

Old enough to know better

By Dean Merrill

What's going on in this messed-up world? The people who are supposed to be leading us are nothing but jerks. Everything's sliding downhill. Everybody just looks out for himself and shafts the other guy without a thought. Who would be stupid enough to bring kids into a world like this?

Do these words sound like they come from the mouth of a 22-year-old, a 42-year-old or a 62-year-old?

Most would attribute this kind of agitation to a young adult, a person without much experience who is struggling for a toehold in life. If all you have is a new diploma and a very short resume, it is normal to fall prey to worry and panic as employers turn you down, security guards look you over twice and potential girlfriends or boyfriends brush you off.

Throughout the ages, it has been the task of older and wiser heads to encourage the young, to hold them steady in moments of anxiety, to affirm their talents and to bolster their shaky knees. Every young person

needs a mom, a dad, an older friend who says, quietly, "This world isn't as berserk as it seems."

In time you will find your place and even make a valuable contribution. Don't give in to cynicism and fear. Here, let me help you."

But that is not happening often enough these days. Instead, the above complaint (with slightly different wording) is heard more frequently from the mouths of 42-year-olds and 62-year-olds. The generations that have lived long enough to have gained perspective are the ones expressing the greatest dismay and discouragement. Journalists are starting to dub them "the anxious class."

No wonder Generation X is "bummed" (to use their jargon). Much has been written about the sour mood of those born between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. They are said to be self-centered, disorganized, surly and unmotivated ("slackers"). These baby busters, of course, point to a plethora of causes for their attitude (not enough good jobs, weak parenting in their early years, parents who divorced, a polluted ecosystem, the cloud over Social Security). But we cannot deny they've picked up some of the gloom from us.

A Boston pastor to the Generation X crowd says it succinctly, "Busters aren't looking for programs providing nice experiences. Instead, they long for meaningful relationships, such as with older church members who can show them, for example, what a good marriage looks like."

Where today are the godly parents such as David, who from his

deathbed inspired his son, Solomon: "Be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires ... so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go" (1 Kings 2:2,3, NIV).

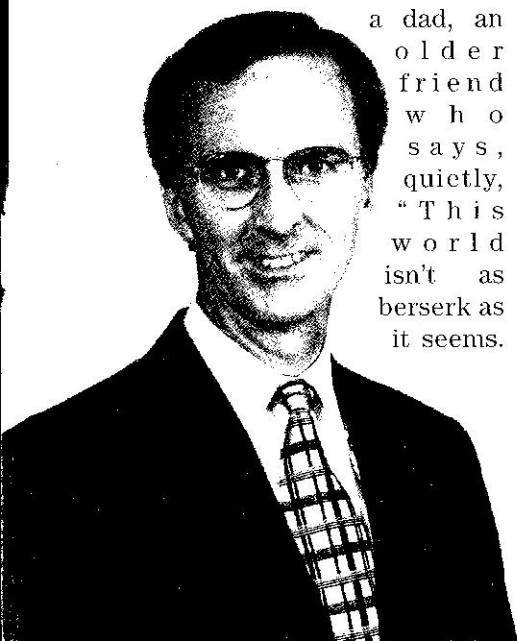
"The Lord be with you, and may you have success and build the house of the Lord your God, as he said you would. May the Lord give you discretion and understanding when he puts you in command over Israel ... Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discour-

aged" (1 Chronicles 22:11-13).

Listen to Paul's tone in 2 Timothy 1:2-4. "My dear son: ... I thank God ... as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers ... I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy." He conveys a message: You can do it, Timothy. You can advance God's kingdom in the midst of a troubled world, and I'll show you how.

True leaders focus on solution rather than blame, inspiration rather than accusation. God is still at work in the world, bringing light to the oppressed and forgiveness to the guilty. His church should be the most optimistic people around. Especially those of us who have walked with Him for decades, through good times and bad. We call ourselves evangelicals — people of the good news. The next generation is listening to hear if we ring true. ■

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Dean Merrill is a member of Living Springs Worship Centre (Assemblies of God), Colorado Springs, Colo., and is the author of *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Church* (Zondervan).