

Young People

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Introduction.

- A. As all of us know, the world in which we live is a hostile environment for Christianity. We are constantly surrounded by people and impulses that try to pull us away from God, and we see the effect of all of these things in the many Christians who struggle with their faith or even fall away. It's hard to stay faithful.
- B. If godly adults have to really work to maintain their Christian walk, in this day and age, how hard is it to be one of our young people? We know that, if anything, the environment in which they live is even more corrosive. Unlike us, our students have to deal with in-your-face Darwinism on a regular basis, and the people they interact with socially are usually not much better. I remember how corrupt the kids I went to school with were 15 years ago, and if anything, I suspect they've gotten worse in the intervening time. That's the kind of setting that would push any Christian to the limit, but simply because they haven't been around as long as we have, our young people don't have those years of Bible study and service to God to fall back on. When we consider that, is it any wonder that every year, so many of our young people are lost?
- C. This, friends, is a serious problem for the brotherhood in general and for our congregation in particular, and it's the sort of problem that our group system has been set up to address. We need to be helping our students, particularly those in junior high and in high school, because if we don't, the consequences of our inactivity may well be disastrous. Let's look, then, at some passages that define the needs of our young people.

I. Teaching.

- A. According to Scripture, one of the things that our young people most need is teaching. Nor is this just any teaching. Consider what the psalmist reveals in Psalm 119:9. Right here is one of the massive blind spots of the society around us. Our nation recognizes the importance of physical education, as evidenced by P.E. classes and all the sports that our children are involved in. It also recognizes the importance of mental education. I myself am the product of 20 years of formal schooling, which is a truly massive amount of time spent in the classroom. However, our society does not believe in moral education. In all of my years in the classroom, I never once took a class in Defeating Sin 101 or Advanced Righteous Living. The consequences of this are both profound and disastrous. Many teenagers and young adults find themselves equipped to write essays and solve math problems, but not to make wise decisions in the most important areas of their lives.
- B. We need to make sure that our young people are better prepared than that, and we need to prepare them by filling their lives with the word of God. Pop psychology won't do it, and neither will any of the philosophies of man. Only the Bible can feed the hunger of the soul. This instruction must begin at home, as godly parents seek to impart their values to their children. It continues during our assemblies, as we teach our young folks to know the Lord here. It's wonderful that we do those things, but what reason do we have to draw the line at this point? How can we possibly ever say, "I think our young people are getting all the Scriptural instruction they need"? In reality, the more Bible they get, the better, and there is no limit to the truth of that statement.
- C. If we don't, if our children emerge into the world lacking wisdom rather than possessing it, they are going to be easy prey for Satan and his followers. Consider the thumbnail sketch that Solomon presents in Proverbs 7:4-8. This passage was written more than 3000 years ago, but it still rings just as true today. Everybody knows that sooner or later, a kid who doesn't have any sense is going to get himself into trouble. A lot of us, myself included, can testify to that from firsthand experience. Teenagers are renowned for doing dumb stuff.
- D. To some extent, that goes with the territory. Sometimes, there are life lessons that we just have to learn through experience. I did a whole bunch of things fifteen years back that I would never, ever do today, and the reason why is because I already went through it. What strong moral teaching does, though, is protect young people from the worst of their inexperience. There were a number of things back in the day that I said "No" to, not because I didn't want to do them, not because I fully understood the bad consequences of saying "Yes," but because I had been taught my whole life that they were wrong, so I rejected them almost without thinking. And boy, am I ever glad I did! We need to give our young folks the same advantages. We need to teach them so repeatedly and thoroughly that making the right decision is hardwired into their minds. That way, the wisdom of the word of God will keep them safe in an increasingly dangerous world.
- E. However, the results of our teaching don't just affect our students as individuals. Instead, the wisdom that we impart now will determine the future of the entire church. Look at the sad story related in Judges 2:10-11. The men and women of Joshua's generation were great. They were the ones who conquered the land of Canaan for God. However, they failed to pass on their knowledge to their children. As a result, they raised a generation that did not know the Lord, and that generation fell away. Brethren, the same thing can happen to us. Our children are our future. They are the elders, the preachers, the Bible class teachers, and the mothers of the next generation, and we cannot allow them to be ignorant, because if they are, we will lose them.

II. Finding Good Companions.

- A. However, simple instruction in the word of God is not the only blessing that we can offer our young people. We can also help them in finding good companions. Along these lines, consider what Paul writes to the young Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22. The two halves of this verse are extremely closely related. In the first part of this, Paul urges Timothy to flee youthful lusts. Paul was warning his protégé that he was going to encounter some temptations that were so strong that the only way to handle them was not to stand and fight, but to flee.
- B. However, just as there was something that Timothy was to run away from, there was something that he was supposed to run toward. He was to seek out the company of other young people who were Christians and who were dedicated just like him to seeking the things above. Once again, friends, human nature hasn't changed any, and godly young people who want to remain godly need to have godly friends. Let's ask ourselves: of the children we have seen "raised in the church," who are the ones who are most likely to fall away? Is it the ones who have a whole bunch of tight friendships with other Christians, or is it the ones who never really had any close friends in the Lord, who were always just kind of on the edges of things? We need to learn from that, and give our children as much opportunity to make good friends as possible.
- C. Solomon reveals why this is important in Proverbs 27:17. We don't spend a whole lot of time sharpening things, so this one might not be totally clear at first glance, but here's what it's saying: It's saying that the more time we spend around godly people, the more useful we will become to God. They will sharpen us into better instruments of His will. The younger and more impressionable we are when this happens, the more intense the sharpening will be. Along these lines, I'm reminded of the group of friends that Lauren and I hung out with about five years ago. Not only were they fun to be with, but they were all dedicated Christians, and since that time, of the young men who were part of that group, four of them have gone on to be full-time preachers. I seriously doubt that I would be in this pulpit now were it not for the influence that that group of friends exerted on me at such a pivotal time in my life. Let's let our young people sharpen one another too.

III. Avoiding Evil Companions.

- A. Of course, the flip side of helping our young folks find good companions is that it helps them with avoiding evil companions. As many of us already know, Paul warns us against evil companions in 1 Corinthians 15:33. Now, this doesn't mean that every time we talk to a non-Christian, we place our soul in mortal peril, but it does mean that we need to understand the consequences of the associations we choose. As with everything else, those consequences are heightened for young people. When our young folks show their ungodly friends the example of Christ in their lives, that un-corrupts their bad morals and, in many cases, leads them to obey the gospel. However, the opposite also holds true. Just as we lift outsiders up, they drag us down, even without consciously intending to. Simply through association, we begin to share in their worldview and in their ideas of what is acceptable and what is not. That has caused many young Christians to be lost.
- B. Part of the reason why this is so is that when our best friends are non-Christians, the advice we hear is not godly. We see an example of the dangers of bad advice in 2 Chronicles 10:12-14. In context, here's what's going on. Young Rehoboam had just become king, and the people of Israel sent to him, pleading with him to reduce their taxes. Rehoboam's older advisors told him to listen to the people, but Rehoboam's young friends told him to show how macho he was and raise the taxes instead. As this verse reveals, Rehoboam listened to his friends. As a result, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel rebelled against him, and the house of David lost them forever. When our young folks listen to their ungodly friends, the results can be just as disastrous. That's why we need to give them opportunity to form healthier friendships instead.
- C. For all of these reasons, to help our students with both the teaching they need and with the companionship they need, we're launching a **YOUNG PEOPLE GROUP**, headed by Josh Collier. This one is not as formal as some of the others. Here's the way it's going to work:
 - 1. **Group leader plans one activity per quarter for junior-high students and one activity per quarter for high-school students.** This is Josh's doing, though I'm sure he'll seek help in it. These activities will be both spiritual and non-spiritual in nature. Exactly what is up to him.
 - 2. **Group members assist group leader with planning, preparation, and execution.** This might involve hosting a get-together; it might just involve buying paper plates and cups. There's not much structure here. Basically, it's just about helping Josh do whatever needs to get done.
- D. As with all the other groups, there are some **REASONS WHY I SHOULD JOIN**. They are:
 - 1. **I enjoy young-people activities.** Basically, if you're like Peter Pan and the Lost Boys and you don't want to grow up, this is the group for you. You can help out with anything from sports to video games.
 - 2. **I would rather spend a lot of time infrequently.** A lot of our groups are fifteen-minutes-a-week commitments. This one isn't like that. Basically, it'll knock out about a Saturday a quarter. If you're much better at fewer, larger commitments like this, this might be the group for you.
 - 3. **I'm concerned about the welfare of our young people.** This, of course, is the real reason to help: because you love our kids and want to do whatever you can to help them get to heaven.

Conclusion. Of course, before we can help others, we need to get our own spiritual lives squared away.