s experience of God.²⁴

Now, even though a brief review of current opinion is noteworthy, it is essential to look at what the Bible has to say on the general topic of rebellion. This analysis will receive additional attention in chapter two, however, some comments are important to make at this point.

A core passage for this dissertation is Romans 7:21-25. Here Paul describes his on-going struggle against sin. This scripture challenges the reader to consider that rebellion (teen included) does not happen only when the individual is lost. It also arises because the Christian life involves an intense, internal war. The apostle points out: “So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”²⁵ In addition, Paul rejects the role of self-improvement as a correction for the sin of rebellion and highlights that victory is found in Christ alone: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”²⁶ This scripture

²² Ibid., 12.

²³ Susan Linn, *Consuming Kids* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 188.

²⁴ Pamela E. King, James L. Furrow, and Natalie Roth, “The Influence of Family and Peers on Adolescent Religiousness,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 21 (Spring, 2002): 114.

²⁵ Romans 7:21.

²⁶ Romans 7:24-25a.

suggests that teen rebellion is not rare and that even mature Christians, apart from the Holy Spirit, can fall into a lifestyle of sin.

Before moving to the next section, it is important to address why this work did not include the immensely popular passage of Luke 15:11-32, the parable of the prodigal son. Although this scripture speaks of sin and salvation and could have been placed carefully in my study, it is not, according to David Wells, a distinguished professor, theologian, and author, “a story about stormy, reckless rebellion, suffering parental patience, and an older brother who sets out to earn his father’s love and cannot understand how that love could simply be given. These are but the props which serve a much bigger story, and a rather different story, the one about sin and redemption.”²⁷

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Over the last ten years, I have observed in my area of service the departure of many young people from the faith. Troubled parents often withdraw from Christian fellowship out of shame. Observing families sometimes become nervous and seek to prevent rebellion through legalism. Departing teens at times engage in sin that brings life-long consequences. The issue of rebellion is weighty, yet the church pays it little attention. According to a recent study produced by researchers O’Connor, Hoge, and Alexander, sixty-nine percent of Baptist youth became inactive after high school.²⁸ Even though no hard data exists for the MBC, the departure percentage for my denomination may not be significantly different from this figure based upon my interaction with many pastors and one district leader. What is certain, however, is that study, education, and

²⁷ David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 47.

²⁸ Thomas P. O’Connor, Dean R. Hoge, and Estrela Alexander, “The Relative Influence of Youth and Adult Experiences on Personal Spirituality and Church Involvement,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2002): 727.

action, rooted in prayer, are required. The purpose of this paper is to determine why certain Minnesota Baptist Conference (MBC) youth rebel against the faith of their families so that parents, teens, pastors, and denominational leaders might better understand the problem and seek correction based upon biblical truth. The primary research questions fall into two categories:

1. What might contribute to rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?
2. What might check rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?

It should be noted that contributions to rebellion by the youth's own sinful habits will be addressed in the first question. Detailed study on the complex matter of internal issues and youth rebellion is beyond the scope of this project.

Significance of the Study

Acting on the guidance of a Minnesota Baptist Conference leader, I sent e-mails to sixteen MBC pastors asking for their permission to interview families in their churches and for their reaction to the topic of youth rebellion. I received seven responses from pastors, and all of them were excited about the topic. Their desire, like my own, was that the issue be studied in order to encourage better pastoral care of hurting souls and a better understanding of the issue. From these seven contacts, I was able to conduct twelve interviews, consisting of six adult children (former rebels) and their parents.

This analysis needed to be performed for the several reasons. First, there appears to be a rather small body of books and articles on the topic of youth rebellion that deals with the issue thoroughly, thoughtfully, and with proper attention to the Scriptures. Second, MBC pastors (me included) and church leaders have often been silent when youth rebellion has occurred. It seems to me that education of churches on this matter and

pastoral care to families in shame and youth in rebellion may receive needed impetus from such a study. In addition, I am personally interested in studying this topic because of youth departure in my area of service, extended family, and the possibility of the same in my immediate family. I would like to encourage an attitude toward rebellion that is both biblically sound and courageous.

This project is not just about encouraging MBC pastors, parents, youth, and churches to look closely at teen rebellion. It is about helping all Christians face this problem with understanding and from a solid biblical foundation. It is also about challenging the myth that rebellion is rare. On this topic and with respect to Romans 7:14-24, Dr. James Montgomery Boice, widely regarded preacher and scholar, writes: “When God called us to be Christian people he called us to lifetime struggles against sin.”²⁹

Definition of Terms

The following primary terms must be defined for the purpose of this analysis:

1. **Culture-** The current stage in the development of civilization in North America. This stage is characterized by the rejection of moral conventions. Theologian David Wells writes: “...ours is the first major civilization to be building itself deliberately and self-consciously without religious foundations.”³⁰
2. **Youth/Teen-** A person who is less than twenty years old and more than twelve years old.

²⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, vol.2, The Reign of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001), 766.

³⁰ David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 26.

3. **Minnesota Baptist Conference-** The Minnesota Baptist Conference is one of thirteen districts or conferences affiliated with and endorsed by the Baptist General Conference. The Conference has a membership of about 183 churches.

4. **Faith (Family Faith)-** The Minnesota Baptist Conference consists of churches who define faith, in a foundational sense, as trusting in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God. In addition, it involves regular attendance at worship services and a willingness to serve the Lord in church ministries. Beyond this basic understanding, most MBC churches hold that faith is conditional upon human decision.

5. **Parent Set-** A parent set consists of a couple or a parent supported by his or her spouse.

6. **Rebellion/Departure-** Deliberate and long-term hostility by a youth toward the faith of his/her family of origin. This rebellion may occur because the child is not a Christian or is a believer struggling with sin and confusion. The resistance of the child may show itself by way of indifference or through aggressive activity and language.

7. **Return-** A going back to and remaining with the faith of one's family.

8. **Adult Child/Child-** A person who has rebelled and returned to the faith. For the purpose of this study, he/she may be over nineteen years of age.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Biblical-Theological Context

The biblical-theological underpinnings of this study are sometimes called the doctrines of sovereign grace. God describes Himself in the Bible as the absolute Sovereign over the whole universe, who speaks of unconverted people as “sons of disobedience”³¹ who seek only rebellion.³² He speaks in this manner throughout Scripture by way of inspiration, which means that the Holy Spirit guided the human writers to say nothing less than the Word of God.³³

Learning about the nature of rebellion and its cure requires an understanding of certain themes related to rebellion. These themes progress from the Old Testament through the New Testament. In the Old Testament, rebellion and its complexity are recognized, but no final cure is offered.³⁴ However, the Old Testament does point to a new covenant wherein God will not remember the sins of His people.³⁵ This cure for the rebellious heart is rooted in the single sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross,³⁶ which is the central message of the New Testament. The message of the cross also includes the anticipation of the day when the people of God will not have to deal with their own rebellion and that of others.³⁷

³¹ Galatians 2:2.

³² Proverbs 17:11.

³³ 2 Timothy 3:16.

³⁴ Jeremiah 17:9.

³⁵ Jeremiah 31:34.

³⁶ Hebrews 10:11-14.

³⁷ Revelation 21:3-4.

All Christians face the problem of rebellion in their lives,³⁸ and many Christian families face the heartache of rebellion in the lives of their children. Therefore, a sound understanding of the biblical themes related to departure can serve as a challenge and encouragement for both Christian parents and their teens.

Biblical Themes

Rebellion Introduced

Rebellion came into the world through the sin of the first man Adam. When he sinned, Adam acted as representative for all of his descendants. They inherited his fallen nature and the consequences of his disobedience. Fitzpatrick and Newheiser, respected authors and biblical counselors, state that our children “are genetically predisposed to be bad because every child is born with original sin and a rebellious nature.”³⁹ The apostle Paul presents this truth, along with the wonder of justification, in his letter to the Romans.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.⁴⁰

An inherited sinful nature leaves all people totally unable to do spiritual good before God. Again, Fitzpatrick and Newheiser describe this situation: “Instead of our abilities and desires being a source of obedience and joy, they have become a snare, bringing sin and sorrow. Here lies the problem...Our hearts...have ceased to be God-centered and have become self-centered.”⁴¹ In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul draws attention to the seriousness of such a condition: “And you were dead in the trespasses and

³⁸ Romans 7:21-23.

³⁹ Elyse Fitzpatrick, Jim Newheiser, with Dr. Laura Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), 29.

⁴⁰ Romans 5:18-19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”⁴²

Before their conversion, the believers at Ephesus were at home with the rule of Satan in their lives. The devil was energetically involved to make what is bad even worse. Disobedience or rebellion was a way of life. Therefore, parents must consider the possibility that a child is rebelling because he or she is simply not a Christian and is being led and deceived by Satan. On this matter, Tim Kimmel writes: “It’s easy to make the assumption that because children grow up in a Christian home and make an early profession of faith in Christ, they are followers of Christ... Throw in a baptism and you feel that you have an almost ironclad case that they are true believers. Not necessarily.”⁴³

Rebellion Denied

The primary way to deal with rebellion is to receive God’s offer of forgiveness and restoration. This gift comes to people through justification, an act of God whereby He declares unjust sinners to be just after He has imputed to them, by faith, the righteousness of Christ. Justification is not a matter of good works. In Romans 3, the Bible affirms this truth.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.⁴⁴

This text should challenge parents to recognize that human rebellion cannot destroy God’s work of justification in the life of a truly converted son or daughter. Such

⁴² Ephesians 2:1-2.

⁴³ Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, 33.

⁴⁴ Romans 3:21-23 and 28.

truth can encourage hope. It can also challenge parents to reject legalism, which exalts law over grace, as a way of ensuring obedience in the teen years and beyond. Legalism often promises a safe place for teens, yet, as Kimmel says: “Parents whose goal is to raise a spiritually safe kid usually get a spiritually safe kid in the process. But they also often get a spiritually weak kid. The child is weak when it comes to standing up against the hard pressures of the world. Once they get exposed to the full gale, down they go.”⁴⁵

Rebellion Revisited

After justification, God provides sanctification in order to deal with ongoing sin and rebellion. Sanctification may be defined as “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”⁴⁶ On this truth, Paul writes: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”⁴⁷ The Apostle John reminds believers that, although they are still in conflict with sin, God restores Christians upon confession of sin. He says: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”⁴⁸

In concert with these truths, Paul, in Romans 7, tells the reader that the struggle with sin is intense and a part of the normal Christian life:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law

⁴⁵ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 746.

⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:18.

⁴⁸ 1 John 1:8-9.

waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.⁴⁹

These texts should instruct parents in the truth that a maturing Christian, young or old, will struggle with deep issues of the heart. Jerry Bridges, a highly regarded speaker and staff writer for Navigators ministry, put it well when he said that justification is the “peace that starts the war.”⁵⁰ Therefore, times of struggle, sin, repentance, and forgiveness should be expected by parents in the lives of their children. After cautioning parents not to think of teen rebellion as automatic, Paul Tripp, a respected voice on parenting teens, comments: “...we have to recognize that this is an age when children push at the boundaries, when temptation abounds, and when peer relationships do not always encourage right behavior.”⁵¹

Rebellion Encouraged

Although not extensively, the Bible does address parent-child relationships. Paul, in Ephesians 6, gives direct instruction to both children and parents.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.⁵²

In this passage, the apostle calls children to honor their parents, and he calls parents (particularly fathers) to carefully instruct their children in truth. Other passages that support this challenge include Psalm 78:1-8 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Unless these warnings are heeded, trouble will often arise. One biblical example of such trouble is presented in 1 Samuel 2. Herein, the priest Eli is shown as a father who loves his sons,

⁴⁹ Romans 7:21-23.

⁵⁰ Jerry Bridges, “The Discomfort of the Justified Life,” *Modern Reformation*, July/August 2006, 13.

⁵¹ Paul David Tripp, *The Age of Opportunity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 25.

⁵² Ephesians 6:1-4.

Hophni and Phinehas, yet he allows them to sin openly without much challenge. God was not pleased and scolded Eli through a visiting prophet: “Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?”⁵³ Eli encouraged the rebellion of his sons by not bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Also, he apparently participated in their sin of fattening themselves. Similarly, King David was guilty of neglecting his duty to parent his boys. For example, in 1 Kings 1:6a, and with reference to David’s son Adonijah, the text reads: “His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’”

David’s and Eli’s experiences show that what parents do or fail to do matters in the lives of their children. On this issue, Kimmel writes: “...kids in Christian homes may rebel against their parents based on something specific their parents have done to them or on something the parents have modeled for them over a prolonged period of time.”⁵⁴ Therefore, parents must grasp the importance of teaching truth and modeling personal responsibility. Children must be careful to obey their parents. Without such maturity, rebellion will be encouraged.

Rebellion Faced

Based upon the above analysis, it is clear that rebellion can occur in Christian homes and even in families where the parents are people of sound faith. Men such as Samuel and David are two examples of fathers who were used greatly by God. Yet, Samuel’s sons, Joel and Abijah (1 Samuel 8:1-5) and David’s sons, Absalom and Amnon

⁵³ 1 Samuel 2:29.

⁵⁴ Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, 216.

(2 Samuel 13:23-39) rebelled against God. Accordingly, it is important that parents face the issue of rebellion with the wisdom of God. The apostle James writes: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”⁵⁵

Here we are reminded that it is necessary to face life with faith in God’s provision of wisdom. Now, if children rebel, parents must confront the matter with an attitude of reliance on God’s direction. Kimmel notes: “Sometimes the line gets fuzzy between constantly loving kids and letting consequences play out. That’s when you need to lean on God for spiritual discernment and divine wisdom.”⁵⁶

In addition to facing rebellion in a child with wisdom, parents must also be willing to face the rebellion in their own hearts. The Apostle Paul declares: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”⁵⁷ Examination of the soul, for maturing Christians, is essential, and parents are not exempt. C. John Miller calls parents to “ask the Father to give you the Holy Spirit to search you out and to reveal what is cooking in the basement of your life.”⁵⁸

This presentation of the biblical themes on rebellion provides the first and most important step in the process of coming to a better understanding of youth and rebellion. In the next section, contributions to teen rebellion will be identified from Christian and non-Christian books and articles. Although there seems to be a growing body of

⁵⁵ James 1:5.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians 13:5.

⁵⁸ Miller and Juliani, *Come Back, Barbara*, 81.

information on youth and rebellion, the bulk of the writing consists of many opinions that touch on many topics but without much scholarly critique of each other.

Contributions to Rebellion

In this section, aspects of culture, family, church, and issues of development will be presented as an answer to the question: What are the major contributors to teen rebellion?

Contributions from Culture

Thomas Hine, often-quoted author and historian, believes that the world of the American teenager is a social invention shaped by the needs of the twentieth century. He notes that from colonial times through most of the nineteenth century, families could not allow their teens to become “a leisured class engaged exclusively in preparation for an adulthood that was many years off.”⁵⁹ According to Hine’s research, in the twentieth century, the real life of going to work and starting a family was replaced by a student life.⁶⁰ This life, apart from the reality of the working world, has evolved and today has created a distinct youth culture that is vastly different from the adult world. Respected journalist and contributor to youth studies, Patricia Hersch, writes: “America’s own adolescents have become strangers. They are a tribe apart, remote, mysterious, vaguely threatening...somewhere in the transition from twelve to thirteen, our nation’s children slip into a netherworld of adolescence that too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of estrangement.”⁶¹ Now, because of this estrangement, many youth are subject to culturally

⁵⁹ Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2000), 111.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶¹ Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1999), 14.

inspired influences that can contribute to rebellion. Some of these influences identified by respected scholars are presented below.

Self Is Number One

David Wells declares that our culture exalts the self and that the worship of God has been replaced with the worship of self.⁶² In connection with this view, David Seel, widely regarded educator and cultural analyst, notes that our world is one wherein “nothing checks the unfettered self”⁶³ and that it encourages the youth to expect immediate gratification of any need. Seel writes: “Pleasure is the lifestyle promoted by Hollywood, the epicenter of youth culture.”⁶⁴ Distinguished professor and author Dr. Archibald D. Hart adds: “When we seek pleasure primarily through extreme, overstimulating thrills, we hijack our brain’s pleasure system and rob ourselves of the ability to experience pleasure from simple things. Literally, we are being thrilled to death.”⁶⁵ Along with this passion walks the desire to reject the concept of objective truth.

No Room for Truth

Dr. Walt Mueller, college professor and recognized expert on parent/youth issues, comments on our culture: “Our postmodern world is marked by a new level of moral relativism, the view that each person’s own personal standard of right and wrong is as legitimate, true and authoritative as any other.”⁶⁶ In this world, according to Mueller, truth claims are rejected,⁶⁷ immorality is viewed as an impossibility,⁶⁸ and there is a rapid

⁶² David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 161.

⁶³ David John Seel, Jr., *Parenting without Perfection* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2000), 70.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶⁵ Archibald D. Hart, *Thrilled to Death* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xi.

⁶⁶ Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 66.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

decline in understanding of the difference between right and wrong.⁶⁹ The self walks through our world almost without constraint and with great concern for appearances.

Fashion First

Highly regarded family/youth researcher and writer Christian Smith reports that in many ways our youth are receiving a clear message from our culture that “what really matters is outward appearance and good looks.”⁷⁰ On the outward life of girls and cultural influence, Mary Pipher adds: “Girls feel an enormous pressure to be beautiful and are aware of constant evaluations of their appearance.”⁷¹ Closely connected with such pressure is the power of fashion. Mardi Keyes believes that for the teen, “clothes and fashion no longer express the self, because there is no self. Instead, they construct the self.”⁷² Since the self is constantly under construction, the “great majority of young people report being dissatisfied with how they look... They are preoccupied with physical appearance in themselves and peers,”⁷³ say Scott Larson and Larry Brendtro, recognized observers of youth culture. But this appearance is often not one that fits their age. According to David Elkind, respected professor and psychologist, the media pushes “the wearing of adult clothes and the use of adult behaviors.”⁷⁴ In addition, the culture encourages the attitude of the rebel through promoting clothing worn by street gangs.⁷⁵ So, with this emphasis on the external, some scholars are observing that identities among the young are becoming more fluid and less in line with reality.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁷⁰ Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 189.

⁷¹ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 55.

⁷² Mardi Keyes, “Youth Culture and Growing Up” *Critique*, 2001, 4.

⁷³ Scott Larson and Larry Brendtro, *Reclaiming Our Prodigal Sons and Daughters* (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 2000), 129.

⁷⁴ David Elkind, *The Hurried Child* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2001), 11.

⁷⁵ Larson and Brendtro, *Reclaiming Our Prodigal Sons and Daughters*, 51.

Virtual Reality

Insightful scholar and author, Tom Beaudoin, thinks that modern culture has created an environment wherein young people are developing a multiplicity of selves. He writes, with reference to his own age group: "...who we are never seems fixed or final. Instead, identity always seems like a series of possibilities. We seem to have many centers, each of them shifting and unstable."⁷⁶ Within this virtual world, reality and fantasy are becoming blurred. Respected author and psychologist Madeline Levine writes, regarding teens and the development of the self:

It is important to know that a teenager with a healthy sense of self may slam doors, or experiment with drugs...Alternatively, there are kids with an impaired sense of self who successfully fly under the radar because they are so exquisitely attuned to what is expected of them that they can pass off an inauthentic and fabricated sense of self as real.⁷⁷

Some scholars are seeing the emergence of an illusion of reality. Seel comments: "We are getting to the point where we cannot tell the real from the fake or the illusion from reality. More importantly, we don't even care to make the distinction. Herein lies the danger."⁷⁸ Once reality is blurred, performing a role before one's friends can become an increasing part of daily living.

Imaginary Audience

David Elkind comments: "The imaginary audience, which is most prominent in early adolescence, has powerful motivational force. The characteristic self-consciousness of youth adolescents derives, in large measure, from the imaginary audience. You become self-conscious when you assume that everybody is looking at you and thinking

⁷⁶ Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 137.

⁷⁷ Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 69-70.

⁷⁸ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 66.

about you.”⁷⁹ Charles Shelton, scholar and writer on high school and college age youth, agrees with Elkind and adds that adolescents “take it for granted that the audience shares their assumptive realities about themselves.”⁸⁰ According to some experts, there are many audiences and, as a result, youth must develop multiple selves in order to perform well. For instance, Chap Clark, professor of youth, family, and culture at Fuller Seminary, observes that youth: “...during midadolescence, find themselves forced to function out of several selves. To survive, a young person must learn how to be a child, a student, an athlete, and a friend, while also continuing the ever lengthening process of determining who he or she is.”⁸¹ Parents often have no idea that the other lives exist. Some scholars, like Bill Beausay, an authority on issues relating to teen boys, place this kind of relating in the context of the secret life.⁸² Such a life consists of many independent parts. A major impetus for living in secret is the family of friends called peers.

Peers as Family

On the matter of peer pressure and its influence on teens, there seems to be a variety of opinion. According to Dr. Mueller, in 1960, “the family exercised the greatest influence on teen values and behavior, followed in order by school, friends and peers, and the church.”⁸³ He notes that by 1980 “friends and peers had taken the number one spot as influencer of teen values and behavior. The family dropped to number two.”⁸⁴ Hine also sees peer pressure as a critical force upon youth: “There’s no doubt that peers are influential in key areas of young people’s lives, no matter what parents do.”⁸⁵ Others

⁷⁹ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 134.

⁸⁰ Charles M. Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983), 36.

⁸¹ Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 20.

⁸² Bill Beausay, *Teenage Boys* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 1998), 9.

⁸³ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 25.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁵ Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 282.

consider peer influence significant, especially in terms of normal development. For instance, Elkind remarks: “The parents, who were once the primary attachment figures, now find themselves eclipsed as young people become attracted to members of the opposite sex.”⁸⁶ A third opinion is best represented by Joseph Erickson, a noted researcher, who believes that peer and parental influence are less important than previously thought.⁸⁷ However, the dominant position appears to agree with scholars like Mueller, who assert that peer pressure is an important issue that is worthy of further study. For instance, through his research of peer groups or clusters, Chap Clark found that the primary concern “of the vast majority of adolescents is finding common ground with their newly aligned cluster. Previously held convictions are latently present, but pleasing the cluster is more important.”⁸⁸ In addition, noted scholar Robert Epstein found in his work that TV and magazines encourage peer pressure through improper models. He writes: “The role models are not industrious, intelligent, dedicated, adult-like young people. Instead, they’re superficial, irresponsible, promiscuous, risk-prone, substance-abusing, disrespectful, and sometimes quite bizarre.”⁸⁹ This quote draws attention to the fact that behind the cluster or peer group is the mass media that seems to define life’s meaning for numerous American teens.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 138.

⁸⁷ Joseph A. Erickson, “Adolescent Religious Development and Commitment,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31 (June 1992): 146.

⁸⁸ Clark, *Hurt*, 84.

⁸⁹ Robert Epstein, *The Case Against Adolescence* (Sanger, CA: Quill Driver Books/Word Dancer Press, Inc., 2007), 174.

⁹⁰ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of youth Culture*, 27.

Mass Media and Meaning

Mardi Keyes observes that without traditional nurturing, “the media have moved in to fill the gap.”⁹¹ The media now stands where parents used to be. Without any significant shield to deflect much of the data from the media, many youth are bombarded with stress brought on by “giving them too much information too fast or by giving them information for which they are not intellectually or emotionally ready,”⁹² according to David Elkind. That is, television often exposes youth to experiences that are beyond what they have encountered and what they can understand. One estimate of the amount of daily pressure has been provided by George Barna, who notes that “teens spend an average of four to six hours per day interacting with the mass media in various forms.”⁹³ A significant part of media pressure is inspired by consumerism.

Consumer Pressure

Susan Linn writes: “Today’s children are assaulted by advertising everywhere... They spend almost forty hours a week engaged with the media... most of which are commercially driven. The average child sees about 40,000 commercials a year on television alone.”⁹⁴ The dominant themes in these commercials are self-fulfillment and rebellion.⁹⁵ In connection with this kind of data, Christian Smith notes: “Industry experts estimate that American teenagers spend about \$170 billion of their dollars annually and influence upwards of \$500 billion of their parents’ spending.”⁹⁶ Many youth have become expensive consumers. Smith adds that this attitude also affects religious youth,

⁹¹ Mardi Keyes, “Who Invented Adolescence?,” *Critique*, May 1994, 6.

⁹² Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 183.

⁹³ George Barna, *Real Teens*, 90.

⁹⁴ Linn, *Consuming Kids*, 5.

⁹⁵ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 60.

⁹⁶ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 178.

who can become “spiritual consumers uniquely authorized as autonomous individuals to pick and choose in the religious market whatever products they may find satisfying or fulfilling at the moment.”⁹⁷

Sexual Pressure

Another force that is related to consumer pressure is that of human sexuality. This force is evident in our culture, where about eighty percent of R-rated movies are aimed at underage children.⁹⁸ The adult world, presented in such films, “implies drinking, spending money and being sexually active,”⁹⁹ according to Mary Pipher. She adds that the media reduces girls, especially, to “mere bodies.”¹⁰⁰ To be mature, for girls and for boys, is to engage in sex. Linn points out that “more than half of teens report getting some or most of their information about sex from television.”¹⁰¹ Such information carries with it great pressure, especially for those under the age of fifteen: “Thirty-three percent of ten-and eleven-year-old kids think that the pressure on them to have sex is a big problem.”¹⁰² Yet, many teens fail to resist the media because, as Keyes points out, “most are distracted from thinking very deeply about the effects of the consumer culture.”¹⁰³ Perhaps one of the most powerful of these distractions is the hurried life encouraged by our world.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 176.

⁹⁸ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, xi.

⁹⁹ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 82.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 206.

¹⁰¹ Linn, *Consuming Kids*, 127.

¹⁰² Ibid., 127.

¹⁰³ Keyes, “*Youth Culture and Growing Up*”, 3.

Hurried and Haggard

Chap Clark points out that only “adults who actively engage youth will become significant forces in their lives.”¹⁰⁴ Yet, many adults simply do not take the time to enter the lives of youth in a meaningful manner. This attitude can arise from a hurried life. Broadly appreciated writers and speakers on the topic of marriage and family issues, Dennis and Barbara Rainey, write that busyness is a “trap that snares many a child and adult. We are a hurried, exhausted, and weary culture. Too many children today are close to overdosing on activities.”¹⁰⁵ Elkind agrees and notes that “as a society we have come to imagine that it is good for young people to mature rapidly. Yet we do our children harm when we hurry them through childhood.”¹⁰⁶ One kind of harm that Elkind has in mind involves the danger of growing up so fast that our kids “learn the rules of social license before they learn the rules of social responsibility.”¹⁰⁷ Connected with the hurried life is the problematic concept of resiliency in youth.

The Resilient Child

Charles Shelton writes: “With time and understanding, the vast majority of youth withstand the everyday disturbances and problems that are so much a part of this developmental period.”¹⁰⁸ Shelton believes that youth are essentially resilient or competent. Mental health professional Cynthia Monahon agrees with Shelton. However, she highlights the important ingredient of family support. Monahon asserts:

For children, the family’s role as a buffering and healing force cannot be overemphasized... The confused child who is trying to figure out how to make

¹⁰⁴ Clark, *Hurt*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Dennis and Barbara Rainey, *Parenting Today’s Adolescents* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 236.

¹⁰⁶ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality*, 4.

sense of a traumatic event looks for cues in his parents' responses to the event. When the child can see that parents view the situation as manageable...the child feels more empowered to do the same.¹⁰⁹

On the other side of the issue, Dr. Elkind, who is responding mainly to Shelton's view, defines resiliency or the concept of competency as the ability of a child to "deal with all of life's vicissitudes"¹¹⁰ and declares it to be a "social invention"¹¹¹ designed to reduce the guilt and anxiety of parents who are spending less and less real time with their kids.¹¹² In concert with Elkind, Clark writes regarding teens and the idea of resiliency in the literature: "There is an external optimism that they feel they are okay, that they can take care of themselves, and that they don't need anybody."¹¹³ This view of self-care by teens is folly according to Clark, who believes that "every midadolescent is crying out for an adult who cares."¹¹⁴ Furthermore, he holds that resiliency, coupled with the hurried life, is merely another form of abandonment.¹¹⁵ This factor of abandonment will be considered next.

All Alone

"The teen years are years of monumental insecurity,"¹¹⁶ writes Tedd Tripp, respected Christian author. He holds that teens feel vulnerable about many things, such as appearance and personality. The result is that young people feel very much alone. Yet, teens are not only feeling alone, they actually are so according to several authors. For instance, Thomas Hine found that many youth "are able to be with their parents ten to

¹⁰⁹ Cynthia Monahan, *Children and Trauma* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993), 60.

¹¹⁰ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, xvii.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, xix.

¹¹³ Clark, *Hurt*, 62.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹⁶ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995), 185.

twelve fewer hours each week than was the case three decades ago.”¹¹⁷ David Seel reports that adolescents spend “only 4.8 percent of their time with their parents and only 2 percent with adults who are not their parents.”¹¹⁸ Epstein notes: “Many American teens—perhaps half or more—also grow up with little access to their father, and for those lucky enough to have a father, the average teenager now spends less than half an hour a week alone with his or her father. Half of this time is spent watching television, a situation that does not readily lend itself to quality parent-child interactions.”¹¹⁹ Parents are often too distracted by their own schedules and problems to be of much help to their kids.¹²⁰

The culture contributes significantly to youth rebellion. The following section will examine the contributions from the family. Parents, according to George Barna, still have the greatest influence (good or bad) upon the lives and faith of their teens.¹²¹ Many authors join with Barna in giving the family a key role in the lives of youth.

Contributions from the Family

Chap Clark believes that the “concept of the family has undergone intense and contentious change over the past twenty or so years.”¹²² Pipher adds that family demographics “have changed radically since the 1970’s, when less than 13 percent of all families were headed by single parents. In 1990, 30 percent of all families were headed by single parents.”¹²³ According to the most recent government data, twenty-eight percent of all children in the US under the age of eighteen live with one parent.¹²⁴

Religious families have not been sheltered from this environment of change and have

¹¹⁷ Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 19.

¹¹⁸ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 28.

¹¹⁹ Epstein, *The Case Against Adolescence*, 92.

¹²⁰ Clark, *Hurt*, 50.

¹²¹ Barna, *Real Teens*, 62.

¹²² Clark, *Hurt*, 103.

¹²³ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 80.

¹²⁴ Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006.

contributed to youth rebellion in a number of ways. In the following paragraphs, certain scholars comment on what appear to be the five most prominent contributors to rebellion in the literature.

The Fear Factor

Tim Kimmel thinks that kids are turned off to the Christian faith by parents' fear of the culture.¹²⁵ He writes: "The fear that drives the choices we make about how we church our kids, how we educate them, the fellowship we provide for them, and how we entertain them may well be why so many Christian kids want little to do with what we are selling."¹²⁶ This kind of fear can lead to what Seel calls child isolation, which in turn can lead to strife between child and parent. He observes that the "notion of being able to raise a child in a sanitized world, untouched by the spirit of our age, is simply naïve – however well-intentioned and conscientious the parents may be."¹²⁷ This sort of thinking ignores the truth highlighted by C. John Miller: "But no one grows into grace through a Christianized environment. No one gets to God by moral self-improvement."¹²⁸ Closely related to fear is the contribution of religious legalism.

Rules and More Rules

According to Kimmel, legalistic parents "spend most of their time trying to make sure their family does everything right."¹²⁹ Tom Bissett discovered in his research that "people who grew up in strongly authoritarian homes showed up with the highest percentage of faith rejection."¹³⁰ He adds that the goal of parenting should not be perfect

¹²⁵ Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, 19.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁷ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 31.

¹²⁸ Miller and Juliani, *Welcome Back, Barbara*, 30.

¹²⁹ Tim Kimmel, *Grace Based Parenting* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 17.

¹³⁰ Tom Bissett, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, 129.

kids.”¹³¹ Miller agrees and notes that the controlling parent works to form an orderly child who performs well in public. Yet, he adds that the problem “of course, is not with the orderliness of the child but with the shaping of a person with a desensitized conscience, a performer who has never learned to love God or people from the heart.”¹³² Trouble, it seems, is inevitable if matters of the heart are ignored. Tedd Trip declares: “You must address the heart as the fountain of behavior and the conscience as the God-given judge of right and wrong. The cross of Christ must be the central focus of your childrearing.”¹³³ Instead of dealing with the heart, parents often manipulate their children, and this can have negatives effects. Kenneth Hyde, psychologist and religious researcher, writes: “A legalistic form of religious belief seems often to be associated with conventional moral reasoning and would seem to have an adverse effect on the development of higher levels of moral judgment.”¹³⁴ Legal training in the name of religion can cause great harm in the life of a teen. Another issue that can contribute to rebellion is the modeling of a faith that costs little.

Low Cost Faith

Dr. Kimmel warns that Christianity can actually become a family hobby. The parents may have a real faith, but their children can easily embrace faith as something the family does throughout the week.¹³⁵ Hobbies are often comfortable. Real faith is not. Kimmel writes: “There is a major problem in many Christian homes, and it feeds a child’s inclination toward rebellion. It is the presence of a faith that doesn’t cost

¹³¹ Ibid., 143.

¹³² Miller and Juliani, *Come Back, Barbara*, 161.

¹³³ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 123.

¹³⁴ Kenneth E. Hyde, *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990), 285-286.

¹³⁵ Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, 95.

much.”¹³⁶ A faith that doesn’t cost much is one in which the parents are often more interested in achievement at any price.

Achievement at Any Price

Madeline Levine declares that “of all the things parents are likely to be anxious about, academic performance is invariably near the top of the list. Parents’ anxiety about school performance leads to children who are pressured and anxious...”¹³⁷ In concert with this view, Elkind says that “young people often become enmeshed in ‘achievement overload.’ So much emphasis has been placed on achievement that young people overload their schedules.”¹³⁸ For instance, many parents push their kids into sports, believing that achievement through such activity will encourage character. Clark’s research points out that the opposite is often true. He writes: “We still use the rhetoric that youth sports build character, yet in reality what we have taught our children builds nothing other than arrogance, self-centeredness, and a performance ethic that is destructive to healthy, communally connected development.”¹³⁹ In addition, parents can emphasize achievement over sacrifice through career advancement. Kimmel asserts that kids know “when we make deliberate choices to take something from them that they vitally need so we can enhance our careers.”¹⁴⁰ This kind of selfish thinking by parents is both a poor teacher and an encourager of discord between kids and parents.

Family Tension

Well-known authors on teens and rebellion, Dean Hoge and Gregory Petrillo, have determined through their research that a family climate of tension contributes

¹³⁶ Ibid., 147.

¹³⁷ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 29.

¹³⁸ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 151.

¹³⁹ Clark, *Hurt*, 119.

¹⁴⁰ Kimmel, *Grace Based Parenting*, 50.

negatively to the transmission of religious values from the parents to the children.¹⁴¹ Such tension may come in different forms. Recognized experts on the topic of teen rebellion, John Wilson and Darren Sherakat, have found that “apostasy is more likely where parents and children have been distant, and where interaction between parents and children was infrequent.”¹⁴² Distance simply breeds more distance. Furthermore, many writers think that the greatest input to family tension comes from parental discord and in particular divorce. Kathleen Engebretson writes: “It also appears that divorce within the family affects children’s attitudes to Christianity negatively.”¹⁴³ Mary Pipher points out that divorce is particularly tough on adolescents. She notes: “Teenagers need parents who talk to them, supervise them, help them stay organized and support them when they are down. Divorcing parents just don’t have the energy.”¹⁴⁴ The loss of real and meaningful relationships has been devastating to numerous teens because, as Shelton suggests, adolescence is relational.¹⁴⁵ Teens need positive interaction with adults, especially their parents. Without significant parental input, youth often experience depression.¹⁴⁶ Family tension often robs the teen of security.

Based upon the preceding information, it appears that the family, and in particular the religious family, can contribute greatly to the rebellion of teens. Yet, along with the family, the church can also add to the problem. In the next section, the topic of church contributions to teen rebellion is considered.

¹⁴¹ Dean R. Hoge and Gregory H. Petrillo, “Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17 (December 1978): 360.

¹⁴² John Wilson and Darren E. Sherkat, “Returning to the Fold,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (June 1994): 150.

¹⁴³ Kathleen Engebretson, “Young People, Culture, and Spirituality: Some Implications for Ministry,” 9.

¹⁴⁴ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 134.

¹⁴⁵ Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality*, 112.

¹⁴⁶ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 150.

Contributions from the Church

A number of scholars have considered the contributions of the church to rebellion, and their opinions focus upon the following factors.

Law and Order

The first area of negative contribution is a legal environment. Cathryn Hill believes that “as long as any church remains ‘legalistic,’ that is at a conventional level of faith, it may be hindering the spiritual and psychological development of all its members.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, according to popular authors Wendi English and Karilee Hayden, church ministries based upon an attitude of legalism often make kids angry and bitter.¹⁴⁸ Congregations that wish to resist the growth of legalism must major on the truth of the Gospel.

Truth Matters

Josh McDowell, Christian apologist and highly regarded author, says that what Christian youth currently believe is disturbing. One of the reasons he gives for this situation is that “many church and parachurch youth workers have become group facilitators rather than teachers of scriptural truth.”¹⁴⁹ Facilitators don’t place truth very high on the list of priorities. The result is a perspective that is all over the map. For instance, McDowell notes that sixty-three percent of Christian teens believe that Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, and all other people pray to the same god and that Jesus committed sins during his ministry on earth.¹⁵⁰ He adds: “Our kids have been

¹⁴⁷ Cathryn I. Hill, “A Developmental Perspective on Adolescent ‘Rebellion’ in the Church,” 316.

¹⁴⁸ Karilee Hayden and Wendi Hayden English, *Wild Child and Waiting Mom* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2006), 73.

¹⁴⁹ Josh D. McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *Beyond Belief to Convictions* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), 11.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

conditioned to believe that truth is not true for them until they choose to believe it.”¹⁵¹

Such thinking, according to Christian Smith, comes from the ethos of therapeutic individualism. He writes: “Therapeutic individualism defines the individual self as the source and standard of authentic moral knowledge and authority... Subjective, personal experience is the touchstone of all that is authentic, right, and true.”¹⁵² This worldview has resulted in about nine percent of teens believing that absolute moral truth exists.¹⁵³ However, the problem does not rest entirely with youth workers. Mueller reports that only half of the Protestant pastors in the U. S. have a biblical worldview and that, even where the pastor has a sound perspective, most of the congregants don’t.¹⁵⁴ He asserts: “...we must consciously guard against the temptation to reinvent, redefine or reimagine the Word in our own image. As our culture shifts deeper into postmodernity, we will be tempted to sacrifice true biblical faith on the altar of relevance.”¹⁵⁵ Tedd Tripp, although not in disagreement with Mueller, believes that the effects of error have already caused much of the church to suffer “from a low view of God.”¹⁵⁶ One symptom of this low view, according to David Wells, is that numerous churches have given up talking about sin in order to present an attractive front.¹⁵⁷ Attractiveness, to scholars like Tom Bisset, leads to nothing but weak theology. He challenges Christian leaders to present true and strong messages. Bisset states: “If you want spiritually strong Christian kids, be certain that thinking hard thoughts about your beliefs is an integral part of the Christian faith you

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵² Smith, *Soul Searching*, 173.

¹⁵³ Barna, *Real Teens*, 91.

¹⁵⁴ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 139.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 177.

¹⁵⁶ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 189.

¹⁵⁷ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 201.

are trying to pass on.”¹⁵⁸ Without a strong focus on truth, our youth will suffer, and rebellion will receive a vote of support. However, unless the truth is presented by people who are living authentic Christian lives, the effect will be limited.

Church as a Business

Tim Kimmel describes a lack of authenticity this way: “Many churches, in trying to connect with culture, have felt it necessary to temper their theology. There has been a subtle airbrushing of classical biblical doctrine to make it more appealing...Our children, in an attempt to be honest with themselves, are inclined to reject a lifestyle that is defined by the conventional brokers of God’s truth – the people in the ‘business’ of church.”¹⁵⁹ To many young people, such airbrushing of truth is simply hypocrisy. Tom Beaudoin points out that “the perception of hypocrisy is one reason religion is not a security blanket but a wet blanket for so many.”¹⁶⁰ That is, when youth encounter mere religion, they tend to feel uneasy and unwelcome in the church. In concert with Beaudoin, Wesley Black, a highly regarded professor and writer, believes that teens “are turned off by Christians who are fakes.”¹⁶¹ These people greet youth with phony smiles and “empty greetings rather than authentic Christian fellowship and warmth.”¹⁶²

Empty Welcome

Relationships play a major role in a teen’s church attendance. A key component of relating, for a teen, involves being heard and understood. Mueller writes: “When young people realize they aren’t understood, church becomes a place where they don’t belong...The cost of losing our ears is great. Whoever takes interest and listens with both

¹⁵⁸ Bisset, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, 49.

¹⁵⁹ Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, 17.

¹⁶⁰ Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 25.

¹⁶¹ Wesley Black, “Youth Ministry that Lasts,” *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 4 (Spring 2006): 32.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 33.

ears will be given the privilege of influence.”¹⁶³ Teens will be far better off imitating the people of faith around them, but, as Patricia Hersch points out: “How can kids imitate and learn from adults if they never talk to them?”¹⁶⁴ In order to talk together, teens and adults should be in close fellowship. Yet, the church often separates youth and older Christians. Mueller believes that “the larger body of Christ should include the emerging generations as it assembles for worship, mission, fellowship, education, and service. In other words, we must stop our destructive practice of separating the body of Christ along generational lines.”¹⁶⁵ Such separation only contributes to what Chap Clark calls the “culture of isolation.”¹⁶⁶ Adults must be present to help youth understand the world around them. Sean McDowell, teacher and nationally recognized speaker, writes: “Young people are leaving faith behind because the Christian community is failing to engage their minds and their hearts.”¹⁶⁷ Perhaps one reason why many adults fail to engage youth is because they do not understand why teens behave the way they do. The following section deals with adolescent development and the possible links to rebellion.

Contributions from Human Development

A significant number of scholars believe that rebellion is often the result of normal development. For example, James Fowler, a pioneer in the study of faith development, notes that in early adolescence “both our previous knowledge and values and our very ways of verifying and justifying our perspectives and our actions undergo change and must be reworked.”¹⁶⁸ This reworking can cause teens to rebel against the

¹⁶³ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 25.

¹⁶⁴ Hersch, *A Tribe Apart*, 20.

¹⁶⁵ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 193.

¹⁶⁶ Clark, *Hurt*, 55.

¹⁶⁷ Sean McDowell, “For a New Generation,” *Christian research Journal* 30 (2007): 24.

¹⁶⁸ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 58.

religious perspectives of their parents. In concert with this kind of thinking, noted researcher and writer Roger Dudley believes:

...that it would be overly simplistic to attempt to identify and describe the cause of religious alienation in adolescents. The roots of human behavior are varied and complex indeed. Yet, it is possible to weave together a number of strands from the adolescent experience and discern a pattern which reveals why such 'heresy' is not at all abnormal or unreasonable – perhaps even likely.¹⁶⁹

Charles Shelton adds his voice to Dudley's: "Every stage of human development – childhood, adolescence, adulthood – is an 'appointed time,' and each life stage is a 'time' when developmental issues influence our response to the invitation of Jesus to 'come, follow me.'"¹⁷⁰ So, according to these scholars, human development can create an environment that encourages teen rebellion. Two factors related to human development that receive attention in the literature are teen identity and basic biology.

Teen Identity

David Seel, writing on the matter of teen identity, notes: "Driving the search for identity is a longing for meaning that is expressed in two questions: 'Where do I find security?' and 'How do I find significance?' These two desires dominate the adolescent consciousness."¹⁷¹ Other scholars side with Seel. For example, regarding teens and the desire for security, Tedd Tripp notes that youth actually "feel vulnerable about everything. They worry about their appearance. ...They feel anxiety about their understanding of life. ...They are unstable in the world of ideas."¹⁷² Related to the issue of instability, Engebretson points out that young people are often "lonely and depressed

¹⁶⁹ Roger L. Dudley, "Adolescent Heresy," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 (Spring 1983): 51-52.

¹⁷⁰ Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality*, 1.

¹⁷¹ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 72.

¹⁷² Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 185.

and find it difficult to talk to people about anything meaningful.”¹⁷³ On the matter of significance, Roland Martinson, professor and recognized expert on youth and faith, notes that many youth develop “an unrealistically high view of themselves; they are arrogant and overestimate their abilities, judgments and place in society.”¹⁷⁴ Some adults pull back from youth when they encounter such attitudes.

Biology and Rebellion

According to James Dobson, Christian psychologist and highly regarded authority on the family, an understanding of basic biology is important in a discussion on the topic of rebellion. He notes: “The emotional characteristics of a suddenly rebellious teenager are rather like the symptoms of a premenstrual syndrome or severe menopause in women, or perhaps a tumultuous mid-life crisis in men. Obviously, dramatic changes are going on inside.”¹⁷⁵ With respect to boys, Beausay adds: “And as early adolescence approaches, a teenager’s brain becomes suddenly (over the course of one to three years) more like a man’s.”¹⁷⁶ He goes on to say that boys are always in some kind of transition and that they will “try, and succeed, in rebellion.”¹⁷⁷ Mary Pipher writes regarding girls and emotional pain in their development: “If that pain is blamed on themselves, on their failures, it manifests itself as depression. If that pain is blamed on others – it shows up as anger. This anger is often mislabeled rebellion or even delinquency.”¹⁷⁸ Biological factors seem to have a place in coming to grips with teen rebellion.

¹⁷³ Engebretson, “Young People, Culture, and Spirituality,” 13.

¹⁷⁴ Roland D. Martinson, *Effective Youth Ministry* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 38.

¹⁷⁵ James C. Dobson, *Parenting Isn’t for Cowards* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 144.

¹⁷⁶ Beausay, *Teenage Boys*, 5.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷⁸ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 150.

Although not exhaustive, the above discussion demonstrates the necessity of families and churches taking action to identify and better understand those things that encourage rebellion in youth. In the following section, possible action by the church and family will be explored in order to provide an initial answer to the question: What can be done to check the potential for and the heartache of teen rebellion?

Possible Checks to Rebellion

Checks by the Church

There appear to be many ways that the church might check rebellion. Below are what appear to be the most significant factors noted in the literature.

Real Passion

Some scholars think that churches should encourage passion for God over mere goodness. Sean Dunn notes that many young people who grow up in church can develop cold and callous hearts toward the faith. He writes: “We must see them transformed. We can’t be satisfied that they are ‘good kids.’ We must work to see them become passionately in love with their Lord. It is the only thing that will protect them from taking their faith for granted.”¹⁷⁹ Tedd Tripp adds to this view by emphasizing the need for youth to maintain a serious view of God. He declares: “Your teenager must be motivated by a sense of awe and reverence for God.”¹⁸⁰ Along with these perspectives, Josh McDowell challenges churches to give teens a biblical worldview. McDowell believes that if the church does not “do something now to reeducate our kids in the foundations of the Christian faith, the young people we’re counting on to lead the church into the next

¹⁷⁹ Dunn, *Bored with God*, 33.

¹⁸⁰ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, 188.

generation won't even be in the church of the next generation."¹⁸¹ He adds that the church must not stop here, but challenge teens "to move beyond belief to convictions."¹⁸² In order for such desires to be encouraged, the church must actually be a body or a community of believers.

Body Life

According to Chap Clark, youth "need to experience authentic, intimate relationships with adults."¹⁸³ Such relationships involve adults listening to youth. David Seel says: "If we listen to the voices of teenagers today, we will hear a longing for respect and the desire that adults would acknowledge that their choices matter and their struggles are real."¹⁸⁴ Pipher adds: "When teenagers temporarily lose their heads, which most do, they need an adult to help them recover."¹⁸⁵ Bisset agrees and adds that adult relationships play a critical role "in helping prodigals return to the faith."¹⁸⁶ Such encouraging relationships will be discouraged unless the church is close. Shelton points out that life together, as the people of God, "provides an extended family in which adolescents can work out identity and intimacy, balancing care of self with care of others."¹⁸⁷ Yet, there are some roadblocks to real community or extended family. For instance, the church must stop separating the body of Christ along generational lines. Mueller writes: "...we must ask ourselves why we are so quick to remove teenagers from the opportunity to worship with the older, wiser and spiritually gifted members of our

¹⁸¹ McDowell, *Beyond Belief to Convictions*, 17.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸³ Clark, *Hurt*, 171.

¹⁸⁴ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 35.

¹⁸⁵ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 285.

¹⁸⁶ Tom Bisset, *Good News About Prodigals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1997), 30.

¹⁸⁷ Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality*, 329.

congregation.”¹⁸⁸ In an effort to encourage generational mixing in the church, Larson and Brendtro suggest four steps for building relationships with difficult youth. They challenge adults to realize that they must start the relationships, plan the time together around activities, schedule events away from the youth’s friends, and meet on their turf.¹⁸⁹

Shelton suggests similar things, but he adds the need for adults to be real. He points out that “a critical factor for adolescent growth is the adult’s ability to admit limits.”¹⁹⁰ An authentic and vulnerable adult is essential in a growing relationship with a teen.

However, Shelton adds a caution. The adult must be careful not to relate out of an insidious need for power. He says: “The adult’s age, experience, knowledge, authority, and role can exert a profound influence over the adolescent...such power needs are often unconscious, however, and are clothed in the banner of ‘the helpful ministerial work I am doing.’”¹⁹¹ Even though a community of faith is vital, it is also important to offer opportunities for youth to gather together. Christian Smith found that religious “youth groups seem to be an important part of the religious and spiritual experience of a substantial minority of U.S. adolescents.”¹⁹²

Youth Groups

Recognized authorities in the area of youth ministry Barry Gane and Jimmy Kijai believe that many teens who are involved in youth groups tend “to have higher levels of maturity and intrinsic orientation to religion compared to those moderately or least

¹⁸⁸ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 193.

¹⁸⁹ Larson and Brendtro, *Reclaiming Our Prodigal Sons and Daughters*, 115-116.

¹⁹⁰ Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality*, 20.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁹² Smith, *Soul Searching*, 69.

involved in youth ministry.”¹⁹³ Yet, the youth group must have certain characteristics in order to help teens. For example, the ministry ought to encourage biblical literacy. According to Engebretson, teens must be taught to “interrogate their own cultural conditioning, including the mindset of their own generation. Thus they might entertain the possibility that enduring beliefs and values warrant their consideration. Relativism itself must be subject to scrutiny.”¹⁹⁴ Along with affording a biblical literacy, it is essential to challenge youth with spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual Disciplines

Wesley Black notes: “Two spiritual disciplines during the teenage years are linked significantly with faithful young adult church attendance. Prayer and Bible reading should be among the key disciplines to teach and encourage among teenage youth group members.”¹⁹⁵ Here is where adults can mentor youth. Black asserts: “Churches and youth ministries need to develop a mentoring program that matches spiritually strong adults (in addition to parents) with adolescents.”¹⁹⁶ In addition to such spiritual disciplines, teens must be encouraged to live disciplined lives.

Disciplined Living

Shelton, speaking to the issue of discipline, says that adults who minister to youth should “pinpoint three specific areas of adolescent sexual behavior that require special attention – masturbation, petting experiences, and premarital sexual activity.”¹⁹⁷ But merely talking about moral issues is not enough. Some scholars want the church to

¹⁹³ Barry Gane and Jimmy Kijai, “The Relationship Between Faith Maturity, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Orientations to Religion and Youth Ministry Involvement,” *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 4:2 (Spring 2006): 59.

¹⁹⁴ Engebretson, “Young People, Culture, and Spirituality: Some Implications for Ministry,” *Religious Education* 98 (Winter 2003): 23.

¹⁹⁵ Black, “Youth Ministry That Lasts,” 29.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁹⁷ Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality*, 242.

encourage adults and youth to think hard about obedience and how to weaken sin. Kris Lundgaard, an able theologian, notes five ways to weaken the flesh. He calls for hard thinking about the sovereignty of God, the punishment of sin, God's love and kindness, the blood and mediation of Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit-the greatest privilege we are made partakers of in this world.¹⁹⁸ Although important, such ministry often takes a significant amount of time; therefore, the church must be careful not to over-schedule youth with 'good things' to do.

Too Busy

Regarding busyness, Dr. Black writes: "Parents and teenagers often lead busy and stressful lives. Youth ministries with a calendar full of activities can add to these busy schedules and even contribute to lack of family time together."¹⁹⁹ Demands and expectations can quickly get out of hand.²⁰⁰ Less organizational stress is needed to encourage teens and their families. One way of reducing such stress is to encourage parents to pick-up more of the burden of youth preparation. That is, churches might consider giving "practical, in-depth guidance to parents in how to be spiritual leaders for their teens."²⁰¹ Although such guidance might be very helpful to parents, congregations must also consider providing aid for the hurting.

Care for the Wounded

During their own struggles with children and rebellion, Fitzpatrick and Newheiser found encouragement from other Christian parents "who know about the pain of wayward children. We know about nights without sleep, the haunting doubts, the self-

¹⁹⁸ Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 85-88.

¹⁹⁹ Black, "Youth Ministry That Lasts," 28.

²⁰⁰ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 43.

²⁰¹ Black, "Youth Ministry That Lasts," 44.

condemning accusations, the humbling abasement.”²⁰² Churches can help weary couples by providing an environment of support and care in the face of stress and heart sickness. In addition to this kind of care, Marcia Mitchell, experienced author and conference speaker, suggests that parents and even churches might also be helped by taking the time “to listen to some of the kids who have been in trouble.”²⁰³ Much can be learned from those who have rebelled and returned to the faith.

So far, the checks on rebellion afforded by the church have been examined. But the church alone cannot do the job. The family must also participate. Kenneth Hyde, considered by some researchers to be a pioneer in the area of youth and rebellion, writes: “When home and church reinforce the same points of view, the influence is strong.”²⁰⁴ In the next part, the answer to this important question will be addressed: What can a family do to reduce the potential for and the heartache of teen rebellion?

Checks by the Family

The format for this section was derived from David Seel’s ten priorities of Christian parenting. Concerning these priorities, he notes: “They are not exhaustive but are fundamental to parenting teens as God parents us.”²⁰⁵ Around each priority was gathered input from other authors.

Follow Jesus

The first priority calls Christian parents to be apprentices of Christ.²⁰⁶ Seel writes: “Our children are looking for the reality of Jesus in their Christian parents. We have little

²⁰² Fitzpatrick and Newheiser, *When Good Kids Made Bad Choices*, 218.

²⁰³ Marcia Mitchell, *Surviving the Prodigal Years* (Lynnwood, WA: Emerald Books, 1995), 39.

²⁰⁴ Kenneth E. Hyde, *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990), 225.

²⁰⁵ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 17.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

to offer as parents if Jesus is not our passion, our reliance, and our life.”²⁰⁷ Youth need to see real faith in their parents. Christian Smith found from his research that “most parents most likely will end up getting religiously of their children what they themselves are.”²⁰⁸ Parents of real faith often produce kids who truly believe. This kind of faith must certainly involve openness to the means of grace such as Scripture and prayer. Pamela King, James Furrow, and Natalie Roth identified from their research that “religious interaction with parents at home is more powerful than parents’ individual experience of religion.”²⁰⁹ They note that such activities as in-home prayer, Bible reading, family devotions, and religious education “have the largest effects on adolescent religious belief and commitment as well as religious worship behavior.”²¹⁰ In addition to these disciplines, parents who live a faith that is sacrificial in nature tend to encourage their teens to live the same. Dr. Kimmel says: “Being willing to sacrifice our lives for our children is the natural next step of a deep-seated love for God. The sheer power of our sacrifices cannot be quantified. Nor can they be minimized. When kids see just how unselfishly our faith lives itself out, they’ll be far more inclined to want that kind of faith too.”²¹¹ Such faith must also be accompanied by what Miller and Juliani call unconditional love. They write: “That is the most powerful weapon in the parent’s arsenal, and the only weapon that can really touch the hardened conscience of a deeply rebellious spirit.”²¹²

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 99.

²⁰⁸ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 57.

²⁰⁹ Pamela E. King, James L. Furrow, and Natalie Roth, “The Influence of Families and Peers on Adolescent Religiousness,” 111.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 111.

²¹¹ Tim Kimmel, *50 Ways to Really Love Your Kids* (Nashville, TN: Countryman, 2006), 108-109.

²¹² Miller and Juliani, *Come Back, Barbara*, 77.

Live with Integrity

The second priority involves living life with integrity for what really matters.²¹³ Seel declares: “More than anyone else, our lives are lived before our children. The choices we make in private are the lessons they learn about how life is to be negotiated.”²¹⁴ In order to live such a life, parents must be willing to examine their hearts. According to Paul Tripp, many parents’ hearts contain idols that can negatively affect relationships with teens. He identifies five typical idols: comfort, respect (as an entitlement), appreciation (as the main goal), success, and control.²¹⁵ Along with examination, there must be a willingness to change. Kimmel believes that a real change in parent’s heart and life “is the best way to create a change in your rebellious child. Changed lives change lives.”²¹⁶ Yet, real change must be accompanied by an understanding of our teens.

Learn From Our Kids

The third priority involves becoming a student of the teenager’s world. Seel notes: “If our children are to know that we are for them, we must make every effort to understand their world – including the hired hands and the wolves who surround them.”²¹⁷ Other authors concur with this point. For instance, Hersch asserts that the “turbulence of adolescence today comes not so much from the rebellion as from loss of communication between adults and kids, and from the lack of a realistic, honest understanding of what the kid’s world really looks like.”²¹⁸ Walt Mueller adds that failing

²¹³ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 101.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

²¹⁵ Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 31-38.

²¹⁶ Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, xi-xii.

²¹⁷ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 120.

²¹⁸ Hersch, *A Tribe Apart*, 365.

“to know the music, films, television, magazines and other expressions of young people that make up their culture soup will lead to failure in youth ministry. The current shift in worldviews and rapidity of cultural change require our diligence in cultural exegesis.”²¹⁹ Understanding the teen world is therefore critical. However, the support of youth interests must be its companion.

Support Our Kids

The fourth priority calls for adults to be advocates of our children’s constructive interests. Seel notes:

We need to become students not only of our teenagers’ world but also of their unique perceptions on their world. We should learn something about their favorite authors, artists, and musical groups... Spiritually speaking, parents should encourage their children to explore a wide variety of experiences that will set the backdrop for discovering their life’s work.²²⁰

Paul Tripp has a related concept called project parenting. This phrase implies “being focused, being purposeful, being goal-oriented in our daily encounters with our teenagers.”²²¹ Getting to know our teens and guiding them toward future goals is vital.

Employ Proper Boundaries

The fifth priority involves establishing limits based on the objective truth of reality. According to Seel, traditional morality is central to reality. He believes that traditional morality “is neither discovered nor invented; it is simply known. Our problem isn’t ignorance, but iniquity. It isn’t morality, but being moral.”²²² In concert with this view, Fitzpatrick and Newheiser assert that parents should protect the borders of their child’s soul. They write: “...you may need to restrict your child from certain friends who

²¹⁹ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 185.

²²⁰ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 123.

²²¹ Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 215.

²²² Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 135.

have proven to be a bad influence...Although you can't make your child become friends with godly people, you can and should keep him away from those who seek to corrupt his life."²²³ Limits or borders are crucial for our youth.

Encourage Passion for Truth

The sixth priority is for parents to encourage the passionate seeking of truth. Seel writes: "There is nothing more important for our children than encouraging in them a humble attitude of passionate truth-seeking."²²⁴ The urgency expressed in this priority is echoed by David Wells, who writes: "...ours is the first major civilization to be building itself deliberately and self-consciously without religious foundations...67 percent of Americans do not believe in the existence of moral absolutes and 70 percent do not believe in absolute truth -- truths that should be believed by all people in all places and at all times."²²⁵ Now, the temptation in the face of a society with a crumbling truth foundation is to place rules and regulations upon our children. Such an approach will "ultimately fail because it does not deal with the heart...it does not deal with the source of a person's wrong behavior, the sinful desires of the heart."²²⁶ Seel recognizes the problems of heart and society and provides in the next section five ways that parents can encourage their youth to be truth-seekers.

Focus on Belief

The seventh priority calls parents to focus upon beliefs and not mere behavior. Seel believes that for parents to make a difference in their teen's beliefs, they must attend to five aspects of influence. Parents must: live attractive lives in Christ, accept their

²²³ Fitzpatrick and Newheiser, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices*, 165.

²²⁴ Seel, *Perfecting without Perfection*, 146.

²²⁵ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 26.

²²⁶ Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 111.

children even if they fail, make the Gospel applicable to the lives of their teens, give honest answers to honest questions, and expose their children to alternatives to real faith.²²⁷ Other authors speak similar language as Seel. For instance, Kimmel holds that parents who emphasize sin management are often not attractive to their kids. He notes: “Children who grow up with graceless truth are repelled by self-righteousness and attracted to the world’s slickly marketed grace-substitutes.”²²⁸ On the matter of acceptance, Miller and his wife discovered that unconditional love was crucial in dealing with their struggling daughter. He describes such love as that which is able “to look through the hard outer shell and see the desperately needy person inside.”²²⁹ This attitude meant acceptance of their daughter as she was. With respect to applicability, Mueller holds that when we challenge youth with real faith, we must call them “to live God’s will and way in the world.”²³⁰ We must call the emerging generations “to a compelling faith that transforms every area of life and every nook and cranny of God’s creation.”²³¹ Regarding the affording of honest answers to honest questions, Kimmel writes: “Grace-based homes that allow a free exchange of candor-level honesty enable these kids to work through these convictions while feeling highly valued by us – even though we may disagree on several matters.”²³² Lastly, Nancy Pearcey addresses the matter of exposing our youth to alternative views to Christianity. She declares: “If all we give them is a ‘heart’ religion, it will not be strong enough to counter the lure of attractive but dangerous ideas. Young believers also need a ‘brain’ religion...to equip them to analyze

²²⁷ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 152-164.

²²⁸ Kimmel, *Grace Based Parenting*, 40.

²²⁹ Miller and Juliani, *Come Back, Barbara*, 39.

²³⁰ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 14.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³² Kimmel, *Grace Based Parenting*, 195.

and critique the competing worldviews they will encounter when they leave home.”²³³

And so, the philosophy of belief over mere behavior is a must for parents to embrace, yet according to Seel, personal responsibility must also be considered.

Encourage Responsibility

The eighth priority calls parents to give teens increasing responsibility for the decisions that shape their lives and reflect their hearts. Seel writes: “Christ demands that parents respect the self-determination of their teenager...Letting our teenage children begin to live their own lives is the often painful challenge for parents and adolescents alike.”²³⁴ This view is also endorsed by Kimmel, who challenges parents not to build safe places for our teens. In addition to the goal of encouraging strength in teens, parents must also give a practical foundation for such strength. Lou Priolo, experienced author and counselor, challenges parents: “It is your job to make clear how the truth you are teaching is to be practiced experientially. Your child must be shown how to apply the Scriptures you are teaching to the various situations and circumstances in life.”²³⁵ Good parenting, therefore, involves moving our youth toward an attitude of increasing self-determination rooted in God’s truth. Yet, parents must not be ignorant of the powerful forces that shape their kids. One such force involves the influence of friends or peers.

The Power of the Peer

Seel’s ninth priority involves parents promoting good friends and associates for their teenagers. He writes: “As parents we may not like what we see in the behavior or character of our children’s friends. But of even greater concern should be what the choice of these friends reveals about their character and thus their heart. Providing influence at

²³³ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 19.

²³⁴ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 166.

²³⁵ Lou Priolo, *Teach Them Diligently* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Books, 2000), 22.

that level, rather than focusing on what follows, must continue to be our priority.”²³⁶

This parental task is not easy given that that peer group influence on teens is very strong.²³⁷ Consequently, parents and youth leaders would do well “to help teenagers develop skills and priorities in choosing friends...the ability to choose friends later will make a major difference in the spiritual life of the young adult.”²³⁸ However, even though parental encouragement is critical in the selection of proper teen friendships, the most important priority is yet to be considered.

The Priority of Prayer

Seel’s tenth and greatest priority is simply to pray for our children. He writes: “The principal responsibility of parents is to pray for our children. Prayer is such a given of discipleship that we may think it hardly needs mentioning.”²³⁹ Fitzpatrick and Newheiser agree: “Although God rules sovereignly in our lives, He has appointed prayer as one means whereby we might move His hand.”²⁴⁰ These authors offer some practical advice: “...find one or two parents in your church with whom you can join in mutual encouragement and prayer. Perhaps you can form a group of parents who gather together weekly to pray for their wayward kids.”²⁴¹ It must be kept in mind, however, that prayer is not a magical formula to keep our youth from rebelling or to automatically remove struggling teens from the grip of dark behavior. But, it is a vital component of the Christian life and some authors afford practical guidance regarding the content of parental prayer. For example, Kimmel provides ten things to keep in mind when dealing

²³⁶ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 178-179.

²³⁷ Hyde, *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence*, 237.

²³⁸ Black, “Youth Ministry That Lasts,” 26-27.

²³⁹ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 185.

²⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick and Newheiser, *When Good Kids make Bad Choices*, 186.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

with and praying for rebellious teens. He challenges adults to never underestimate the power of prayer, ask for forgiveness, never interfere with consequences for sin, lean on the God for spiritual discernment, avoid bitterness, keep the rebel from harming other relationships like one's marriage, give opportunities to repent, be willing to help others, make one's life more attractive than the rebel's life, and never give up.²⁴² Like Kimmel, other writers offer advice for praying parents. For instance, Fitzpatrick and Newheiser remind parents of an important truth concerning youth: "...the natural bent of their nature is to rebel...Our children need God's sovereign grace for their nature to be changed."²⁴³ If parents do not embrace this truth, then the tendency to blame other people can readily emerge. Marcia Mitchell adds: "Rather than lash out at others, we parents need to turn our thoughts and hearts toward God."²⁴⁴ Calling parents to trust in God is the proper place to end this section on what contributions can be made by the family to minimize the potential of rebellion and even the duration if it should occur.

It has been my goal to identify the apparent contributions and possible checks to teen rebellion from Christian and secular writings. Perhaps this information, gathered from many sources, might serve as a challenge to pastors and other church leaders to study more and to carefully develop ministries that can offer warnings to all Christian families and hope to those who struggle with teen rebellion.

²⁴² Kimmel, *When Christian Kids Rebel*, 236-237.

²⁴³ Fitzpatrick and Newheiser, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices*, 30.

²⁴⁴ Mitchell, *Surviving the Prodigal Years*, 58.

Chapter Three Methodology

Design of the Study: A Qualitative Approach

This study is designed to be a qualitative research project. In this work, I conducted twelve interviews which involved six parent sets and six adult children who departed from the faith and later returned, in order to determine what might have contributed to the rebellion and what might have checked it. My purpose in this research was to analyze the attitudes and behavior of both parents and former rebels regarding this serious issue. In so doing, I could then inductively establish a sound theory relating to why some MBC youth depart from the faith of their families.

Each adult child was recommended by a MBC pastor. These people lived in significant rebellion, returned to the faith within the last ten years, and now have sound relationships with their parents. They came from a variety of church sizes and settings, and all but one are currently serving the Lord within MBC congregations. As to the parent sets, they are committed Christians who came from a diversity of social and economic backgrounds, and all but one set are ministering in MBC fellowships. The variety and quality of participants, the diversity of life settings, the comparability of the interview data with the literature review data (noted in Appendices B and C), and the power of the qualitative method contribute to the credibility of this study.

With respect to Appendices B (Contributions to Youth Rebellion) and C (Checks to Rebellion), it is important to note that they were developed by reading the interview manuscript and identifying certain themes that stood out from the parent and adult child

data. The next step was to carefully match these themes with specific categories found in the literature review. A certain degree of error was expected due to the subjective nature of interpreting what was stated and allocating this data to a category in the literature. The apparent strength of agreement between the review data and the parent and child information was estimated by the inclusion of three levels of agreement for both the parents and the children. For example, in Appendix B under the category marked 'Culture,' three or more parents and three or more adult children agreed with the literature review that peer pressure is a significant factor in teen rebellion. Also, with respect to 'Self,' three or more adult children agreed that this factor contributed to rebellion, while only one parent agreed.

It should also be noted that a qualitative study fits well within the gifting of the average pastor. That is, much of pastoral ministry involves relating with people on many levels. Pastors spend a great deal of time asking questions, noting answers, and analyzing the results in order to recommend proper courses of action. While this skill is not necessarily required for quantitative analysis, it is essential for the qualitative method. In addition, this kind of study ought to be accessible to pastors given the absence of statistical tables and associated jargon. The average minister will find himself a part of the work as he notes what respected authors and families are saying about rebellion. Having said this, it is also possible that a pastor might find a useful insight that I omitted from the data presented in chapter four.

To further confirm the qualitative research method, it is essential to consider the definition afforded by Sharan Merriam, a respected author on the topic of qualitative research. She writes: "Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms

of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible.”²⁴⁵ Merriam adds to this definition by highlighting five central characteristics of the method. She says that it shows an interest in understanding the meaning of the experiences people have in their world, makes the researcher the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, usually involves field work, primarily employs an inductive research strategy, and is descriptive through words and pictures.²⁴⁶

Interview verses Survey Method

I chose to interview parents and adult children rather than sending a detailed survey. Even though the survey method could have reduced the time I spent traveling and interviewing people face to face, I believe that the time was well spent given that I was able to ask clarifying questions and observe the mind and heart reactions of the participants. Therefore, in my opinion, the results that I obtained from the interviews are more complete than data that might have been collected from surveys.

The interview questions were designed to help me find the answer to the question presented in the problem statement of this study. Due to issues of distance, two of the parent sets and two of the adult children were interviewed over the telephone. The rest of the participants were interviewed face to face. Conversations with all parents and adult children lasted no less than forty minutes and no more than one hundred minutes. Each interview was tape-recorded and then put in transcript form for further analysis. It should also be noted that all the interviewees have signed consent forms.

²⁴⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and case Study Application in Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 5.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-8.

As to the analysis of the data, the manuscripts were carefully read to identify themes or categories associated with contributions and checks to rebellion from the parent and adult child perspectives. Next, the themes for both parents and adult children were placed on spreadsheets in order to identify agreement and difference within both the child and parent samples and agreement and difference between samples. At this point, this data was compared to the categories identified from the literature review in order to provide a measure of the validity of the interview data (see Appendices A and B). The last step involved gathering the data from the spreadsheets and presenting it in chapter four.

Research Questions

Through discussions with MBC leadership, observations from trusted pastors, reflection on my own pastoral care experience of about twenty years, and input from thoughtful writers, I began my interviews of both parents and adult children with preliminary questions designed to stimulate thinking and feeling on the hard issue of rebellion. In other words, I sought to recreate, as much as possible, the original crisis, so that the answers to important questions might come from deep within the soul and not ‘off the top’ of the participant’s head. On this matter, respected pastor and author Peter Scazzero writes: “My experience working with people as a pastor over the last twenty years has convinced me that unless there is sufficient discomfort and anguish, most will not do the hard work to take a deep, honest look inside.”²⁴⁷ I then turned my attention to collecting data in concert with my two primary research questions:

- 1- What might contribute to rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?
- 2- What might check rebellion in the lives of MBC youth?

²⁴⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 74.

Under these general headings, I asked the questions presented in Appendix A.

Program Design

Goals

There are three main goals associated with this work.

1- To determine what might contribute to rebellion.

2- To determine what might check rebellion.

3- To encourage MBC leaders and pastors to address the serious issue of rebellion so that parents and teens, involved in crisis, might be helped and that churches might be educated on the matter.

Learning Activities

The learning activities involved several different forms. The first was an e-mail sent to MBC pastors, who were recommended to me by a conference leader, explaining the nature of the research and what would be required of each participant. Every pastor was asked to find within his congregation at least one parent set and one adult child who were willing to take part in the project. There is little doubt that the pastors' inquiries significantly raised the level of discussion on rebellion, especially among those contacted within their congregations.

The second activity involved a follow-up phone call in which I repeated the contents of the original e-mail and answered any questions that might have arisen since the original contact. It was during this phase of the project that pastors encouraged me to finish the work because of the great need for it.

Thirdly, the actual interviews were the most important learning activity because I had the privilege of speaking with parents and their adult children on a deep level and over a significant amount of time. Each person or couple was able to share helpful

information and open their hearts to express emotion and thoughts that were essential to face for further reflection and healing.

Learning Indicators

The most important learning indicators came from the interviews. The pastors who recommended participants were challenged right away with the need to make the issue of teen rebellion known within their congregations. Some were even interested in getting input from my research on active cases of rebellion within their churches.

With respect to the parent sets who took part in the study, there were learning indicators as well. For instance, as the parents shared their thoughts and feelings, they were encouraged by the growth in their own lives and in the relationship with their former rebels. God's grace was made clear to them. In addition, through their interest in my research and the opinions of certain authors, the parents grew in appreciation for the problem of teen rebellion.

Regarding the adult children, their learning was similar to that of the parents. That is, they came to see how far God had brought them since the crisis and how much more they could be doing to help struggling parents and their children. Also, two of the six adult children were reminded through the interviews of the sovereignty of God in their lives and in the lives of all people.

Overall Plan

The overall plan was to interview parents and their adult children, in order to acquire their thoughts and feelings on possible contributors to and checks on rebellion, until observable repetition began to appear in the data. In this case, twelve interviews, consisting of six parent sets and six children, were sufficient. It should also be noted that

many potential participants were contacted; however, the thought of revisiting old hurts caused them to decline the interview invitation.

I recorded the interviews and started each one with the date, time, and names of the participants. Identical questions were presented to each parent set, and the same questions, although different from those presented to the parents, were directed to the adult children. In each conversation, some questions received more attention than others and additional questions were also asked at moments where it seemed appropriate to seek more insight into interesting responses.

At the end of each conversation, I asked a generic question aimed at providing an opportunity to raise more thoughts and feelings on the matter of rebellion and to check what was already presented in the interview. The data acquired from this strategy is presented in chapter four.

Limitations of the Study

Many limitations to this study were identified as the study progressed from the literature review, through the interview stage, and into the time of analysis. Five limitations are now given.

This project sought to conduct interviews with parents and their adult children until observable repetition in responses to questions was found. The final number was six parent sets and six adult children. While these participants represent a good sample from the MBC churches, which are about 183 in number, it is certainly not an exhaustive representation. More data might provide additional insights on the topic of teen rebellion.

Second, the nature of the study was such that interviews were very difficult to acquire, even with pastoral input. Many people chose not to participate in the study

because it might open old wounds and bring trouble into their lives. I think that more parents and children would have participated if the interviews were conducted by people closer to their lives. However, the time and money involved in conducting such interviews was beyond the scope of this study.

Third, the problem of teen rebellion is beyond the boundaries of the MBC and extends to all denominations, but the scope of this study was, for practical reasons, limited to the Conference.

Issues like mental illness and ADD (attention deficit disorder) or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) were not considered in this project. My training and background are not sufficient to handle such matters.

Finally, this project is not meant to be a problem solver but an encouragement to families, pastors, and MBC leaders. Rather than giving a number of steps for handling or preventing rebellion, the goal is to encourage pastors and helpers to become better educated on this important matter, to prayerfully apply what is learned to ministry, and to face the issue with grace if it should occur.

Chapter Four Findings

Introduction

In chapter three, I considered the reason and purpose for a qualitative research project on the subject of youth and rebellion. I have supported my work with a thorough review of pertinent literature and developed an inductive interview method that will produce a sound argument on the topic. I now turn to the analysis of the data gathered from the interviews. This chapter will not critique the collected information or afford any conclusions. Such matters will be covered in chapter 5. The objective of this chapter is to inform the reader about what the research subjects said with respect to the possible causes and hindrances to youth rebellion.

It is important to remember that a qualitative study is concerned with what happened and with coming to some conclusions about the participants' behavior. My two main headings for the interview questions were the primary research questions:

- 1- What might contribute to rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?
- 2- What might check rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?

It should be noted that my focus is not on developing a method to keep youth from leaving the faith, but to encourage a better understanding as to why some youth depart and what might hinder rebellion in their lives.

Participants

As previously stated, my research interviews were conducted with four parent couples and two individual parents. In addition, I interviewed six adult children who

rebelled from the faith and returned within the last ten years. Basic information on the people interviewed in this study is now given. It should be noted that, unless otherwise stated, the cities and towns are located in Minnesota.

Parents AH (husband) and AW (wife) are now retired (in Colorado) after many years of ministry. Their daughter AD is married and works as a professional in a large city.

Parents BH and BW work and live in a small city along with their daughter BD who attends college.

Parents CH and CW are retired and live near their son CS. He is a family man who owns his own business located in a large town.

Parent DH is self-employed and lives in a small city. His son DS is a college graduate and serves the Lord in campus ministry outside of Minnesota.

Parent EW is self-employed and lives in a major city with her son ES. He is employed by a local company.

Parents FH and FW live and work near a small town. Their son, FS, is a Baptist General Conference pastor who lives near his parents with his wife and children.

Interview Settings

All of the research subjects were interviewed in person except for AH, AW, EW, DS, and ES, who were interviewed by telephone. The reason for using the phone was to avoid the cost of traveling long distances. In addition, I sought interviews from people who lived in different settings around Minnesota in order to reduce the possibility of skewing the data in favor of one type of environment. It should also be noted that all of the interviews were recorded and transcribed into written text. Then, certain themes were

identified from the data associated with both the parents and the adult children. Next, these themes were arranged on spread sheets in order to show similarities and differences within and between the data provided by the participants. From this analysis, the data comparisons, available in Appendices B and C, were developed. Lastly, the themes were organized for presentation in this chapter.

Participant Backgrounds

All of the participants in this study are members or regular worshipers at MBC churches, except for parents AH, AW, and child DS. With respect to the adult children, all of them returned to the Lord after a period of rebellion greater than one year and have a growing relationship with their parents. In addition, the ages of the children range from early twenties to late forties.

Knowledge of the Issue

None of the interviewees has spent significant time studying the issue of rebellion. While more information could have produced deeper conversation, it seems that the lack of knowledge contributed to personal insights unshaped by professional opinion.

Research Interview Questions

This section consists of three parts. The first part includes the responses to preliminary questions designed to stimulate thinking and feeling on the difficult issue of rebellion. The second part considers the responses of the parents and their children to questions associated with the first primary research question. The last part presents the answers of the participants to questions related to the second primary research question. After each part, certain themes are identified from the data in preparation for the analysis

of chapter five. I begin by presenting the responses by the parents to three thinking and feeling questions.

Preliminary Research Questions

The first question asked the parents to recall the initial signs of a looming crisis in their child. Three out of six participants spoke briefly concerning strong wills in their children. Three respondents talked about their child withdrawing from the family. For instance, parent BW noticed that her daughter “was spending more time alone in the seventh and eighth grades. She didn’t want to be with the family as much. We did a lot of basketball games on Saturdays. She chose not to come!”²⁴⁸ Two parent sets talked about their child choosing the wrong kind of friends. Parent FH commented that his son:

...wanted to hang around with questionable kids...He was obedient in our presence, but he did things that we didn’t know about. We bought him a three-wheeler, and then he was all over the place with that thing. We found out that the kids would go to the local store and buy beer and chewing tobacco. I would go looking for him and never find him. We didn’t know that he chewed tobacco until high school.²⁴⁹

Furthermore, two respondents indicated that their children were moody (or dark) and angry. For example, parent DH remarked that his son “was always a dark personality... We did not get along well in his junior and senior high years. So, while I thought he was a Christian and that he accepted Christ as a boy, he always had a really dark personality. I wondered where he was because of his dark personality.”²⁵⁰

The parents were then asked to describe the highest level of their child’s defiance. Two parent sets were unsure. However, four respondents spoke of involvement in

²⁴⁸ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁴⁹ Parent FH, interview by author, 5 August 2007, Brook Park, MN, tape recording, author’s possession, Brook Park, MN.

²⁵⁰ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007, Alexandria, MN, tape recording, author’s possession, Brook Park, MN.

extreme behavior such as drinking and driving and dating unbelievers. For instance, parent BW remarked that her daughter:

...was hanging around with a lot of friends and was not coming home and not obeying us. She wanted to go her own way and own direction. She was drinking in eighth or ninth grade. Once she came home drunk. She was out of control. It was difficult seeing her that way. She was defiant. Her whole personality changed. We took her to the sheriff's office at about 4AM. As a mother, you want to protect, yet there comes a time where they have to be exposed. So we took her into the sheriff's office.²⁵¹

A third question was raised on the issue of parental reaction to rebellion with respect to thoughts and emotions. While one couple could not articulate an answer, the other respondents spoke about internal turmoil that was described as hurt, tension, or concern. Parent BW noted that "the tension was horrible...I was always worried about her. She was in a destructive mood, and there were a lot of hurt feelings. We were very distant. She was not interested in faith or in coming back to the faith."²⁵² In addition, BH said he was very disappointed in his daughter's behavior and declared: "I was shocked and mad!"²⁵³

In addition to the parent sets, the adult children were also asked three thinking and feeling questions. The first question sought to discover their dominant thoughts and emotions during their time of rebellion. Also, they were asked to consider their strengths and weaknesses. Five out of six adult children indicated that they were lonely. Child AD spoke about her extreme guilt and her sense of helplessness. She added: "I asked God to let me die at the age of sixteen!"²⁵⁴ Adult children BD and CS talked about their

²⁵¹ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Parent BH, interview by author, 31 May 2007, Cambridge, MN, tape recording, author's possession, Brook Park, MN.

²⁵⁴ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007, Duluth, MN, tape recording, author's possession, Brook Park, MN.

loneliness along with their sense of abandonment. BD asserted: “I sought my parents’ attention because they were so involved with my brothers. My parents would go to tournaments with my brothers and I was left out.”²⁵⁵ Children DS and ES sought to overcome the pain of loneliness by trying to fit in with popular youth or by seeking pleasure. DS said: “I was trying to find or do something to make me happy or fulfilled. To find and do things that bring me fulfillment or joy.”²⁵⁶ In addition to loneliness, adult children AD and CS talked about willful disobedience to God. CS declared: “I was impatient. As I got older, it got worse. I couldn’t do what the other kids could do. I would ask: ‘Why can’t I have that?’ So I rebelled...I hid my actions. God is in heaven and I am down here. I will deal with Him later!”²⁵⁷ Child AD noted, with even more passion than CS: “I would do something even if God did not want me to do it. I was determined to carry through whatever I started. I would say: ‘God, I’m not doing it [what God wants]’ and would go the other way.”²⁵⁸

Regarding strengths and weaknesses, not all adult children answered the question. Those who did gave a variety of responses. BD said: “My strength was the ability to understand the presence of danger. My weakness was that I was a follower.”²⁵⁹ Child CS remarked: “My strength was that I knew there was a God and that Jesus had died for me. My weakness was that I was a sinner.”²⁶⁰ The only other response was given by child FS who spoke of a weakness for women.

²⁵⁵ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁵⁶ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007, Grand Forks, ND, phone interview, tape recording, author’s possession, Brook Park, MN.

²⁵⁷ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007, Rush City, MN, tape recording, author’s possession, Brook Park, MN.

²⁵⁸ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

²⁵⁹ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁶⁰ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

The next question designed to stimulate thinking and feeling concerning rebellion involved the participants' view of God and the nature of their belief at the time of the rebellion. Four out of six adult children said that they were believers, yet they did not follow God during their rebellion. Only children DS and FS said that they were not Christians. With respect to their view of God, three out of six answers spoke of the Lord as judge. Child AD declared: "Somehow, I thought that God was standing with a baseball bat and waiting to whack me and not to protect me. Through most of it, I took responsibility, and God was saying: 'You did this! You are on your own!'"²⁶¹ Adult child CS noted: "I viewed God as I do my dad. I did not see God as a God of love but as a disciplinarian."²⁶² Former rebel FS also observed that he saw God as a judge. However, he added: "...even after becoming a believer, I still saw God as a judge."²⁶³ Another perspective on God was offered by child DS, who said: "I viewed God as something I tried to fit into my life...I didn't view God as someone who fulfills me. I thought God was a hindrance to what I wanted to do. I knew that that was contrary to the Bible, and [it] put me into a lot of conflict."²⁶⁴

The third preliminary question sought to identify the point at which each person was farthest from God and included a call to comment on the most intense moments of conflict. Five out of six participants commented, and all of them indicated that their lives had drifted into excessive sin and disorder. Adult child AD noted:

After having sex with an older man, I said: 'I am going to hell, so it doesn't matter from here on out!' I did this thing, and so I am stuck. At nineteen, I married a forty year old man. He was at our church. I was going to be dead anyway, and so I resigned to this fact...We were married nine days and then he

²⁶¹ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

²⁶² Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

²⁶³ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

²⁶⁴ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

said that he hated me. I said that I deserved it. He started hitting me. I went to date other men after this. I sought others to love me. We went to church, and yet we lived two different lives. I was having an affair with my boss, and yet I was teaching Sunday school!²⁶⁵

BD spoke of a party involving drinking and driving. It culminated in a serious accident wherein a friend was killed. Not long before the crash, she had rejected an offer to ride in that vehicle. She commented: "When the accident happened, the smashed car woke me up. Both back seats were smashed, and that is where I would have been. Up to this point, I was in my greatest rebellion."²⁶⁶ Child CS also lost a close friend in an accident. He declared that after "Bob died and I got married, things got really bad."²⁶⁷ DS remarked:

I lived in hell. I was at the point that I would wake up and wished that I hadn't. I lived in despair. I thought about suicide, and yet I did not act on it. I would blame other people and things. I blamed my parents because they made me conscious of my sin. I blamed God. I didn't believe that God loved me, and I did not believe that everything that was said about Jesus was true.²⁶⁸

FS mentioned a time when he was doing what he wanted to do. He spoke of one serious incident: "I had taken alcohol and pills, and I drove to the cities [one and a half hours from his home] and ended up way south. So I turned around and went back. I missed my ramp and ended up in Barnum [about one hour north of the Twin Cities]. It scared me."²⁶⁹

Common themes emerged from the answers to the preliminary research questions, by both parents and adult children. The first involved withdrawal from the family as a warning sign of active rebellion. Several parents observed their child moving away from the family and spending time with the wrong kind of friends, who encouraged wrongful behavior such as drinking. Two parents noted that their child displayed a moodiness or

²⁶⁵ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

²⁶⁶ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁶⁷ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

²⁶⁸ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

²⁶⁹ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

darkness along with their movement away from the home. Child DS affirmed this observation and spoke of thoughts of suicide and a heart heavy with despair.²⁷⁰

The second theme that emerged from the data presented by the adult children is that abandonment characterized by loneliness can haunt the soul of the rebel. One striking comment made by BD highlights the pain associated with this sense: “My parents would go to tournaments with my brothers, and I was left out.”²⁷¹ Abandoned and alone, some respondents sought pleasure from many sources, including premarital sex.

The last theme that arose from this interview data is indifference toward God by the rebellious child. Although four adult children indicated that they had a personal relationship with God, and three said that they saw God as judge, such assertions were not strong enough to keep them from willful disobedience. A comment from child DS captures the heart of this attitude of indifference: “I viewed God as something I tried to fit into my life.”²⁷²

First Primary Research Question:

What might encourage rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?

After stimulating thoughts and emotions, parents and the adult children were asked questions in order to obtain data related to what might contribute to youth rebellion. I begin with the input from the parents.

The first question dealt with how the youth outside and within the church influenced their sons or daughters. Two parent sets did not have answers. Four respondents pointed to a strong influence from youth outside the family church. For example, EW noted regarding her son: “He didn’t go to church. He got worse when he

²⁷⁰ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

²⁷¹ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁷² Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

left high school. In high school, he was fine at church. His friends at work took him away. He saw freedom, and then he tried a lot of things. I don't know if it was peer pressure, but his friends were different than he had at high school."²⁷³ Two parents added that their church youth groups served to drive their kids away because of no age matches,²⁷⁴ and that kids from the community appeared more accepting.²⁷⁵

Next, I asked each parent set to consider what elements of their child's rebellion might have come from the culture. Five parent sets answered the question. Three out of five said that there was no or little influence from the surrounding culture. Two participants, however, disagreed with these parents. Parent AH expressed such influence by relating the sad story of a teacher who did 'bad things' with his daughter: "We did not know about it until years later. She didn't share it because she was afraid."²⁷⁶ Another parent said: "Probably all his attitude came from the influence of the culture. Especially the need to be accepted... The culture says: 'If it feels good, do it'... I wanted him to be friends with kids in the church. But they weren't his friends. The culture dragged him to fit in with the kids from the culture."²⁷⁷

In an effort to verify previous answers and encourage more thought on rebellion, the participants were asked to give three main reasons for their child's departure. Five out of six parent sets were able to answer the question. From this data, three main categories emerged: peer pressure, personality issues, and transitions (such as high school to work or college). Each of these categories was supported by at least two of the participants. On

²⁷³ Parent EW, interview by author, 30 October 2007, St. Paul, MN: phone interview, tape recording, author's possession, Brook Park, MN.

²⁷⁴ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁷⁵ Parent CW, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

²⁷⁶ Parent AH, interview by author, 7 August 2007, Denver, CO: phone interview, tape recording, author's possession, Brook Park, MN.

²⁷⁷ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

the issue of peer pressure, parents AW and EW remarked briefly on the power of peer pressure. AW added a unique dimension by pointing out that her daughter had “some friends who were Christians, yet they did things together that weren’t good.”²⁷⁸

Regarding personality issues, parents AH, DH, and BW made remarks that focused on hurts. For example, BW indicated that her daughter may have been grieving. She said: “Her sister died soon after birth. There were times when she wished that she had a sister. She had a sense of loss in her life. She lost a good friend who moved away. Hurt was there.”²⁷⁹ Lastly, transitions received attention from parents EW and FH, who commented that his son’s rebellion got worse when he “went off to college and was living with people who played guitar and drank beer.”²⁸⁰

Now, I will present the responses by the adult children to questions related to the first primary research question. The first interview question asked about early struggles, their origins, and the role these struggles played in the subsequent conflicts with family and church. Each participant answered the question with passion. Five respondents addressed serious issues with their parents. One adult child, AD, afforded this unique comment:

I think the main thing was that I did not know that I was ADD back then. I learned very quickly. My sister taught me many things. In first grade, my teacher was a rules person, and I was clear off the board. I was constantly in trouble because it was so boring to me. Second grade was much better. My teachers were either my friends (let me get away with murder) or my sworn enemies. The kids were never as important, it was always the adults. Part of that was being around so many adults at church...Boys were the most important thing. From first grade, I would walk out the door and there would be four boys hiding around the bush waiting to walk me to school, so my mom and dad didn’t see. In some ways, not a bad thing. But I think a symbol of what was to come. And I was

²⁷⁸ Parent AW, interview by author, 7 August 2007, Denver, CO: phone interview, tape recording, author’s possession, Brook Park, MN.

²⁷⁹ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁸⁰ Parent FH, interviewed by author, 5 August 2007.

able to keep my parents on one side and my school on the other. I was able to manipulate adults pretty easily, although not in a vicious way. I just could do it! So, that was a struggle all the way through...I divided my life between what was at school and what was at home. Very rarely did I let my parents know what was going on at school. It was easy to divide. That was the beginning of the two worlds.²⁸¹

The other participants gave responses that focused upon more common struggles between the parent and child. BD noted: "I have two brothers who are straight 'A' students. My grades in high school went down because of drinking with my friends. I think that I was angry because of trying to live like my brothers. I wanted to play sports and my parents took my brothers to their events, and I didn't get that attention. I was jealous."²⁸² Adult child CS asserted:

The Baptist Church was always set apart from other people. If you went, then you were teased because you were a "do's and don'ts" church. You were ashamed if you went to the Baptist Church because you wouldn't be able to fit in. I couldn't go where other kids got to go. I couldn't stay at a person's house because the parents drank or they smoked or they danced. Trust and legalism were huge issues for me. Dancing was out. I was not allowed to go to dances. I asked: Why couldn't I go? It was never explained to me why it was wrong to go...I needed to know why I couldn't go. "If this is Christianity, then I do not want a part of it," I thought.²⁸³

DS noted: "In junior high, I struggled with finding who I was. I tried to be what people wanted me to be...I wasn't very open and not receptive to parental guidance that was given to me. It was hard for them to get me to open up."²⁸⁴ ES stated: "I had a lot of struggles around that time. I had typical teen stuff when you don't agree with your parents. I wanted to go and hang out with my friends. I just wanted to be free."²⁸⁵ After

²⁸¹ Child AD, interviewed by author, 4 August 2007.

²⁸² Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁸³ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

²⁸⁴ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

²⁸⁵ Child ES, interview by author, 30 October 2007, St. Paul, MN: phone interview, tape recording, author's possession, Brook Park, MN.

considering his home life, child FS simply declared: “I saw our religion as hypocritical!”²⁸⁶

The next question addressed the matter of rebellion and the influence of culture. Three adult children saw little or no input from the surrounding culture. The other participants observed influence and commented. AD spoke of her attraction to the cause of women’s liberation. She said: “I remember studying mother as a servant. Then mom got a job and became her own person. I pushed women to step out, and women in the church did not get it! Many did not wear make-up or jewelry.”²⁸⁷ DS stated: “The culture provided excitement. I remember in elementary school seeing people on TV as being excited. I didn’t see excitement in the lives of the people of faith.”²⁸⁸ Child FS saw many inputs from the culture. For example, he said: “My parents didn’t want us listening to secular music. So I had all the Christian rock music. But I would borrow from the neighbors’ AC/DC music. That music was lust with a beat, and I think that affected the way I looked at women and sexuality...Our family had the TV on all the time. It always had a mind-numbing affect.”²⁸⁹

Another question, aimed at discovering what might contribute to rebellion, dealt with the extent that choices may have carried the adult child away from family, church, and faith. All of the participants gave answers, and all of them spoke without hesitation of personal choices that ranged from harmful (including children CS, DS, ES, and FS) to dangerous (involving children AD and BD). A dangerous example came from AD, who spoke of going to a large city with a teenage girlfriend in order to have fun. During their

²⁸⁶ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

²⁸⁷ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

²⁸⁸ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

²⁸⁹ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

time there, they met a group of young men. She states: "We drank a lot, and I got sick. I had to stay in bed in my room. An older guy was lying next to me. These guys were porn actors. Eventually, I called my dad, and he came to get me. He drove me home. I was terrified that dad would say something as to why I was sick. This situation could have been huge. These guys could have killed us!"²⁹⁰ As to a harmful example, child CS, in speaking of his life in the navy, noted: "I found love in drinking, friends, and women...Then, my best friend died in a car crash. Bob, who stayed out of the navy, hit a tractor going eighty miles an hour. My parents did not tell me...I met my wife when I got back from the navy. She was a Roman Catholic, and her parents were not Christians. Then the bottom came out of my life. I drank a lot and smoked pot. I got married, and we had two girls and one boy...I had to teach my kids that God is real and that Jesus died for them. Then, I would go back to my other life."²⁹¹

Peer pressure and the importance of friendships was the focus of the next question that each participant faced. Four out of six adult children indicated that peer pressure was a significant issue in their lives. For instance, BD simply stated that "peers took me out of church and into the party scene."²⁹² DS described peer pressure in this manner: "I would hold out for a while, but once it took me from my friends, then I would give in. A good example would be my tenth grade year. Most of my friends started drinking and partying, although I held out for about a year. I didn't have the confidence to seek another group of friends."²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

²⁹¹ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

²⁹² Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

²⁹³ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

As to the matter of friends and importance, four out of six adult children commented. DS called the relationships with his friends very important. He noted: "To a degree, every person needs friends. So, in a sense, my friends were very important. Yet, I was able to deal with a lack of relationships...My friends were an eight on a scale from one to ten. I lived a different life at home than with my friends to the extreme."²⁹⁴ The others, BD, CS, and FS, added to this comment by referring to their friends as a kind of family. For example, FS declared: "My friends were pretty important. Probably pretty close to a family."²⁹⁵

The last question, presented to the participants on the matter of potential causes, simply asked for the top three reasons for his or her rebellion (if possible). All of the adult children gave answers. Two of the respondents, AD and FS, brought up hypocrisy as the main reason for their departure from the faith. Child AD said: We [the church] need to show each other our scars. We are not all fine!"²⁹⁶ Adult child FS noted, in the context of his home church, that he was bothered by "people not being real."²⁹⁷ He pointed out that "people still act a certain way at church and another in other spheres."²⁹⁸ BD and CS referred briefly to a sense of abandonment or distance between them and their parents. CS and FS spoke of legalism as a major problem. For example, FS asserted that he was irritated by "people putting false standards in place [that] are not biblical."²⁹⁹ Peer pressure was mentioned by BD, CS, and ES. CS said: "I wanted to be popular. My sister had epilepsy and had seizures at school and people would tease her. I stood up to

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

²⁹⁶ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

²⁹⁷ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

the teasing for her and got into fights. I wondered why it was happening. Why is my sister getting in my way as a popularity seeker? Why couldn't she go to another school?"³⁰⁰ Three respondents, CS, DS, and FS, pointed to a self-centered worldview as a big contributor to rebellion. DS declared: "I wanted to have fun. Christians, to me, did not have excitement...I wanted to live my own plan. I had to disconnect myself if I was to drink, party, and sleep around."³⁰¹ FS said, with emphasis: "It is hard to reject the idea that life is not about me!"³⁰²

At this point, certain themes that surfaced from the data related to encouragements to rebellion will be discussed. The first is the power of peer pressure. Both parents and their adult children strongly affirmed the power of this contributor over teens. For instance, EW noted that her son's friends "took him away"³⁰³ from church. FS referred to his friends as "pretty close to a family."³⁰⁴ This family environment was so strong that it seemed to create two separate worlds for respondents AD, DS, and CS.

The second theme involves parenting issues. Five adult children thought that their parents contributed to their rebellion by engaging in legalism, favoring other children, hypocrisy, and abandonment (a sense of distance between child and parent). For instance, BD noted: "I wanted to play sports and my parents took my brothers to their events and I didn't get that attention. I was jealous."³⁰⁵

The third theme pointed to culture in general as a contributor to rebellion. Both the parents and the adult children affirmed this theme, although the children were slightly

³⁰⁰ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

³⁰¹ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³⁰² Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

³⁰³ Parent EW, interview by author, 30 October 2007.

³⁰⁴ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

³⁰⁵ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

stronger than the parents on this matter. The respondents agreed that the culture does exert great pressure on young lives. For example, parent DH observed, regarding his son, that “the culture dragged him to fit in with the kids from the culture.”³⁰⁶ Also, child FS pointed out that television had a “mind-numbing affect”³⁰⁷ upon him.

Another theme involves a self-centered worldview by the rebel. Several adult children mentioned this attitude. FS noted: “It is hard to reject the idea that life is not about me!”³⁰⁸ In addition, all six child respondents gave examples of the pursuit of personal pleasure through choices that ranged from harmful to dangerous. For instance, child AD spoke of getting drunk and waking up next to a strange man.³⁰⁹

The last theme that arose from the data relating to contributions to rebellion involves personality issues. Three parents noted that their children were carrying hurts such as grief. For example, BW observed that her daughter “demonstrated a sense of loss in her life.”³¹⁰ Two parents indicated that their children struggled greatly when they went off to college. In addition, adult child DS wrestled with his identity: “In junior high, I struggled with finding who I was.”³¹¹

Second Primary Research Question:

What might check rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?

After considering what might contribute to rebellion, parents and the adult children were asked to consider what might discourage rebellion. I begin with the answers given by the parents.

³⁰⁶ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³⁰⁷ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

³¹⁰ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³¹¹ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

First of all, the parents were asked to recall what they were saying to their children during the time of rebellion and what they were doing to control their behavior. All of the parent sets answered the question. Three of the six spoke of many attempts to reason with their children, yet they were left with anger directed at their rebellious child. For example, DH said: "I would get very angry. I would pray that God would make us friends and that we would have a good relationship. I don't do well with teens. We were trying to stay on top of things in order to control behavior...It was hard for me to know what to say. I was confused!"³¹² Regarding her daughter, BW declared:

It was hard to reason with her. There was more and more a dependency on the drugs and alcohol. If she didn't have it, she was out of control. Even when she was drinking, she was wild. She had dependency upon the drink and her friends. We tried to talk to her and tell her that friends would not go out and drink and drive. We tried to help her make better choices.³¹³

Two of the respondents chose to challenge their children. EW, for instance, confronted her son's defiance with word pictures. That is, on one occasion, she pointed to the American flag, in order to make a point about authentic faith, and said: "No matter what, look at the flag. The flag is red, white, and blue. It is not a flag with color missing. You must have faith as a whole and not leave out one color!"³¹⁴ AH and AW spoke about attempting to involve their daughter in ministry. However, this strategy did not work. Parent AH noted: "I would take her to school and then pick her up. Later, we found out that she was not at school. It was an extra bad time."³¹⁵

The parents faced another question dealing with the role that their faith played in the struggle with their child. Five out of six participants answered and mentioned the

³¹² Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³¹³ Parent AW, interview by author, 7 August 2007.

³¹⁴ Parent EW, interview by author, 30 October 2007.

³¹⁵ Parent AH, interview by author, 7 August 2007.

necessity of prayer for the rebellious child. BW said: “We prayed a lot and trusted in the Lord for her protection and that she would come back to the faith...At one time, she was fun to be around and she attended church. I prayed for her to come back. I also prayed for her friends. None of them were believers.”³¹⁶ DH added: “I had to pray, and it was a struggle. Then I heard something, perhaps on Focus of the Family: ‘Do you bless or curse your child?’ I need to be a blessing to my child. I would catch myself being angry at him. Bless one’s child even in bad times!”³¹⁷

The respondents were also asked to consider how their home church helped them during the period of child rebellion. Five out of six participants responded to the question. Three of the five indicated that the church played a small role. For instance, BW said: “Pastor was very concerned and was praying for BD. Our church is supportive and yet not a lot of coming forth. Some churches do not know how to help. Sometimes they want us to come and ask for help. I had mentioned things to them and asked them to be praying. The church was not certain how to help out.”³¹⁸ BH was not as tactful as his wife: “I thought it was pathetic! I don’t know if I wanted them to help. At baby dedications, everybody gets up when prompted by the pastor to stand if you are willing to help in the raising of the child. Yet nobody gets up to help in times of trouble!”³¹⁹ EW remarked: “We did not talk much about it. People knew he had fallen away. But they did not talk. They prayed.”³²⁰ One respondent saw some artificial responses from his local church; however, he presented this positive note: “The church we attend is a serious church and down to earth. Our kids wanted to go to a bigger and flashier church. Yet, we

³¹⁶ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³¹⁷ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³¹⁸ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³¹⁹ Parent BH, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³²⁰ Parent EW, interview by author, 30 October 2007.

have the best people I know teaching the kids. So, I decided to stay and not go elsewhere. Staying at the church and working through the good and the bad things has been invaluable.”³²¹ Unlike the other participants, AW said that the church had a great influence through its large youth group that provided a lot of activities.

Still seeking influences that might hinder rebellion, the parents were asked to think about the most helpful thing said to them during the difficult time of rebellion. Five out of six parent sets addressed the question, and each answer was very brief. Three of the five parents, DH, EW, and FW, mentioned the importance of people being honest and supportive. For instance, DH noted:

Probably something my wife said. I like to say: ‘Get on with your life and quit whining!’ She realized that he [their son] had deficiencies. I can’t think of the most helpful thing. I guess: ‘You need to bless your child!’ This was probably the most helpful thing that was said. If I started blessing and praying for him, then it would get better.³²²

Two other respondents simply said that “our friends were supportive”³²³ and that “the pastor’s speaking to our son and wife was the best thing that could have happened.”³²⁴

One final question that was answered by some of the parent sets sought reasons for their child’s return to the faith or their best advice to parents in rebellion. BW said: “Rebellion is not something that is intended. It is a reaction to something that hurts. They probably don’t know why they are fighting. We need to think about what we are doing to them. We must show equal attention to our children. Try to figure out when they need healing.”³²⁵ BH added: “Rebellion comes when they get their freedom (like a driver’s license). They are dependent up to that point. So, it will happen at that time. Parents are

³²¹ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³²⁴ Parent CH, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

³²⁵ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

often seen as being stupid by their teens. So, go to church that has a good youth group.”³²⁶ Respondent DH gave glory to God for his son’s change:

DS called me after becoming a Christian and told me that he had become a Christian. It was a little bit of a shock. It was a humbling experience. Afterwards, I thought about it. It was very obvious to me that regardless of my shortcomings and all that happened, it was clear that man had very little to do with his conversion. God reached down and grabbed him and dragged him back from the edge.³²⁷

EW joined with the focus on sovereignty and said regarding her son: “God brought him back. He stopped drinking on his own, when God told him to stop!”³²⁸

Now, the answers that the adult children gave to queries associated with the second primary research question will be presented. The first question sought to bring out what things helped to bring them back to the faith. The emphasis was placed upon the actions of their churches and parents. All of the adult children responded. AD indicated the importance of church fellowship in her life and challenged congregations not to separate teens from adults. She then noted: “I have good friends who are in their eighties...Get the adults involved with the kids. Tell the kids your stories!”³²⁹ FS drew attention to the necessity of mature youth leaders. He observed: “Their teaching [certain youth leaders] was helpful, and they were willing to reach out and say: ‘Come and hang out with us!’”³³⁰ Two of the respondents, BD and CS, mentioned the need for parents to hold their children accountable. For instance, child BD declared: “My parents took me to

³²⁶ Parent BH, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³²⁷ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³²⁸ Parent EW, interview by author, 30 October 2007.

³²⁹ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

³³⁰ Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

jail. They gave me room, but I was still responsible for my actions. They did not pay for my minor [fine]. I had to clean roadsides.”³³¹

Also, CS and BD noted that the church should at least try to reach out to the rebel. For example, CS said: “My parents did help and provided [financially]. Nobody came to see me from the church. Once my dad asked a pastor to come, and he did. Friends from the church did stay in contact with me. They were there so I could come back when I was ready...a man from the church came to me and invited me to a study at the right time. I accepted. Pastor [current] came, and we hit it off from the start. We started doing Bible studies, and people started to come to the Lord.”³³² Two adult children, FS and DS, drew attention to people praying for them as the main reason for their return. DS noted: “My parents would always say that they were praying for me. My dad would even say that he would fast and pray. The church at home had people praying for me. One man prayed for me regularly and would call me on my birthday and say that he was praying for me!”³³³

One final question that was answered by some of the respondents involved identifying some reasons for their return and/or some advice for parents who are facing rebellion. Child BD challenged parents to treat their kids equally. She added: “Talk to kids and get trust. Be honest to kids.”³³⁴ CS gave this advice to parents: “Tell your kids that you love them and that Jesus loves them. Show them that you love them and discipline them. Be there for them and without conditions...Sit down and look at your own life and see what you have done to this person and how you have treated him. Love

³³¹ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³³² Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

³³³ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³³⁴ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

and seek forgiveness.”³³⁵ Respondent DS said that his return to the faith came by people praying for him and by way of “Christ’s love on earth through people.”³³⁶ In addition, he noted: “I had a good example in my dad and in the church. My dad befriended a trailer park man. He also set-up the ‘Walk for Life’ each year.”³³⁷ ES and AD indicated that they returned to the faith through conviction of sin. ES spoke of his youth pastor and his pastor’s sermons helping him. He then noted an important question that challenged his heart: “Is there anyway that I can glorify God with what I am doing? A key question that I considered. A person can become immune to sin going through life. If I want to glorify God, I must be aware of the question: ‘Is this glorifying to God?’”³³⁸ AD pointed to a vision that God gave her of her sinfulness. This vision was clear and showed her body “covered with open wounds and sores”³³⁹ which pointed to what she was really like.

The themes that emerged from the data related to checks to rebellion are now presented. First, affirmed by both parents and their adult children, is prayer. On this theme, the parents were stronger than the children. BW said that she and her husband “prayed a lot and trusted the Lord for her protection and that she would come back to the faith.”³⁴⁰

The second theme involves the importance of teens having good relationships with parents or mature adults. Four adult children spoke of the importance of having sound adult relationships. For example, AD indicated the need for adults to “tell the kids

³³⁵ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

³³⁶ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Child ES, interview by author, 30 October 2007.

³³⁹ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

³⁴⁰ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

your stories.”³⁴¹ In addition, BW called on parents to pay equal attention to their children and to know when to deal with hurts.³⁴²

The next theme is the positive influence of the church. Four adult children pointed to the role of the church as important, especially through fellowship, ministry involvement, youth leaders, sermons, and a general attitude of outreach to teens. For instance, CS noted: “Friends from church did stay in contact with me. They were there so I could come back when I was ready.”³⁴³ Three parents said that the church was helpful, but only in a small way. The problem, according to parent BD, was that the church “was not certain how to help out.”³⁴⁴

The last theme addresses the issue of the sovereignty of God. DH said, regarding his son, that “God reached down and grabbed him and dragged him back from the edge.”³⁴⁵ EW observed that her son was brought back by God and that he stopped drinking “when God told him to stop!”³⁴⁶ AD spoke of God impressing a picture of her sinfulness upon her heart—a picture of “open wounds and sores.”³⁴⁷

In conclusion, it is clear from the interview data and the passion demonstrated by the parents and their adult children that the issue of teen rebellion is critical and that the matter must receive more attention from the church in general and the MBC in particular. In the next chapter, the themes identified in chapter four will form the basis for what should be done.

³⁴¹ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

³⁴² Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³⁴³ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

³⁴⁴ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³⁴⁵ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³⁴⁶ Parent EW, interviewed by author, 30 October 2007.

³⁴⁷ Child AD, interviewed by author, 4 August 2007.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary of Study

The foundational question behind this study was, “Why do some Minnesota Baptist youth depart from the faith of their families?” Based upon my twenty years of experience in pastoral care and conversations with other MBC pastors, I believed that this problem of departure or rebellion was significant and that it was not getting the attention it deserved. My first goal in addressing this issue was to determine, by way of a basic biblical analysis, a broad literature review, and interviews involving certain MBC families who faced serious teen rebellion, if the foundational question was significant and necessary to consider. Secondly, I wanted to identify some of the major contributors and checks to rebellion. Finally, my desire was to produce a tool that might inform and encourage MBC pastors to bring the matter of teen rebellion to the attention of their congregations, with the intention of educating churches and helping troubled youth and stressed parents within these fellowships.

I began my research with an analysis of what the Bible says about human rebellion in general. The perspective, through which I approached the Scriptures, was rooted in the doctrines of sovereign grace. These doctrines speak of God as the absolute sovereign over the entire universe and even over the hearts of rebellious people. The biblical study covered Old and New Testament passages and sought to provide a lens through which church leaders, believing parents, and youth might better understand the nature of teen rebellion. In addition, such an understanding might serve as a reminder that rebellion is not rare and that mere human effort is not the solution to the matter.

The next step took me to books and articles, written by both secular and religious writers, in order to acquire additional insight into the foundational question. The authors included parents who have faced rebellion, psychologists, pastors, seminary professors, historians, and so on. Even though this review was not exhaustive, I believe that the findings were significant.

During the collection of data from my literature review, I began to interview six parent sets that had faced rebellion, and their six adult children who had walked away from the faith and returned within the last ten years. All of these cases were referred to me by MBC pastors who had close association with the parents and/or the adult children. In addition, most of the participants were from a variety of locations within Minnesota, as well as different social and economic backgrounds. It should also be noted that the interviews were conducted in person except for two parent sets and two adult children, and that the settings included homes, churches, and one office.

Although the interviews involved different settings and a variety of participants, the questions were similar for all the parent sets and for the adult children. In this qualitative research project, these questions came under two main headings:

1. What might contribute to rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?
2. What might check rebellion in the lives of some MBC youth?

As to the content of the questions, it should be observed that the parents were quizzed regarding the first signs of rebellion in their children, their reaction to this rebellion, the influence of peers and culture, the role of their faith during the time of struggle, the input from their home church, and the main reasons for their child's rebellion and return to the faith. With respect to the adult children, they were asked

questions relating to their dominant thoughts and emotions during the time of rebellion, their view of God at the time of departure, their early struggles, the influence of culture and peers, and the things that seemed to bring them back to the faith. In addition to such questions, both the parents and the adult children were afforded the opportunity to give other input at any time during the interviews. Lastly, all of the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and the data is presented in chapter four.

Discussion of Findings

The following findings are based upon the themes identified in chapter four, which are supported by data from the literature review. These outcomes are presented in three sections. The first presents two warning signs with respect to teen rebellion. The other two highlight certain encouragements and checks to rebellion respectively.

Before addressing the findings, it is important to consider an initial observation. That is, by way of the comparative analyses of Appendices B and C, the data from the parent and child interviews does correlate well with a number of categories determined by the literature review. Therefore, it appears reasonable to conclude that the interview data is, at least, similar to the data from the literature review and that it supports the notion that teen rebellion is a serious matter and ought to receive more and better attention from the church in general.

Warning Signs

The first finding is that withdrawal from the family, by a teen, can be a sign of rebellion. Three parents noted that their children pulled away from the family and joined with unsavory friends who encouraged such behaviors as drinking and sex. Parent BW said, regarding her daughter's withdrawal: "She didn't want to be with the family as

much. We did a lot of basketball games on Saturdays. She chose not to come.”³⁴⁸ In addition, the interview data indicated that withdrawal can be accompanied by moodiness and a dark personality.³⁴⁹ In the literature review, there is a strong emphasis on causes of and remedies for rebellion. However, there is not much attention paid to warning signs such as withdrawal.

Before proceeding to the next sign, it is important to consider a caution from the literature. That is, not all withdrawal is a sign of rebellion. There are situations where emotional pain is the central reason for pulling away from the family and church. Clark observes that beneath the surface of many adolescent lives “there is turmoil that is difficult, painful, lonely, and even harmful to our young.”³⁵⁰ Levine notes, with respect to youth from affluent homes: “It is now clear, however, that children of privilege are exhibiting unexpectedly high rates of emotional problems beginning in junior high school and accelerating throughout adolescence.”³⁵¹

The second warning sign involves the existence of two worlds in the life of a teen which might be more difficult to detect than withdrawal. Adult children AD, CS, and DS spoke of living in one world at home and a different one with their friends. For instance, DS noted: “My friends were an eight on a scale from one to ten. I lived a different life at home than with my friends to the extreme.”³⁵² A similar phenomenon was found in the literature. Chap Clark discovered that youth “find themselves forced to function out of several selves”³⁵³ and that often parents have no idea that the other lives exist.

³⁴⁸ Parent BW, interviewed by author, 31 May 2007.

³⁴⁹ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³⁵⁰ Clark, *Hurt*, 42.

³⁵¹ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 21.

³⁵² Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³⁵³ Clark, *Hurt*, 20.

MBC pastors and other church leaders should give serious consideration to educating and encouraging parents with respect to getting closer to their children and taking time to observe their lives. Being aware of withdrawal and other worlds may help to stop or limit behavior that might lead to great harm for the child and his or her family.

Encouragements to Rebellion

The third finding is that peer pressure is a significant factor in youth rebellion. Although I anticipated this outcome, I did not expect to find such strong affirmation of this factor. Four out of six adult children saw peer pressure as significant in their departure. For instance, BD noted that peers “took her out of the church and into the party scene.”³⁵⁴ DS said: “I would hold out for a while, but once it took me from my friends, then I would give in.”³⁵⁵ Parents AW, EW, and FH added their voices to these opinions. For example, FH commented on the behavior of his son and his friends: “We found out that the kids would go to the local store and buy beer and chewing tobacco. I would go looking for him and never find him.”³⁵⁶

The literature review presents a variety of opinions. However, the most prominent one is that peer pressure is a serious matter. Clark asserts that the primary concern for most teens is finding common ground with their friends.³⁵⁷ Hyde calls the influence of peers “very strong.”³⁵⁸ I believe that this finding points to the need for conference churches to encourage healthy relationships between youth and adults who prize biblical truth and common sense. Such relationships will inspire positive peer pressure and

³⁵⁴ Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³⁵⁵ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³⁵⁶ Parent FH, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

³⁵⁷ Clark, *Hurt*, 84.

³⁵⁸ Hyde, *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence*, 237.

thereby address the deep desire of youth to belong to a group. In this way, the power of negative peer pressure might be challenged in the lives of many teens.

Another finding involves the general influence of the culture upon youth. Three adult children spoke out on this issue. DS commented: “The culture provided excitement...I didn’t see excitement in the lives of the people of faith.”³⁵⁹ Two parents agreed with the youth regarding the influence of the culture. For example, DH said concerning his son and his friends: “The culture dragged him to fit in with the kids from the culture.”³⁶⁰ According to the literature, culture can have a strong influence upon youth. One of the most prominent influences is consumerism. Susan Linn reports that young people are “assaulted by advertising everywhere”³⁶¹ which encourages the attitude of a consumer.

A fifth outcome is ignorance of cultural influences upon youth which emerges from the interview data only. Three out of five parents asserted that there was little or no influence from the surrounding culture. In addition, three adult children indicated that the cultural environment had little to no impact upon their rebellion. Given the emphasis afforded by the literature on cultural impact and my own experience in church ministry of over twenty years, it was amazing to encounter this perspective with such strength.

I think that findings four and five, relating to the danger of cultural influences and the apparent ignorance of such influences, call for MBC pastors to educate their congregations on the broad and powerful impact of the world upon the church. In addition, instruction on God-honoring responses should be presented.

³⁵⁹ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³⁶⁰ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³⁶¹ Linn, *Consuming Kids*, 127.

The sixth finding, regarding encouragements to rebellion, is parenting issues. Five adult children thought their parents contributed to their rebellion through such things as parental favoritism, abandonment, legalism, and hypocrisy (poor modeling of the faith). Child FS commented on his family and faith: "I saw our religion as hypocritical."³⁶² The literature addressed parenting issues and identified most of the factors discovered through the interviews, such as abandonment, legalism, and hypocrisy. On hypocrisy, for instance, Kimmel writes: "There is a major problem in many Christian homes...It is the presence of a faith that doesn't cost much."³⁶³ Over the last twenty years of ministry, I have observed the gradual growth of what might be called low cost faith. However, to see this attitude show up in the interviews and the literature with emphasis is alarming. I believe that the time has come for MBC churches to examine ourselves before God on the issue of living sacrificially for Jesus Christ!

The next outcome is indifference toward God. Four out of six adult children said that they were Christians during their rebellion; yet, their faith had no control over their sinful behavior. In fact, their indifference toward God seemed to give them energy for more sin. Child AD declared: "I would do something even if God did not want me to do it. I was determined to carry through whatever I started."³⁶⁴ CS added: "So I rebelled...I hid my actions. God is in heaven, and I am down here. I will deal with Him later."³⁶⁵ Adult children DS and FS, who claimed no faith during their time of departure,

³⁶² Child FS, interview by author, 5 August 2007.

³⁶³ Kimmel, *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, 147.

³⁶⁴ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

³⁶⁵ Child CS, interview by author, 28 June 2007.

demonstrated similar indifference. For instance, DS said: “I thought God was a hindrance to what I wanted to do.”³⁶⁶

On this issue, the literature offers insight and a remedy. For example, Josh McDowell commented: “Our kids have been conditioned to believe that truth is not true until they choose to believe it.”³⁶⁷ Tom Bisset urged churches to encourage youth to think hard thoughts about their beliefs.³⁶⁸ Rebellion is often enhanced when indifference remains unchallenged! In an age where attraction through entertainment is high on the agenda in many youth ministries, MBC churches must be willing to risk popularity and challenge young people to think carefully about God’s Word and how it applies to life and without compromise.

The eighth finding related to encouragement of rebellion is a self-centered worldview. Three respondents mentioned this issue. DS said: “I wanted to have fun. Christians, to me, did not have excitement...I wanted to live my own plan.”³⁶⁹ On this matter, David Wells points out that our culture exalts the self and that the worship of God has been replaced with the worship of self.³⁷⁰ Related to the worship of self is the relentless pursuit of pleasure. Four out of six adult children were willing to engage in dangerous behavior in order to acquire pleasure. AD, for instance, went to a large city with a girlfriend in order to have fun. She declared: “We drank a lot and I got sick. I had to stay in bed in my room. An older guy was lying next to me. These guys were porn actors.”³⁷¹ Seel comments on such behavior: “Pleasure is the lifestyle promoted by

³⁶⁶ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³⁶⁷ McDowell and Hostetler, *Beyond Belief to Convictions*, 12.

³⁶⁸ Bisset, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, 49.

³⁶⁹ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³⁷⁰ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 161.

³⁷¹ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

Hollywood, the epicenter of youth culture.”³⁷² This challenge of self-centeredness in concert with pleasure seeking should encourage churches to involve youth in more service-oriented events. It is time to call our teens to think more about other people than themselves.

The last finding is personality issues. Three parents observed grief in the lives of their children. BW commented on her daughter’s apparent grief over the loss of a friend³⁷³ and over the death of her sister soon after she was born.³⁷⁴ Two adult children spoke of loneliness which they tried to control through pleasure. For instance, DS noted: “I was trying to find or do something to make me happy or fulfilled.”³⁷⁵ In addition, two parents observed change in the behavior of their children when they went off to college. Furthermore, child AD noted that she had ADD (attention deficit disorder) as a young girl and did not know it.³⁷⁶ The literature does deal with related topics such as idea instability and teen depression. However, the interviews have drawn attention to more specific personality issues. Such information should challenge MBC pastors to educate parents and youth on personality challenges that teens might face and to provide opportunities for young people to share their hearts and minds on difficult situations.

Checks to Rebellion

The tenth finding is that prayer can help check rebellion in the life of a teen. Five of six parents and two adult children pointed to this check. DH observed: “I had to pray, and it was a struggle. Then I heard something, perhaps on Focus on the Family: ‘Do you

³⁷² Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 104.

³⁷³ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³⁷⁶ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

bless or curse your child?’ I need to be a blessing to my child.”³⁷⁷ DS added: “The church at home had people praying for me. One man prayed for me regularly and would call me on my birthday and say that he was praying for me!”³⁷⁸ From the literature review, Seel wrote: “The principal responsibility of parents is to pray for our children.”³⁷⁹ Fitzpatrick and Newheiser agree: “Although God rules sovereignly in our lives, He has appointed prayer as one means whereby we might move His hand.”³⁸⁰ The need for serious prayer for youth is something that all MBC churches must embrace. Authors like Tim Kimmel provide helpful guidelines for such prayer (see chapter two). Perhaps organizing parents and other adults who are passionate for prayer is the place to begin.

The eleventh outcome points to parental or adult support (church context) as a possible check to rebellion. The focus in this finding is upon meaningful relationships. Two adult children spoke of the need for meaningful interaction between youth and adults. AD called for churches not to separate youth from adults.³⁸¹ Two children mentioned parental support in terms of accountability and general assistance. BD said concerning her parents: “They gave me room, but I was still responsible. They did not pay for my minor [fine]. I had to clean roadsides.”³⁸² BW added, regarding the rebellious in general: “They probably don’t know why they are fighting. We need to think about what we are doing to them... Try to figure out when they need healing.”³⁸³ In the literature, the same theme is found. Chap Clark, for instance, wrote that youth “need to

³⁷⁷ Parent DH, interview by author, 10 September 2007.

³⁷⁸ Child DS, interview by author, 19 September 2007.

³⁷⁹ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 185.

³⁸⁰ Fitzpatrick and Newheiser, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices*, 186.

³⁸¹ Child AD, interview by author, 4 August 2007.

³⁸² Child BD, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

³⁸³ Parent BW, interview by author, 31 May 2007.

experience authentic, intimate relationships with adults.”³⁸⁴ Seel declared that: “...parents should encourage their children to explore a wide variety of experiences that will set the backdrop for discovering their life’s work.”³⁸⁵ As indicated earlier, churches must involve youth with godly adults in order to afford sound advice for life and basic lessons in truth. To exclude teens from the adult world of faith is a recipe for disaster.

The last finding is the direct intervention of God. Although indicated in the literature, this issue arises significantly from the interview data. Two adult children drew attention to God’s sovereign action in their lives. ES mentioned an important question that came to his heart: “Is there anything that I can glorify God with what I am doing?”³⁸⁶ Two parents pointed to God’s sovereign grace as well. Regarding her son, EW declared: “God brought him back. He stopped drinking on his own, when God told him to stop!”³⁸⁷ MBC congregations might benefit from presenting a doctrinal overview to parents and their teens like the one given in chapter two. This biblical perspective can encourage struggling parents with the truth that rebellion is not rare and that God is in control of all situations.

Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

Much more could be added to this brief study. I encountered a small sample from the MBC and a minute sample when compared to the American church in general. I have not considered the opinions of church leaders, families that have not faced serious rebellion, adult children who have not yet returned to the faith, teens who are currently in rebellion, siblings who did not rebel but were affected, or multiple rebels in one family.

³⁸⁴ Clark, *Hurt*, 171.

³⁸⁵ Seel, *Parenting without Perfection*, 123.

³⁸⁶ Child ES, interview by author, 30 October 2007.

³⁸⁷ Parent EW, interview by author, 30 October 2007.

Significant work could be done by the MBC and other denominations on this serious issue.

My first recommendation is to challenge MBC churches to use the Spotlight on Teen Rebellion material outlined in Appendix D. This material is designed for use on a weekend and consists of six sections. The first provides a biblical overview of rebellion. Section two affords two possible signs of departure. The next two parts present the findings indicated in this chapter. Section five gives two practical recommendations. The last part contains a sample sermon from the book of II Samuel. The schedule of the weekend might involve a Saturday set aside for power point presentations (sections one through five) and a sermon related to the theme of rebellion during the worship service on Sunday. Such a weekend might be used by God to educate churches and families and to stimulate communication between parents and teens in conflict.

Second, I would suggest that MBC churches consider forming care groups consisting of about five or six members in order to pray for parents and teens in crisis, learn about the issue, educate others, and attend to the needs of hurting families. On the issue of attending to hurts, each church should consider providing sound biblical training for the group before allowing counsel to go out to the hurting.

Third, I would suggest that the MBC approach Bethel Seminary, in St. Paul, Minnesota, in order to encourage the seminary leadership to include in their pastoral care curriculum a major section on youth rebellion. Based upon the data from this small study, there is a serious problem of teen rebellion in many American churches, and a dramatic need for a proper understanding of the issue. Perhaps a strong emphasis on teen rebellion

at the seminary level might produce pastors who are better equipped to educate their congregations and encourage the troubled more effectively.

Finally, I would recommend that the MBC appoint several pastors who have a heart for teen rebellion to embark on a conference-wide study to determine the depth of the problem within the MBC and what the conference might do immediately, by God's grace, to encourage a more biblical response to the matter.

Hopefully this study is only the start of a process that will lead to more understanding on the issue of teen rebellion, more care for parents and youth who are affected, and greater glory to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Parent Sets

Preliminary Questions:

- 1- When did you begin to see the first signs of a looming crisis in your child? What did these signs look like?
- 2- Consider the highest level of defiance that your child reached. Now, what did his/her behavior look like?
- 3- How did you react to the rebellion (not just the highest level)? Describe your thoughts and feelings at the time?

What might contribute to rebellion?

- 1- How did the youth within the church and outside of the church influence your son or daughter?
- 2- What elements of the rebellion seemed to come from the influence of the culture?
- 3- In your opinion, what were the three main reasons for your child's rebellion?

What might check rebellion?

- 1- During the time of the conflict, what were you saying to your child? What were you doing to control the behavior?
- 2- What role did your faith play in the struggle with your child?
- 3- How did your church help during this time?
- 4- What was the most helpful thing said to you during this difficult time?
- 5- What were the three main reasons for your child's return to the faith?

Adult Children

Preliminary Questions:

- 1- What were your dominant thoughts and emotions during your time of crisis? What were your strengths and weaknesses?
- 2- How did you view God during this time in your life? Were you a believer?
- 3- How would you describe the point at which you were farthest from God? Describe the most intense moments of conflict?

What might contribute to rebellion?

- 1- What were some of the struggles you faced in grade-school or junior high? From where did these struggles come? What role did these struggles play in your subsequent conflicts with family and church?
- 2- In what ways did the culture influence you to walk away from the faith of your family?
- 3- To what extent would you say that choices you made carried you away from your family, church, and faith?
- 4- What role did peer-pressure play in your alienation from parents, church, and God?
- 5- What were the top three reasons for your departure?

What might check rebellion?

- 1- What things did your church do that were helpful during the time of struggle? What things did your parents do that were helpful?
- 2- What were the top three reasons for your returning to the faith?

Appendix B
 Parents and Adult Children Compared with Literature Review
 Contributions to Youth Rebellion

<i>Literature Review Categories</i>	Responses from Interview Data					
	Three or more Agree		Two Agree		One Agree	
	Parents	Adult Children	Par.	Ad. Ch.	Par.	Ad. Ch.
Biblical Themes						
Rebellion Intro'd				✓		
Rebellion Denied						
Rebellion Revisited		✓				
Rebellion Encour'd						
Rebellion Faced						
Culture						
Self		✓				
No Truth		✓				
Virtual Reality						
Imaginary Aud'ce		✓				
Peers	✓	✓				
Mass Media		✓				
Consumer Press.						
Sexual Press.					✓	✓
Hurried Life						
Resilience						
All Alone		✓				
Family						
Fear						
Rules				✓		
Low Cost Faith						✓
No Faith						
Family Tension	✓	✓				
Church						
Law				✓		
Truth						
Business				✓		
Empty Welcome						
Human Devel't						
Identity	✓			✓		
Biology						

Appendix C

Checks to Rebellion

Responses from Interview Data

[illegible]

Appendix D

A Weekend Seminar

‘Spotlight on Teen Rebellion’

The following information is presented in six parts. The first part gives the biblical-theological foundation for a sound understanding of rebellion and in particular teen rebellion. Part two presents possible warning signs of rebellion. Three and four identify, from the findings in chapter five, possible contributors and checks to rebellion respectively. Part five provides recommendations for consideration by those participating in the seminar. The last section affords a sample sermon in outline form that might be presented during a worship service to bring a Christ-honoring conclusion to the weekend. It should also be noted that the method of presentation, for parts one through five, is assumed to be by power point; therefore, this information is given in a slide format.

Part 1: Biblical-Theological Content

Slide 1: Biblical Theological Content

- 1- Rebellion Introduced (Romans 5:18-19 and Ephesians 2:1-2)
- 2- Rebellion Denied (Romans 3:21-23 and 28)
- 3- Rebellion Revisited (1 John 1:8-9 and Romans 7:21-23)
- 4- Rebellion Encouraged (Ephesians 6:1-4 and 1 Samuel 2:29)
- 5- Rebellion Faced (James 1:5 and 2 Corinthians 13:5)

Part 2: Possible Warning Signs of Rebellion

Slide 2: Warning Signs

- 1- Withdrawal from Family
- 2- Two Worlds

Part 3: Possible Contributors to Rebellion

Slide 3: Contributors to Rebellion

- 1- Peer Pressure
- 2- Culture in General
- 3- Ignorance
- 4- Parenting Issues
- 5- Peers as Family
- 6- Indifference toward God
- 7- Self-Centered Worldview
- 8- Personality Issues

Part 4: Possible Checks to Rebellion

Slide 4: Checks to Rebellion

- 1- Prayer
- 2- Adult Support
- 3- Intervention by God

Part 5: Recommendations

Slide 5: Recommendations

- 1- Develop a care group to (PLEA):
 - a- Pray (for parents and adults in crisis)
 - a- Learn (about the issue)
 - b- Educate (church attendees on rebellion)
 - c- Attend (to the needs of struggling parents and teens)

Handout Only:

- 2- Make available the following works (at least) for the group and other interested people.

Fitzpatrick, Elyse, Jim Newheiser, and Laura Hendrickson. *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices*. Eugene: Harvest House Publications, 2005.

Here is a work that points parents to such important topics as God's sovereignty, a child's responsibility, and depravity. It also reminds parents that growth can occur in times of struggle when there is trust in Christ. This biblical and encouraging book provides foundational concepts for parents facing rebellion.

*Hersch, Patricia. *A Tribe Apart*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1999.

Hersch gives parents a glimpse into the lives of many American teens. The main lesson is that a large number of youth are separated from adults and are alone. This aloneness makes them a tribe apart.

*Hine, Thomas. *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2000.

Hine's book challenges the concept of teenager. His view is that this concept was an invention of the machine age. Such a position is helpful in challenging the popular notion that youth are to be considered a distinct group.

Kimmel, Tim. *Why Christian Kids Rebel*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004.

This book does not address the necessity of change in the child. Instead, it calls for change in the parent. That is, it calls the parent to authentic faith. Self-examination is a must for parents who want to be taken seriously by their teens.

*Levine, Madeline. *The Price of Privilege*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2006.

Levine bursts the notion that somehow children of advantage are less likely to be unhappy. This work can shock parents into seeing that the pursuit of 'more things' is simply not a solution to the problem of rebellion.

Miller, C. John and Barbara Miller Juliani. *Come Back, Barbara*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1998.

I have recommended this book to many people in the midst of rebellion because of its strong biblical foundation and insightful recommendations to parents. The main message is to confront the conscience of the rebel.

Smith, Christian, with Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Here is a book that is full of data calling churches to give youth more Bible and less entertainment. Serious pastors will find this work to be very helpful in their efforts to reform their youth ministries.

*These books are written from a secular perspective.

Part 6: Outline of Sermon on 2 Samuel 13:23-39

Title: "Longing for Absalom"

Introduction

- A. Teen rebellion is a serious issue facing the church.
 - 1. Tim Kimmel writes: "Nearly 90 percent of evangelical children leave the church after high school-and many never return."
 - 2. The rebellious heart is a part of all humanity. Yet, in the west, rebellion seems to be most obvious in the lives of youth. Many believing parents are caught off guard and wonder what is going on when a once compliant child goes into a pattern of contrary behavior.
- B. Where can we find help as a congregation to begin to address this difficult issue?
 - 1. In 2 Samuel 13:23-39, Absalom's rebellion provides for the people of God a picture of what the face of rebellion looks like among God's people.
 - 2. To learn and apply these truths, by the power of God, may make our church a place where teen rebellion is handled well.
 - 3. Our question: What are some of the qualities of a rebellious heart?

Body

- I. "A Rebellious Heart Is Opposed to God" (verses 23-29)
 - A. Absalom through his sin is opposed to God.
 - 1. Absalom has deceived his father David.
 - 2. He has murdered his brother.
 - 3. He has abused his power, as a member of the royal family.
 - B. Effective parents do not reduce the size of their child's sin.
 - 1. Rebellion among the people of God, and in particular among our teens, must be called sin (note 1 Samuel 15:23 and David's inactivity against sin in this context).
 - C. Application: Pray for mothers and fathers within our church to lovingly and carefully show how wrong behavior (sexual activity, alcohol, drugs, and so on) is sin and done in opposition to God.
- II. "A Rebellious Heart Is a Source of Great Pain" (verses 30-39)
 - A. The sin of Absalom brought great pain to David and others.
 - 1. David and his sons weep for Amnon.
 - 2. David longs for Absalom.
 - B. When rebellion hits home, often families retreat out of shame and guilt.
 - 1. Families who have done well in crisis are those who are prayed for and listened to.

- C. Application: Pray for those in our midst who are struggling with teen rebellion. Also, may we be willing to learn more about the nature of rebellion.

Summary

The rebellious heart has at least two qualities. The rebellious heart is opposed to God and is a source of great pain for many.

Conclusion

Here are two things to consider as we think about parenting and rebellion.

- A. Rebellion is a struggle for all believers. Note Romans 7:21-23.
- B. Do not trust in our own strength to accomplish the task of parenting. Trust in Jesus who gives us strength to do so! Note Romans 7:24-25.

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Parent EW. Interviewed by author, 30 October 2007, St. Paul, MN. Tape recording. Author's possession, Brook Park, MN.

Parent FH. Interviewed by author, 5 August 2007, Brook Park, MN. Tape recording. Author's possession, Brook Park, MN.

Parent FW. Interviewed by author, 5 August 2007, Brook Park, MN. Tape recording. Author's possession, Brook Park, MN.

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