PHARAOH FELT threatened. At the rate the Hebrew slaves were multiplying, he was afraid that Egypt would be overrun with them in the next generation. So, he reacted to the situation with a new policy: “Drown all the Hebrew baby boys.” That sounds harsh to us, but he wanted to stop the next generation. And throwing all the babies into the river would do just that.

Next generations are at risk all the time. It doesn’t take something as drastic as an executive order for murder to keep the next generation from inheriting all it should from the present one. It only takes neglect. It’s a bit like the old saying about health: “Ignore it and it will go away.” If neglected, Christianity is only one generation away from extinction.

Pharaoh was not successful at eliminating the Hebrew threat. It only took the actions of one person to thwart his plan and bring about God’s will for the Hebrew people.

Moses’ mother hid him for three months after he was born. Then she made him a little boat out of a basket waterproofed with tar. She set the boat adrift at the edge of the Nile and had Moses’ sister keep her eye on it. When the Pharaoh’s daughter rescued the baby from the water, Moses’ sister offered to “get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for” her (Exodus 2:7).
Of course, she got Moses’ mother, and Pharaoh’s daughter even paid her to take care of her own son.

**Will the Church Survive to the Next Generation?**

How important that basket was to Moses’ life and to the Israelite nation! His mother recognized the danger to the next generation in Pharaoh’s decree, and she constructed a waterproof haven to protect Moses and ensure the future.

As Christians, we are faced with a question similar to Moses’ mother’s dilemma: Will the Church survive to the next generation? Though no one has issued a decree to drown all Christians, there are trends that are increasingly alarming.

For example, church attendance is declining. According to a recent study done by a major university, church attendance in the United States went from 60 percent in 1981 to 55 percent in 1998. And that was based on respondents saying they went to church at least once a month!

The question is: How can we build a “basket” that will be a safe haven for the next generation and ensure that the Christian faith will be alive and well in the future? That’s what we want to examine from several different angles in this book. We want to hear the plaintive cry of our children, “You’re losing us,” and do something constructive about it.

**The Perils in Our Culture**

What perils are in the culture surrounding Christianity that will affect the present generation as well as the next one? What factors exist that, if left unchallenged, might spell the end of Christianity in the next decade?

Two realities in society have a potential deadly effect on the next generation. Each has a spiritual problem at its root, and both can impact our children.

Physical dangers. Our culture seems to be more violent than it used to be. A rash of school shootings has been in the news in the past few years. Some of those shootings have even occurred in churches. Youth no longer settle differences of opinion with
words or fists; now they use deadly weapons, like knives and guns. An FBI report for 92 selected cities in the United States reported 5,976 murders in 1999. We wonder, how many of those were children fighting other children?

Suicide among 15- to 24-year-olds is also an alarming display of violence. “About every two hours a young person in the United States between the ages of 15 and 24 dies of suicide. . . . Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for college students (after accidents), and the third-leading cause of death (after accidents and homicides) for all those 15-24.”

Our culture seems to have a growing problem with alcohol and drug abuse as well. Alcohol-related deaths top 100,000 each year, and some experts feel the reality may be closer to six times that number. A British doctor summed up the impact in this way: “I cannot underestimate the importance of alcohol in the workload of emergency departments. We would be out of business if it was not for alcohol.”

What is missing in the lives of people today that they turn violent to express themselves and turn to alcohol and illegal drugs to try to escape their pain? What spiritual direction are they lacking? Are we, as Christians, doing all we can to make a positive impact on their lives?

Spiritual dangers. The evidence shows that there are so many choices about spirituality in the open marketplace of ideas that Christianity is losing its prominence. Our society has accepted two ideas that weaken the influence of the Church today.

First, many (if not most) people ascribe to the idea that personal preference is the final judge of what is true or good. They live by the philosophy “My viewpoint is the only thing valid for me; your view is valid for you.” Such persons do not look beyond themselves for a foundation of truth. Brought into the Church, this idea is divisive, because often the number of different opinions equals the number of persons in a room. How can we “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) if we listen only to ourselves rather than God’s truth?
The other idea of pluralism that impacts the Church today is that all roads lead equally well to God. That sounds like a pleasant statement ensuring equality and tolerance, and we want to be fair to all and tolerant of differences. Yet, Jesus said clearly, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, emphasis added).

**Inadequate or Inappropriate Responses**

When we look around at the violence that threatens the lives of our children and see the ideas that are eroding Christianity, how do we react?

Some people react with fear. They develop a bunker mentality and cut off all contact with the world outside their particular corner of the Christian Church. Such persons find a comforting directive in the words “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord” (2 Corinthians 6:17).

Some other people react with despair. They watch the news and see how bad the situation has become; then they feel overwhelmed. They give up, saying, “There’s nothing we can do.”

Another way to respond is through accommodation. This can happen in a negative way or a positive one. On the downside, we can ignore the changes, which are usually subtle and gradual, until things have changed so much that we cannot tell the difference between what we believe and what the world believes. In this way, it becomes impossible to answer the question: Does the Church shape the culture, or does the culture shape the Church?

On the upside, we can see how things are shaping up in society and find new ways to share the gospel. The content of the message never changes, but the package it’s shipped in must constantly adjust if the truth of Christianity is to be received and accepted by a confused world. Packaging the uncompromising message in ways that totally secular people can hear the truth of the gospel is effective evangelism.
What Is Our Hope and Our Goal?

Why do we want to protect our values and pass our faith on to the next generation? Because we want them to be Christians in the future. We desire that the saving power of Jesus that has been real in our lives will become a reality in theirs.

Why does this task seem so difficult? After all, isn't God in control? Doesn't the Holy Spirit lead and protect? Yes, of course. However, in the day-to-day grind of living, the secular culture seems to dominate nearly everything around us. If only 55 percent of Americans are churchgoers, and only once a month at that, secularism does indeed rule at least half of our society. And the voices of the media are so loud, it can seem as if they dominate 90 percent.

Before we throw our hands up in despair, however, let us remember Moses' story. His mother was a rebel; she went against the dominant culture to save Moses in the midst of that culture. He was reared in an Egyptian palace, taught in an Egyptian school, dressed like an Egyptian prince, and probably even walked like an Egyptian. Yet, thanks to his mother, in his heart he was a Hebrew! She instilled the values of the Hebrew faith in him that helped him understand and respond to the call from the burning bush 80 years later (see Acts 7:17-36).

What Is Our Plan?

Our task is to construct a basket and make it leakproof. We need to find ways to pass on our faith to the next generation while they are forced to swim in the shark-infested waters of the present. Moses' story is about a parent who did all she could to prepare her child to face the hostile world that would soon engulf him. That is our task as well.

The early years of a child's life are extremely important in molding values and setting priorities. Yet, all is not lost with older children. Studies show that family continues to be the major influence on children and teens. Thus, we have ads urging parents to talk to their kids about drugs. We need to continue talk-
ing to them about our Christian faith too. We can start at any age; only the methods needed to reach them may be different.

We need to pass on our faith in a myriad of ways. We can take our cues from the apostle Paul’s method: “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, emphasis added).

When our time on earth is over, when we have passed the torch to the next generation, we want to be able to say what Paul proclaimed near the end of his life: “I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Everyone Is Important

There is no way to know what is wrapped up in a child. We have no way of knowing whom God will call to a significant ministry or place of dedicated service. Yet, all children are special, and God has an important place in His kingdom for each one.

The story is told of a man who, on his way to church one day, noticed four boys loitering on the corner. He invited them to church and organized a new Sunday School class for them. Many years later, the boys scattered into adulthood.

In 1932, on the man’s birthday, he received letters from each of those four boys. One was a missionary in China. Another was the president of the Federal Reserve Bank. A third was the private secretary to President Herbert Hoover. And the fourth was President Hoover himself.

You never know what’s wrapped up in a child! That’s what can make passing on our faith so exciting.

Notes:

4. “Number of Deaths and Age-Adjusted Death Rates per 100,000 Population for Categories of Alcohol-Related (A-R) Mortality, United States and
States, 1979-1996,” <www.alcoholism.about.com/library/narmort01.htm>,
April 16, 2002.


Scripture: Exodus 1:22—2:10; John 14:6; Acts 7:17-36; 1 Corinthians 9:22; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 4:3; 2 Timothy 4:7