

My Advice to Christian Youth: Stay!

Haven't we all doubted? Have you ever wondered if the faith that we hold so dear is real? I don't know anybody who hasn't doubted to some degree. I would challenge you to doubt your doubts, believe in Christ, and believe your faith! Years ago I read a life changing book, Tortured for Christ. It is the true story of Richard Wurmbrand who was a pastor in the communist satellites. His precious wife, Sabina was also imprisoned in 1950. She was forced to serve as a laborer on the Danube Canal project, leaving their nine-year-old son, Mihai, alone and homeless. Wurmbrand was tortured beyond comprehension. He did not see his children for fourteen years. If anyone was caught giving the boy asylum, they stood in danger of being arrested by the communists. To tempt Mrs. Wurmbrand to deny the faith, they brought young Mihai before them and gave her an opportunity to recant and rejoin her son who had been left to beg on the street. As soon as she saw her son, she cried out, "Mihai, believe on Jesus!" and with that, they quickly snatched her away and threw her son back on the streets. But Mihai never forgot her words. Timothy Keller says, "People don't listen to you when you say, "I love you;" they need to be shown." This youngster had heard all his life, but now he saw what it cost his parents...all for the love of Jesus! In quiet and confidence, young Mihai believed. He could not doubt what he had seen. I could only hope that I have been transparent enough for those who know me to see Jesus in spite of my failings and shortcomings. Listen to the great Apostle John who said, *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."* (I John 1:1-4). The result of a life lived unto and for Jesus is joy that is full, totally maxed out! This promise can be believed! The key is full commitment.

In any profession, the "movers and shakers" are those who fully commit. I saw Rod Stewart interviewed by Piers Morgan recently. He asked this old rocker, when did he start his journey into rock-n-roll stardom? He answered, "When I first saw Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones. I said, 'I can do that.'" And he fully committed his life to it. Now at sixty-six, he was a tired old man who laughed about his sexual, alcohol and drug escapades. Then when asked by Morgan, "Do you feel guilty?" (The specific question was pointed to the neglect of a daughter who grew up without him). And then the smile evaporated, Stewart pulled his hand across his weather worn face and sadly said, "My life is filled with guilt."

Dick Cavett was recently interviewed after the death of Elizabeth Taylor. In reference to her and Richard Burton, Cavett very seriously said that these people's lives are not to be envied. He explained that they were both drunks, pointing out that they, like all who choose this lifestyle, are never truly happy. The continual quest for happiness and debauched forms of escape never satisfy. Please compare this to a life as John promised: a life where joy is full. The Apostle

Peter put it like this, "*Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*" (I Peter 1:8). I haven't seen Christ with my physical eyes, but I love Him. In spite of all the disappointments my wife and I have, we are here to confess, the joy that our Lord brings to us (by faith) is beyond description and full of glory. Borrowing the words of William Borden, I say, "No reservations, no retreats, no regrets." If you commit to the Lord with the same abandonment with which many are now committing to this God-hating world, you will find that in time, this joy will come to the surface like nothing you have ever experienced. However, it takes time of continual and constant commitment. Christ will not share His treasured life of pure joy with the casual commitment. Jesus is either Lord of all or not Lord at all. I plead with you, for your children's sake, your parent's sake and above all, for Jesus' sake, commit, commit, commit. I know this seems corny, but here is a dialogue from the final installment of the film "Back To The Future III":

Jennifer Parker: Dr. Brown, I brought this note back from the future and now it's erased. **Doc:** Of course it's erased. **Jennifer Parker:** What does that mean? **Doc:** It means your future hasn't been written yet. No one's has. Your future is whatever you make it. So make it a good one, both of you. **Marty McFly:** We will, Doc.

Although this is not correct theologically, it is a point well taken. At least, we do not know our future. We do know the outcome of those who have committed their lives to God such as Daniel and those who did not make this commitment such as Belshazzar (Daniel 5:27). Make a good future for you and the family God has given you. Our house is not as nice as Rod Stewart's, his cars are much more expensive, his fame will no doubt be known when I am dead and forgotten by this world. However, if he dies in the state that he is now in and I die in the state that I am in...I promise you my future beyond the grave is going to be "out of this world" compared with his. And not only that, I have no guilt or regrets with what and with those whom I have left behind. I can say with the apostle Paul, "*...I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*" (II Timothy 1:12). With these thoughts in mind, I am asking the youth who were reared in the faith:

1. Don't leave.

In the article from November, 2010, "The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church" (subtitled) *More than in previous generations, 20- and 30-somethings are abandoning the faith. Why?* by Drew Dyck, he begins his article with this pitiful testimony of a foundering youth, "A few years ago, shortly after college, I was in my studio apartment with a friend and fellow pastor's kid. After some small talk over dinner, he announced, "I'm not a Christian anymore. I don't know what happened. I just left it."

One problem with "just leaving it" is that you also open your life to things that will place scars on you that you may take to your grave. To list a few: (1) Pregnancies outside of marriage, which in the world without God is often solved with abortion. I shall never forget a young lady in my generation who had an abortion who woke up most every night since dreaming of the baby she never

held in her arms. (2) A lifelong struggle with substances you became addicted to. I remember my dad saying (20 years after he had given up tobacco), I could still enjoy tobacco after any good meal. (3) People that you influenced the wrong way. Many years ago, I read of a man who, as an atheist, had a teenage daughter who went his route and dying as a result of making some of the same choices of her father said, "Dad, I saw you go one way and Mom another way. Which way is the right way?" He tearfully cried, "Honey, choose Mommy's way, choose Mommy's way!" But it was too late as he held her in his arms, she breathed her last breath.

2. Doubt your doubts; believe your beliefs.

Do not be troubled because you don't get it all on this side of eternity. *"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known"* (I Corinthians 13:12). As you grow in grace, the doubts will fade and your faith will grow stronger. Remember the Christian life is growth. Like a child growing up before our eyes, we don't always notice it, because it is so gradual, but before you know it, a six-foot tall youngster is abiding in your home. Granted, he did not get that way overnight! And neither will you and I spiritually. Just stay with it. Jesus said, *"And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs..."* (Mark 4: 30-32a). Don't pull your faith up from the roots; let it grow and watch what God will make of your life!

-Pastor Pope-