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Longings of a lost world



In search of opportunities for evangelistic children's or youth work. A critical analysis with the aim of finding positive approaches for evangelism!

Jesus and the woman at Jacob's well

From the outward thirst for water, a conversation develops between Jesus and the woman about the thirst for life - the longings that lie deep within her. On two different levels, so to speak, the conversation proceeds:

Jesus promises the woman living water. That was the name for spring water in those days, for flowing, fresh water as opposed to stagnant water that was drawn from cisterns. That would be nice, the woman thinks, if there were such a water that quenched thirst so that it would never come back. That would be nice if you didn't have to go all the way back every day to fetch water.

The woman recognizes her thirst

The woman recognizes her longings: the Samaritan woman moves from focusing on her bodily thirst to looking at her spiritual thirst through her encounter with Jesus, from the request, "Give me water!" to the request, "Bring your husband here!" Jesus does not stop at the surface, he addresses the deep longings of this woman. We don't know this woman's longings. Perhaps it was a desire for closeness, or for independence, or for recognition and acceptance, or for independence and dignity.

Jesus understood and took seriously the woman with her need and her wants. He knew about her deepest desires and longings. It is not wrong for us to look closely at what is troubling people today, what their deepest longings are, in order to pick them up where they are. Jesus saw the deep need of the people and was moved by it, he even shed tears. Human beings are fundamentally designed for relationship. We are created to worship and commune with God. Man has a longing for worship and fellowship with God! God placed this longing in us at the creation of man.

The problem: the "lost world"

The lost man does not believe in this God. So he cannot worship God either. This opens up a deep hole of meaninglessness inside him, which he is desperate to plug up again.

Since he doesn't believe in God, he needs other things to worship. And modern society already has a solution ready, too: self-actualization.

Since there is no longer a God in their eyes, the human ego takes over that function. "If I can't believe in anything external anymore, I'll just believe in myself." "Salvation is within myself. I just have to find it." "Do what you want, as long as it's right for you." "Be aware of your goals and do everything to achieve them!" These and similar are the battle cries of today's society. In the process, everything that gets in the way of this goal is put to one side.

- **Mobility**
  As an individual, I want to be free at all times to decide when and where I move without the help of theirs. Being mobile means being independent. "My car and me" is the motto. The modern man is the single person who lives his existence in a locked tin can. The average citizen stands alone sixty hours a year in front of a red light in traffic jams.
- **No Kids**
  I don't want kids because they could jeopardize my personal career and goals. The family is no longer a work or ministry community, but an emotional community. At the first emotional lurch, the ship of marriage tips, and separation is inevitable. Where personal happiness takes precedence over the happiness of the family as a whole, conflict is almost bound to arise.
- **True for me**
  General truths no longer exist. What is true is what is right for me at the moment and moves me forward.
- **"I want it all..."**
  Failure and patience is out. I want it all and I want it exactly when and how I want it.

Our society has long since adjusted to the extreme emphasis on the interests of the individual over the community. Individuals have all the rights and are allowed to make their own lives, and society has only a servant function. The service society is booming.

Pluralism

However, if everyone is their own god and determines their own truth, there is no longer one truth. Then we have many different truths which stand independently side by side. The fundamental conviction that different views and manifestations of life should be equally accepted as true is called pluralism.

The pluralism of life is called pluralism

Individual desires of customers determine marketing. The collective is out, long live the individual. At Levi's, I can choose from 8448 different combinations of styles, cuts and sizes of jeans and my computer is customized to my liking. Where there used to be a toothpaste on the shelf, there is now a shelf overflowing with dozens of branded products - everyone is supposed to have their own paste. The department store has become a temple of modernity. We have long become accustomed to the diversity of what department stores offer.

The downside of this diversity of supply is the compulsion to choose. Choosing is no longer just an imposed form of behavior, it has long since become a way of thinking and living. Today we make more decisions in a week than our ancestors did in their entire lives. Already after getting up I have to decide which clothes I want to wear (in former times there was only the weekday and the Sunday skirt). After that the question arises, which "muesli mixture" I will have for breakfast and what I will drink with it. What fruit do I take for a snack?

The agony of choice

When I go shopping, I have to spend more and more time looking at the produce to make the right choice. All of this takes time. This makes the merchandise more important than it used to be. It enters the center of our lives.

But the problem is not necessarily the variety of goods on offer in our department stores, but the variety of worldviews on offer and the disorientation that comes with it. What if I choose the wrong thing? By constantly choosing, we lose security - I could choose the wrong thing! So we seek safety.

Trend researchers speak of "cocooning", of the withdrawal of the ego into the cocoon, into self-created isolation. One's own four walls are considered a fortress of individuality. And if I do have to go outside, I have my Discman. So I'm alone with myself and my world everywhere, isolated by the headphones. The background of this cocoon existence is the increasing fear of the unexpected and the multicultural world, as well as the feeling of being constantly overwhelmed. We want security in this world again.

The security boom is found everywhere:

- Private surveillance services are booming
- Cars have airbags, ABS side impact protection ...
- Computers have firewalls and anti-virus programs
- Wars are fought in the name of security
- Personal surveillance using cameras
- Condoms during sex
- Nearly no front door is left unlocked overnight

We are looking for footing in this individualistic, pluralistic world. One of the fashionable illnesses of the last decades and the consequence of individualization is the "ego" loss, the so-called "borderline cases". People with this mental illness have lost their personality, live only in certain roles. These people no longer know who they actually are. The person is restless because he is in constant search of his identity. Meaning and security are in demand again. Man is looking for warmth, closeness, security, love, peace, the nest. He lights candles again, snuggles under the comforter.

Many have realized that the longings in self-fulfillment ultimately cannot be satisfied. They have realized that the fulfillment of their being is to be sought outside of themselves. But since they still do not want to believe in a God, the answer must be to love in relationship with others.

Looking for security.

We are looking for warmth and security. We want to dream again, to snuggle up in the fluffy make-believe world. Boy bands sing about the longing for authenticity, love, security and deep experience of being in their romantic ballads. Most teenagers are sensitive and mean it sincerely. They have a deep longing for warmth and friends. They are looking for real relationships.

Individualism in the group

However, individualism has prevailed here as well. Universal norms of what such a relationship might look like no longer exist. The non-, pre-marital, co-marital or post-marital ways of life are recognized in society. And here, too, the following applies: "I have to get my money's worth! Good is what satisfies me!" Deep relationships are confused with superficial sex. The trend is clearly towards sex without love, sex without consequences and without responsibility. Prostitution is socially integrated.

However, people crave more than short-term gratification. Fidelity and honesty are once again high on the agenda of most young people. Recently, there has even been talk of a new chastity among young people. People are waiting again for the man - the woman - for life. Marriage is also getting back on track, along with the family. 65% of all young people consider marriage to be the ideal way of life. People are longing for happiness and security and are tired of living without relationships. At the same time, you notice that you are always disappointed by people and that your longings are ultimately never satisfied.

So we try to plug the meaning hole in our lives with other things.

Materialism

Belief in the power of money and possessions defines our Western culture. We define ourselves by our possessions. Advertising wants us to believe that we can only experience freedom and happiness with certain products. We have become connoisseurs. We have forgotten how to do without. We no longer manage to limit ourselves. We don't want to anymore. Why should we? If you don't have enough money, you can lease or live on credit!

We have to buy paradise happiness on earth

We have to buy paradisiacal happiness on earth together, because we no longer believe in a paradise in heaven. The same is true of our addiction to experience. Modern man is under enormous time pressure not to miss anything. After all, it could be that the very experience we missed would have brought true fulfillment.

So we run from one adventure park to another. After bungee jumping to canyoning - always looking to satisfy our cravings. We have more and more free time but less and less time to live. Our desires have grown gigantically. We want everything, and we want it now. We are pressed for time because we no longer have an eternity. Everything must be achieved in this one short life, because there is no longer an afterlife. The meaning of life no longer lies in the adoption of traditions or beliefs, but in the personal experience of reality. Life becomes "experiencing". Only what I see, feel and experience is true. Our society has become an experience society.

Today, many of the pleasure-seeking experiencers realize that the risk of disappointment resonates with every experience. Experiences give only selective satisfaction.

We continue to search for meaning, stable community, and moral norms. Religion satisfies these needs and is therefore on the rise. Its form, however, is unusually new. Again, many are making up their own religion as if they were in a supermarket. Since we still do not want to believe in God, we look elsewhere for experience of salvation. From everywhere we are promised new and old fillers of meaning. Sects and radical fundamentalists offer strong castles with easy answers and are again in demand. The body cult, esotericism, Gregorian, witches, body experience (aerobics, autogenic training, Tai Chi, Yoga ...), eastern religions (The philosophy of eastern religions comes close to postmodernism. Objective truths are also denied in Hinduism and Buddism), are becoming more and more popular. Even the Christian religion is again good for the individual. But it must not make a universal claim for all. Who God is, man determines.

But this again leaves us with no universally valid standards and values. Basically, we have simply invented a religious expression of individualism. Man sooner or later realizes that this does not quench his inner thirst.

Back to Jesus ...

What deep longings did the woman at Jacob's well have? The number of men she had speaks volumes - and yet we don't know for sure. We need to listen carefully to what moves people, what their deepest desires and longings are. These longings are opportunities - they offer us points of connection.

Jesus did not stop at longings

He offers himself to the thirsty woman. To her whose longing for life cannot be satisfied, "But whosoever shall drink of the water which I shall give him shall not thirst for ever: but the water which I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

He gives her a new perspective and so she learns to reach out for the living water, from which she would not have to thirst again and again. Those who come to him then also learn that their thirst can be quenched, that they no longer need a cheaper substitute. The encounter with Jesus takes us from what we think we need to what we really need.

This is the ultimate goal of any Ameisli, Jungschar, or teen program.

This is what we live for: All children and youth in Switzerland should have the opportunity to hear the Gospel in such a way that they can make a decision for Jesus and be developed in discipleship.

We can and should meet people where they are (see also Acts 17 where Paul used a pagan altar in Athens as an opportunity to preach the gospel), whether they have a guilt problem, are burned out, deceived, or disappointed. Then we can lead the desires in a direction, as with the woman at Jacob's well, and proclaim to them the good news that someone will have their desires satisfied if they repent and turn to the Lord Jesus.

Convert

How did Jesus do this?

He addressed the woman. He broke through all social and cultural barriers (a Jew was not permitted to address a woman in public - certainly not a Samaritan woman).

- He took the woman seriously with her desires. He listened carefully and tried to understand her.
- He led the woman from her superficial longings to her basic longings. He brought the woman to awareness of her sins and addressed the sore spot in her life.
- He offers himself. He shows her the true way to the living water - Himself!
- Our children and young people are thirsty for this water - what an enormous privilege we have to be able to offer them this in Jesus. What do we make of this opportunity

Book Tips

Stephan Holthaus: *Trends 2000. the Zeitgeist and Christians*

Stephan Holthaus: *Operation Future. Being Christian in the New Millennium*

Josh McDowell et al: *Faith without Values.* (An Analysis of Christian Youth)

Youth 2002. 14th Shell Youth Study.

The Bible (Up-to-date social analysis, incl. answers)

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