

YOUTH GROUPS NOURISH THE HEART I Timothy 4:12

INTRODUCTION:

Would it surprise you to know that churches have not always had youth groups and ministry targeted to youth? It was not until the middle of the 1800's, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution that churches began to make a particular effort to minister specifically to teenagers. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, young people between age 10 and 20 would have been found on the farm, working alongside Mom and Dad and attending church with them on Sundays.

But the Industrial Revolution changed all of that. Now young people were working in factories six days a week and hanging out on street corners on Sundays. Most were not given the chance for even a basic formal education. So churches, seeing a need, began to bring older children and teenagers into classrooms to teach them how to read the Bible.

The Sunday School Movement was one result but that was a pretty formal, structured classroom approach to Christian Education. In 1881, Dr. Francis Edward Clark began what he called "Christian Endeavor" to provide opportunity not only for Christian education but also for Christian fellowship and Christian service. Christian Endeavor meetings were a place where youth got to spend time with other people of their own age, they learned more about the Bible and they got a chance to learn to fill various roles in the church.

Youth work is nothing new for our churches. Most Christian Churches that are alive today had some sort of youth groups 20, 30, 40 and 50 or more years ago. I can say that pretty confidently because if they weren't working with youth then, they probably are not around now. Oh, the methods have changed a bit but the motive and the message remain the same. The motive is still to encourage the youth and incorporate them into the ongoing work of the church. And the message is still the gospel.

We usually think of the adults as the examples that are set for the youth. But Paul didn't look at it that way. Paul challenged the young man Timothy to set an example for the adults. Paul told him:

¹² *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young." That's great advice, Paul, but how is a young person supposed to prevent people from looking down on him just because he is young? Do you expect the youth to stand up to the adults and argue with them? If they feel like some adult is looking down on them are they supposed to punch them in the mouth?

Cuss them out? Flip them off? Of course not. That would just give the adult more to criticize. No, from the rest of what Paul told Timothy, it is apparent that his advice is, “don’t give them a chance to look down on you. Make sure you are conducting yourself in such a way that you are setting a higher standard for the adults so they look up to you instead of looking down on you.”

I. **IN SPEECH**

For 25 years, Verbal Advantage, an audio educational program, has been saying, “Fair or not, people will judge you by the words you use.” And it is true that people do make assumptions about you by the way you speak.

Young people, if you do not want people to look down on you, guard your tongue and be careful about what you say. Here’s what I mean:

- A. Tell the truth
- B. Don’t say hurtful things to or about others
- C. Don’t use the Lord’s name in vain (and that includes texting things like “OMG”)
- D. Don’t say vulgar things. (Bathroom language and bathroom humor are unbecoming a child of God.)

I’m sure you have seen the bracelets that say “W.W.J.D.” That is an abbreviation for “What Would Jesus Do?” Might I suggest that you also consider W.W.J.S.? If you cannot honestly picture Jesus saying it, you should not either.

II. **IN LIFE**

Not only are you to watch your words, you are to watch your walk. You’d best pay attention to your actions because you can be sure that others are. If you are a Christian, you wear the name of Christ. If you wear his name, your conduct will bring honor or dishonor to his name.

If you do not want adults to look down on you, live above the level of their lives. Make it your ambition to be more Christlike than they are.

In the third chapter of the epistle of James, the author wrote:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

If you want others to regard you as wise, show them your wisdom by your good life, your humble deeds and your Christlike conduct. Set the standard for the adults. Raise the bar for the rest of us.

III. **IN LOVE**

Paul also told Timothy to set an example for the rest of the believers in love. The word that Paul uses for “love” is the word agape, which means

to choose to do the best for others even if it is difficult and even when you don't feel like it. When people act like that, others notice.

This piece was posted on the website, www.LightSinger.com:

What Is Love From a Kid's Point of View

- "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love."
- "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth."
- "Love is when someone hurts you, and you get so mad, but you don't yell at them because you know it would hurt their feelings."
- "Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is okay."
- "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."
- "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well."
- "Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford."
- "Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day."
- "You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget."

You know? Those aren't too bad. Kids, there are some good examples of love out there. Look at those and then set even better examples for us to live up to.

IV. IN FAITH

I want to remind you of an example of faith that was set by a young person on April 20, 1999. The day began like any other day. Cassie Bernall had only been a Christian for a year or so, but the difference that Christ had made in her life was evident to everyone. When she and the rest of the students entered Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado, that day they had no idea what was getting ready to happen. Two of their fellow students had come to school that day intending to kill as many people as possible. When the shooting started Cassie and several others students were in the Library. It was there that Cassie was shot to death.

In the months following Cassie's death, her mother, Misty Bernall, wrote the book *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*. In this book Misty Bernall discusses her daughter's turbulent teenage life, spiritual conversion and martyrdom. According to Misty, one of the gunmen entered the Library, saw her and must have remembered that Cassie professed to be a Christian. Instead of just shooting her, as he had other students, he walked over to Cassie, put a gun to her head and

asked her if she really believed in God. Cassie said that she did and then her classmate shot her in cold blood.

This morning I wanted to remind you of Cassie's story because it is a perfect illustration of how youth can be an example for the rest of the church...an example in faith.

I pray that none of our young people will ever be put in a situation like Cassie Bernall was. But you need to know that it is just as hard if not harder to live a life of faith as it is to die for your faith. Guys, if you don't want anyone to look down on you because you are young, set an example in faith.

V. IN PURITY

And set an example in purity. This includes sexual purity. I know you have been told that everyone is having sex before marriage. You've been lied to. Everyone is not having sex before marriage.

If you are not a fan of professional basketball, you may not know the name A. C. Green. A. C. Green is a retired NBA player. Green set a record for playing in more consecutive professional basketball games than any other player in history. A. C. Green was a great example of hard work and discipline.

A. C. Green was a great example of discipline off the court, too. The NBA is not known for high morals among its players but A. C. Green had the courage and the determination to do what was right even if others around him were not.

Once one of the NBA's most eligible bachelors, A. C. Green is single no longer. He was married in Los Angeles on Saturday, April 20, 2002 to Veronique Green. "I have waited awhile for marriage to take place, but my beautiful wife has been well worth the wait," said A. C.

"A.C. is the man I have waited for my whole life," said Veronique. "To know that he has also been faithful in waiting for me is the best wedding present I could ever imagine."

When he was asked after his wedding about his life-long vow of purity until marriage. He said, "IT WAS WORTH THE WAIT."

I can assure you young people that none of you have had to face the temptations to impurity that A. C. Green faced. NBA groupies threw themselves at him and few of his peers were living pure lives. I can also assure you that if A. C. Green could live a life of sexual purity, so can you.

Even if no one you know is living a pure life, you can...and you can be an example for them.

CONCLUSION:

Have you ever seen an elephant in a circus? These huge beasts are so strong that they are used to pull railroad cars and to drag the poles into place that support the Big Top. But when they are not in use like that, they can be seen tethered by a chain attached at one end to their leg and at the other end to a stake in the ground. Any elephant could easily pull the stake from the ground and walk away. But they don't. Do you know why?

When still a baby, the elephant is tethered by a chain to a stake firmly hammered into the ground. The little elephant will try several times to get free, but it lacks the strength to do so. After a year or so, the stake and the chain are still strong enough to keep a small elephant tethered. Typically, it will continue to try unsuccessfully to get free. Before long, however, the animal realizes that the chain is too strong and so it gives up trying.

When it reaches adulthood, the elephant will still remember how, for a long time, it had wasted its energies trying to escape captivity. At this stage, the trainer can tether the elephant with a slender thread tied to a broom handle, and the elephant will make no attempt to escape to freedom.

Young people, our world has tethered you with a low self-image. We have told you that you are just the consequence of an accident that happened long ago in a slimy pond when some algae morphed into sea life and eventually crawled out onto the bank and over millions of years of random chance, became an ape and then evolved into you. You've been lied to about that. You are not the result of an accident and you did not descend from an ape. You were made in the image of God.

Because we lied to you about your origins, we gave you low expectations for your life. People have constantly put you down by saying things like, "You can't expect much out of them: they're just kids." Guys, don't be chained down by the low expectations of others. Rise above what anyone thinks of you and set an example for everyone: an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Our youth groups do not exist simply to entertain. We aim to help young people rise to the challenge of setting a higher standard for us than we have for them.

INVITATION: #602 – *"I Have Decided To Follow Jesus"*