

Advice to Young People Leaving Home

It's estimated that 80% of all young people raised in a Christian home will abandon Christianity when they leave home for university. This is a pandemic far more serious than others we have seen in recent years, though little is said (and still too little is being done) about it. The university is often blamed for that statistic, and there can be no doubt that the left-wing standards of such secular institutions do contribute enormously to the problem.

The university, however, is not the only contributing factor. Even many young people raised in Christian homes, young people who never go to university, turn their backs on the message and influence of the church when they leave home to enter the workforce. Clearly it isn't hitting the mark to say that parents must then be to blame. I'm not suggesting that parents cannot be part of the problem – sometimes they are – and even the group dynamic within the home may need to be recalibrated through biblical counselling to make it work more effectively. Nor would it be right to suggest that those same young people should never have left home when they did. Some may leave home before they are really ready to do so, that's true, and that in itself can be a recipe for disaster, but our offspring are created by God to leave home at some point as part of His plan for them, and it can seriously hinder their further development if parents try to prevent that.

Yet, regardless of these contributing factors, the major fault of our younger folk abandoning the faith when they leave home rests with those young people themselves. Let's not try to cover for them or consider them to be helpless victims. Like the rest of us, they are fully responsible for what they do. This paper isn't meant to address parents with alternative suggestions for schooling, but to alert young people to the dangers ahead of them, to encourage them to get on track before then and to stay focused. Are you young and about to leave home? Here are three things you need to know:

(1) Let's be very clear about this, that those who abandon the faith were never converted in the first place. Why, then, would we be surprised by their falling away? Should we not expect it? If you are an unbeliever, regardless of your age and circumstance, don't rely on the culture, or the moral standards of society, or your own conscience or even your Christian friends, to keep you in check, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:21). The plight

of the unregenerate soul is that, apart from the grace of God, the pull of worldly and wicked ways will always be stronger than any supposed drawing power of living a holy life. Are you an unbeliever about to leave home for the first time? You need to know that you are embarking on a very dangerous journey, and that without the Lord Jesus Christ in your life it cannot end well!

I don't mean to discourage anyone, whether the young or their parents, by drawing attention to this first point, but it should signal why we in God's covenant community of the church need to pray fervently for our young people and to give them every encouragement to commit to Christ both early in life and with everything they have to give. Something that has proved to be very beneficial to many young people, something that churches and parents alike ought to consider very seriously, especially for teens, is the Christian camp or conference. Such retreats, even for just a weekend, have often demonstrated great effectiveness in challenging younger folk to become disciples of Christ. If you, my young friend, have an opportunity to attend one or more of these, be sure you do so.

(2) One of the distinguishing marks of the present generation is immaturity; it's a distinction which is spreading and becoming increasingly apparent as time goes on, and it should be noted as another reason why our young people are turning away from Christianity. I remember when J.I. Packer said in an interview that adolescence is no longer over with the passing of the teen years but now lasts for far too many people well into their forties. He was right. A bi-product of this expanding trend of immaturity is an attitude of entitlement, an emphasis on rights over responsibilities, and the socialist notion that government should supply all our needs so that we won't have to work hard in order to get ahead or to improve our lot. Not only does this focus destroy incentive and demolish the strong work ethic of previous generations, but it leaves those so affected apathetic toward others and uninterested in planning even their own future.

But from what does such immaturity and carelessness of thought arise? It springs, in part, from an unregenerate heart. Who among unbelievers in this self-absorbed generation is not going to think that way? But it also comes from the material prosperity which we have so long enjoyed. As so many have said over the course of time, "We have had it too good for too long!" That is a fundamental fact of our present existence. We have, indeed, had it too good for too long.

The first half of the twentieth century was plagued with poverty and war; it was a time when people had to work hard and the minds of many were consumed with the bigger issues of time and eternity. For a very long time, however, we have experienced virtually nothing of those same hardships. The early years of the twenty-first century have unleashed upon us a new order of technology and all the gadgets of an easier life. This is a very different world from that of our grandparents, and we need to recognize that.

Even a cursory reading of the Old Testament makes it clear that a short period of prosperity, particularly after times of severe affliction, can make God's people thankful for what they have and eager to work, while an extended period of prosperity – when we are inclined to ignore our Creator and forget how much we need Him – will almost certainly lead to taking everything for granted, culminating in laziness and every kind of self-serving debauchery. People operating out of such a worldview don't make wise, carefully conceived decisions, nor do they give any thought to living their life for the Lord.

To everyone living such an irresponsible life, who contribute nothing to the wellbeing of society but are satisfied to be fully dependent on others, using virtue signaling as a means of easing their own conscience, let it be said that it's time to grow up and to put behind you all such childish ways. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth. Fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12).

(3) In addition to the points above, there is still one more reason why so many church-grown young people turn away from the call of God in the gospel when they leave home. They suddenly find themselves with so many new and exciting things to think about, so much so that the bigger issues of one's life and purpose can easily be cast aside, or even utterly discounted, in order to deal with what appears to be the more immediate and pressing issues of the moment. And, as a result, they never go back to those bigger issues, the real priorities of our existence, but simply allow themselves to become absorbed by this new life and its ways into which they have suddenly been catapulted. Add to that the fact that the brain is not fully developed until age 25, and that most students and apprentices have never been properly trained to think through any issues properly – only to write papers and to summarize in print what has been dictated

to them in class – it soon becomes clear why it is that, with little or no thought, they are able to turn their backs on what they have mistakenly come to perceive as the old-fashioned and now outdated practices of their parents.

Here, especially, I would like to plead with our younger folk to think very carefully about the bigger issues of life and death, of time and eternity, and only when you do will those seemingly more pressing issues of the moment come into better, more accurate perspective. Nothing, my dear young friend, is more important for you than your knowing God, which you can do only through faith in Jesus Christ, and there is no better life than to serve Him and be completely devoted to Him. If you are an unbeliever, the time to think through these things, to review the Scriptures line upon line and precept upon precept, is now. If you put it off, what makes you think that you will be more disposed to do it later? Isn't your lack of interest today an indication of an even more hardened heart tomorrow?

Consider the call of God in the gospel and what little time you have to hear it (Isaiah 55: 6,7). Consider what is promised in that call and the only alternative (John 3: 35,36). Consider what it is to be "in Christ" and the security of all those who are (Ephesians 1: 3-14. Can you name the five blessings, blessings to every believer which cannot be taken from him, mentioned in this passage?) Don't let your thinking of God be subservient to your plans for the future, but commit to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23), who works all things together for good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28), and seek His will for your life! "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3: 5,6).

Let me recommend to you the booklet, Thoughts for Young Men, by J.C. Ryle. It's also for old men and young women. In fact, I cannot think of anyone in any demographic for whom it would not be profitable. Though it was written more than a century ago, this booklet is still of great practical value today!

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