

“The High Calling of Being a Young Life Leader”

My wife reminded me that I should preface these remarks by saying there is no one incident or current situation that has preempted these comments. Rather, this is an area we really haven't talked about recently. It's vitally important and unfortunately, often not dealt with in the body of Christ.

We don't elevate ourselves as leaders, but we do need to be aware of the high calling it is to follow Christ and lead high school people.

Jesus characterized his followers in Matthew 5:1-16 – what a standard – purity of heart, passion for Him – a righteousness from within that only He can give. We recognize that these qualities are “graces” – “gifts” – as are friends, disciples, and “ministry”. Everything we have and are comes from Him.

James 3:1 provides us with a sobering reminder of the high standard of those who teach others: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that those who teach will be judged more strictly.” (NIV)

In Acts 1:8 Jesus calls us “His witnesses”, in II Cor. 5:20 we are “Christ's ambassadors” and in I Thess. 4:1 God speaks to us about how we should live: “Finally, brothers (and sisters), we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.” I Peter 2:21 says, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.”

To be called by Christ to carry His love to high school people is a high calling with the highest standards. We know we are in a spiritual battle, and Satan will plague us along with a host of temptations to distract us from living whole, healthy lives truly free in Christ. We “battle not against flesh and blood” – what a seductive world we live in!

I want to speak to three areas where we are especially vulnerable.

The first is the whole area of sexuality in ministry. The last couple years should convince us that no one is immune to sexual temptation. Some of the greatest Christian leaders in our country have fallen into immorality. How tragically the work of Christ has been diverted through great leaders who got off track morally. One of them (whose books and ministry has helped me greatly) remarked that the one area he felt he would never struggle in was sexuality. He now says that's the first step in losing the battle.

The Bible gives us so many people as examples and warnings to us of the power of sexual temptation. David, perhaps the greatest lover of God – “a man after God's own heart” moved from curiosity, to lust, to adultery, to murder. Samson, the strongest man in the world, became the weakest in the face of sexual temptation. Solomon, the wisest man in the world, died in tragedy as his relationship with the opposite sex lured him away from God into idolatry.

There is a long, long list of people far greater than any of us who have fallen into sexual immorality. One great leader said, “it's the hot water of accountability (by the body of Christ) that helps keep us clean.” We need to help each other. How do we do this? Ask...Risk...Pray...Confess...Repent.

The point of all this is to say we in Young Life leadership are especially vulnerable in this area. Ours is a ministry of intimacy with others. We listen, care and love at the deepest level in the lives of kids, other leaders and staff. We need to be aware that we bring our sexuality into every relationship – that's part of our whole person. Sex is a great counterfeit for intimacy and can

temporarily deceive us into thinking our deep needs for love and acceptance are being met. The damage to ourselves and others is obvious.

With kids we need to be aware of their perceptions and needs. Guys need to work with guys and women work with girls. Be aware of kids who hang around for rides, etc. and situations where you end up alone with a kid of the opposite sex. Refer them to another leader, be “busy” if you need to, and walk with wisdom and love. In some cases our leaders are just a few years older than kids. One price of being a leader is not pursuing relationships with the opposite sex in high school or right out of high school – it casts great doubt on why all of us are there – leads to resentment from other kids and makes it very hard to help kids with spiritual issues. There are many horror stories regarding leaders in other places, etc...

With each other we need to be aware of the way Satan can get a foothold between leaders who date, etc...if it doesn’t “work out”. I met my wife through Young Life – what greater place to meet someone who shares a call of the Lord in ministry, etc.... We just need to take care to preserve unity, remain a family and avoid hurting our teams, etc...

I’m also offering a personal opinion for our single folks after seeing so many marriages suffer the pain of one spouse trying to interest the other in spiritual things. Set a high standard for your date life. The fact that a person has a ministry says a whole lot more about their devotions to Christ than their “God talk” or church attendance. Chances are that a person who doesn’t follow Christ in “going and making disciples” before marriage won’t do that after marriage.

The second area I want to mention is where we go. As leaders, we are models and our lives speak to kids. What kind of statement do we make if we go to a particular movie, concert, or bar? Have we thought about what our lives are saying to our world? We’re called to “avoid the appearance of evil”.

The third area is really part of the whole public life thing – drinking. For kids there is a matter of obeying the law, honoring and obeying parents and the clear Biblical statements regarding drunkenness. For those of us who are older, what do we communicate drinking publicly? Are we condoning their practices? Do we know how much a person drinks or their motivations? Be “above reproach, blameless” the Bible tells us. Whatever your beliefs on this issue, a Young Life leader should not do anything to cause a high school person to stumble.

Our Lord speaks a great deal about being a “stumbling block”. I used to think that meant if you went out and got drunk, I’d be tempted to go out and get drunk. If you’ve been unfaithful to your wife, you’d cause me to do the same. This might be true for kids but not for us in most cases. I began to feel that folks who got distracted were no stumbling blocks to me – until I read Matthew 16:23.

Here after Jesus shared about his upcoming crucifixion, Peter rebuked the Lord and Jesus said, “you are a stumbling block to me...”. How could Peter be a stumbling block to Jesus who was perfect? Surely he did not cause Jesus to go out and be like him! No, he made it harder for Jesus to walk in faith – to continue trusting His father. When a follower of Christ does one of these things I’m not tempted so much to repeat their behavior, but to doubt – the power of God to keep me, the goodness of God or maybe even the reality of God in my life and world – it makes it harder for me to walk in faith.

Bottom line, I want to say I’m proud of you and your devotion to be all Christ made you to be. Continue to love Him with all your heart, and let’s help each other live the high standard we are called to.