

1-1-2002

Development Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development, Peter C. Scales and Nancy Leffert

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Recommended Citation

Daniel, Eleanor A. (2002) "Development Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development, Peter C. Scales and Nancy Leffert," *Leaven*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 11.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol10/iss1/11>

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Book Reviews

MARKUS H. McDOWELL AND ELEANOR DANIEL, EDITORS

The Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry

By Doug Fields

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998. 395 pages.

The author of *The Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, Doug Fields, is the youth minister at Saddleback Community Church in Southern California, a model church for many seeking to grow a megachurch. Fields is an experienced youth minister of more than twenty years and also is an instructor for Youth Specialties. His experience lends credibility to the material presented in his book.

The book is an obvious play off the title *The Purpose-Driven Church* written by his pastor, Rick Warren. But that in no way detracts from the value of the book.

Fields contends that youth ministry must be built on nine components—the power of God, purpose, the potential audience, programs, process, planned values, parents, participating leaders, and perseverance. The nine components form the outline for the book. Each is developed with one or more chapters.

The book contains many useful anecdotes set off from the main text. For example, he says, “Copying someone else’s program always led to failure,” “I was spending all my time doing the work of God without being a person of God,” and “God doesn’t need a program in order to work. He doesn’t even need me.” Each chapter closes with a section entitled “Making It Personal,” followed by questions for discussion.

Fields insists that effective, biblical youth programs must be driven by five external purposes—evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry—and that these be balanced in any congregation. For many youth workers, this section alone makes the book worth reading.

Field’s analysis of audience is also helpful. Building on the paradigm in *The Purpose Drive Church*, he points out that in any youth ministry there are five different groups. The community consists of those who could be reached, but are not a part of the ministry. The crowd is made up of those who are involved in the program, but with little commitment beyond attendance one hour a week. The congregation is made up of those who are involved in fellowship activities, more involved than the crowd, but less involved than the next two groups. The committed are those who are serious about discipleship and are growing in their relationship with God. The core consists of those involved in ministry. The groups described proceed from the largest numbers to the smallest.

Programming must be carefully selected to reach those for whom a particular program is intended. In Fields’ opinion, every church should program to reach each group.

The chief limitation of the book is that it assumes that youth programming is somehow outside the community of faith. Beyond his chapters on the parental component of youth ministry, he spends little or no time describing how young people are a part of the entire community of faith and how to accomplish good intergenerational communication by which the faith can be communicated from one generation to another.

Overall, however, I recommend this book as a good read with helpful resources for churches in search of a biblical paradigm for youth ministry.

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Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development

By Peter C. Scales and Nancy Leffert

Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999. 282 pages.

In the forward to *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development*, the writers explain,

It is not news that the youth of America face challenges to their health and positive development that are unique for this century. . . . Many people act as if there is little that can be done to address the problems. . . . The news is not that youth have problems, nor that the problems can be addressed by prevention programs, albeit with often less-than-desired or unsustainable effects. Rather, Scales and Leffert present us with a different conception of American youth and their development, one that merges an understanding of the basic processes involved in adaptive (i.e., positive, healthy) development with a clear action agenda, with “applications” involving community-based strategies and the engagement of public policy. (x)

The book is a compendium of research about adolescent development organized in a way to demonstrate the Search Institute’s determination of the external and internal assets that allow healthy development of teenagers. It begins with an introduction followed by two major parts: four chapters dealing with research related to the external assets and four chapters relating to the internal assets. The work concludes with a postscript entitled “Lesson from the Research.” Each of the 8 main chapters is filled with reviews of research studies in adolescent development.

The list of research reviewed is extremely impressive. Forty pages at the end of the book present the 1200 studies examined and cited. A few of these date back to the 1970s or 1980s, if they are especially relevant; however, the bulk of the studies cited were completed in the 1990s, making this work very relevant. The book is an outstanding tool for any interested in youth ministry and youth development.

The authors conclude with their findings about the themes discovered in the literature and how those

themes relate to what the Search Institute is doing. They draw eight conclusions.

- The asset framework is a solidly supported way of communicating essential features of healthy development during adolescence.
- Some categories of assets, as well as individual assets, have a stronger research base than others. The research is particularly confirming of the power of support, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, and commitment to learning. There is limited research on the effects of the empowerment assets.
- Although it is quite comprehensive, the framework of the 40 assets does not capture everything young people need.
- The assets are interdependent.
- The asset framework raises numerous critical questions about adolescent development that remain to be addressed by researchers.
- The assets are important for all youth, but the levels and patterns of assets that work for individual youth in different contexts seem to vary—e.g., among African American youth, urban contexts, and middle school transition.
- Building developmental assets is only part of what communities need to do to ensure healthy development for all adolescents.
- Supportive and caring relationships are more fundamental than programs to the process of enhancing or building assets.

These conclusions have significant implications for community leaders, families, and churches. Additionally, they suggest that researchers need to continue to extend their research into new areas that relate to adolescents.

Though some questions are left unanswered by the book—and one can hope those will continue to be addressed in the future—we can conclude with the author:

In the final analysis, we can say with a great deal of confidence that the assets work to reduce young people’s risks and promote their well-being, but a vast uncharted territory remains to be explored to learn precisely how the assets help youth achieve those develop-

mental goals. Focusing on developmental assets clearly puts all of us on the right path—as researchers, policy makers, funders, community leaders, and those who work with youth and their families—but our journey has just begun.

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A Fragile Foundation: The State of Developmental Assets Among American Youth

By Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Nancy Leffert, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

Minneapolis: The Search Institute, 1999. 185 pages.

A Fragile Foundation contains the report of the findings of the Search Institute's extensive research into the developmental assets and deficits of adolescents in the United States. Complete with charts and statistics reporting the findings, it provides a helpful analysis of the status of adolescents in our country.

The book begins by stating:

In recent years, the United States has engaged in much collective hand-wringing about problems and challenges facing young people. One opinion poll after another shows that youth-related issues top people's lists of concerns and priorities. People consistently ask politicians and other leaders to improve education; reduce youth violence; prevent young people from using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs; or declare "war" on some other youth-related problem.

While most people agree that something has gone wrong, there is much less agreement about how to make more things go right. Yet, a growing number of experts and leaders in youth development, education, prevention, juvenile justice, public health, and other fields are calling for a new focus on building a solid foundation that can help young people cope and thrive." (v)

The Search Institute concludes that everyone plays a part in contributing to the current situation. Additionally, everyone can play a part in correcting the problems of our youth.

The report is organized into five chapters. The first provides a background about assets and the people

surveyed. Chapter 2 focuses on the experiences of young people in regard to developmental assets while chapter 3 examines the deficits. Chapter 4 then builds links between the developmental assets and deficits and risky behavior. The final chapter pulls everything together and gives suggestions for approaches to youth programming and relationships, using the information gained in the study.

The Search Institute identified 40 of what they call "assets." These are of two kinds of assets—internal and external. External assets include support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time; while internal assets consist of commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. Data was gathered from 99,462 teenagers in grades six through twelve. These teens came from 212 communities within 25 of the United States. This sample is but a part of the more than 500,000 young people of the same age in more than 600 communities who have been surveyed in the past decade. About 3 out of 5 (63%) young people have 20 or fewer of these assets in their lives; only 3 of 10 had more than 30.

This study showed the clear link between deficits and at-risk behaviors. For example, two-thirds of those with fewer than 10 assets were problem alcohol users while only one-tenth of those with 31–40 assets were. Though the percentages differed somewhat from one at-risk behavior to another, more assets always predicted a far less likelihood of at-risk behavior—alcohol abuse, drug use, tobacco use, illicit sex, etc. With every increment of 10 assets, percentages of at-risk behavior declined, usually by 10–15%.

The final chapter asks, "What is preventing us from strengthening the foundation?" The answer:

- Adult silence about boundaries, values, and expectations.
- Fragmentation of and competition among many socializing systems for teens.
- Age segregation and the general disintegration of the public from building meaningful connections with youth.
- High levels of parental absence in the lives of children.

- Isolation of people of all ages within neighborhoods.
- Overexposure to the mass media without critical examination of its messages and images.
- Barriers to healthy development such as poverty, lack of access to programs and services, and families without the skills to nurture and support their children.
- Adult fear of involvement and a sense that youth are someone else's responsibility.
- Schools, religious institutions, and other youth-serving organizations that are not equipped to be sources of support, caring, and positive challenge.

The authors insist that the problems can be overcome with a concentrated effort by all those involved in the lives of youth—parents, schools, churches, and communities.

This book is absolutely essential for every person involved with youth. Reading it and heeding it could well make the difference in our communities and churches.

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After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change

By Bruce W. Winter

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. 344 pages.

In the introduction to this fascinating multidisciplinary study, Bruce Winter explains, "The aim of this book has been to gather for the first time all relevant extant material about life in the first century in the Roman colony of Corinth from literary, non-literary, and archaeological sources. This has been done in order to understand what happened to its Christian community after Paul left Corinth, for the origin of many of the problems Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians can be traced to culturally determined responses to aspects of life in Corinth."

Readers today may be tempted to ask, "Why did Paul not deal with some or all of these problems while he was there initially?" Winter's thesis is that "Paul did not deal with many of the problems reflected in 1 Corinthians because either they had not arisen during his time in Corinth, or they had done so in a way different from that in which they were now encountering them."

In chapter 1, "The Enigma and the Cultural Setting of 1 Corinthians," Winter reviews archaeological, numismatic, epigraphic, literary, and non-literary evidence that demonstrate that the dominant cultural and social ethos that influenced the world of the Christian community in Corinth was Roman. This fact has not always been sufficiently appreciated.

As the subtitle suggests, the book falls into two major sections. Part I (chapters 2–9) focuses on the influence of secular ethics on the Corinthians. Part II (chapters 10–13) examines the social changes that influenced the Corinthian Christians after Paul left.

In chapter 2, Winter examines the nature of the teacher/disciple relationship in secular education. The zealous loyalty of pupils typically involved promoting the merits of their teacher and criticizing the deficiencies of rivals. This sheds much light on the strife and rivalry that Paul tries to counter in 1 Corinthians 1–4.

Chapter 3 sets forth how Roman criminal law generally dealt with instances of adultery and incest without leniency. Winter suggests that the Corinthian Christians may have hesitated to condemn the young man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 because they took pride in his high social status.

In chapter 4, Winter explains how Roman civil law favored those of a higher status, so that Paul was justified in calling Roman judges or juries "unjust" (6:1). Winter also suggests that rival Christian leaders in Corinth were using the civil courts to pursue petty personal grievances against their rivals, as was common among their pagan neighbors.

Chapter 5 presents evidence that some elite defended their hedonistic lifestyle on the basis of Platonic teaching on the immortality of the soul. Since physical senses were given for pleasures and were useless after death, why should anyone forego such pleasures in this life? Winter proposes that

some Corinthian Christians held similar views (evidenced by Paul's quotation, "All things are permitted") and so engaged in excessive eating and drinking and sexual immorality at dinner parties with their neighbors.

In chapter 6, Winter explains that it was men of high status who covered their heads with their togas while praying or sacrificing in pagan cults. Accordingly, men in the Corinthian church who prayed or prophesied with heads covered likely wanted to call attention to their own status. Similarly, wives who prayed or prophesied without a veil, the sign of marital status, looked like the independent, promiscuous "new wives" of the early Roman empire. Winter also suggests in this chapter that the *angeloi* in 11:10 were "messengers" sent by inquisitive outsiders to gather information about the Christians' meeting.

Chapter 7 argues that at the Lord's Supper, some Corinthians were following the dinner "etiquette" of their secular companions. The social "haves" devoured their own meal and got drunk, while the hungry low-class "have-nots" were left looking on as slaves did at private dinners.

Chapter 8 proposes that some Corinthian Christians invoked the name of Jesus in cursing their adversaries (12:3), just as they had previously invoked pagan gods.

In chapter 9, Winter suggests that the house of Stephanas, unlike others in the Corinthian church, had transformed conventional patronage by serving the needs of the saints rather than their own personal ambitions.

In chapters 10 and 11, Winter argues that the "present distress" mentioned in 7:26 is a grain shortage in the region and related social unrest. Winter suggests that some Christian married couples, taking this famine as a sign of the beginning of eschatological birth pangs, were considering sexual abstinence as a means of avoiding pregnancy during this time of crisis. The situation also prompted engaged couples to consider whether they should marry as planned.

Chapter 12 discusses the shifting of the Isthmian Games from Corinth to nearby Isthmia and the introduction of a new federal imperial cult in the region centered in Corinth. The privileged elite of Corinth

were invited to dine at banquets connected with the Isthmian games and imperial cult. Winter suggests that such dining rights were the rights claimed by the "strong" in 1 Corinthians 8.

In the final chapter, Winter suggests that Paul's instruction that the Corinthians eat whatever meat was sold in the marketplace (10:25) may indicate that kosher meat was no longer being made available there for the Jewish community, as was apparently done in major cities in the empire.

After Paul Left Corinth is not an exposition of 1 Corinthians, nor does it explore how Paul argued his response to the situation. Winter plans to write a sequel in which he will examine the role of Paul's theological background and the nature of his rhetorical arguments in responding to the problems in Corinth. Winter notes that space limitations prohibited him from interacting extensively with New Testament scholarship on 1 Corinthians.

This groundbreaking study will provide students of 1 Corinthians with many new insights and much food for thought. The book also prompts preachers and teachers in the church to reflect on the influence of secular ethics and social change on Christians today.

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