

INTRODUCTION

Our church has a great tradition of having a youth Sunday in mid-August to send off the college freshmen. There are five of them this year. Can I ask those young folks to sit at the front row, please? This message is especially for them. Going to college is a milestone. Your parents and family members are so proud of you. Many uncles and aunts see you grow up in this church. Your Sunday school teachers, AWANA and youth leaders poured out their hearts to give you spiritual nurture. Be sure to thank them before you walk out of this place. College is an exciting place. There needs to be a lot of adjustments. When I first came to U.S. to study I felt like a caveman. It was the first time I ever flew on a plane. People commented that I spoke decent English and so I should be able to survive. Know what? They were wrong. It took me some time to adapt to a different culture. When you arrive at the campus you may also face a cultural change. Here in the mid-south most people go to church. They are nice and helpful. Some of you are going to big cities. People may wonder where in the world this village place called Memphis is. They may entice you to see this, drink that, smoke this or try that. “Let me tell you what you have been missing for the past 18 years,” they say. One statistic shows that 75% of the young people grew up in a Christian family give up their faith when they go to college. That is alarming. They no longer read the Bible or attend church. Before long, your parents will not be nagging you. There will be no more “you must go to youth group and Sunday service,” or “you have to be home by 11 pm,” or “you can’t wear that outfit.” Freedom can be a scary thing. But the good news is God loves you and He will always be with you. You have a choice: follow God’s heart or follow your own heart. Years ago, the U.S. Army came up with a slogan: “Be all you can be!” I tweak that and challenge you with this statement: “Be the leader God equips you to be!” In the Bible, Timothy was Paul’s apprentice and faithful ministry partner. Paul addressed Timothy as “my son.” Paul assigned him to serve as a pastor at the Ephesian church. Timothy might be in his 30’s. Both his mom and grandmother were faithful Christians. Among other challenges, Timothy had to confront false doctrines. You are blessed to grow up in a Christian family. Now God is sending you to a place that may be hostile to the Christian faith. God does not want you to barely survive. He wants you to influence others with the Christian faith. But how? Paul encouraged Timothy in 4:12 of his letter: 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. It is the same encouragement I have for you. Let us unfold the truth in this verse.

EXPLANATION

God wants you to be an example in the five ways Paul listed here – speech, life, love, faith and purity. Like it or not, you represent something. People look at you and will immediately notice that you are an Asian. They think that you eat some funny-smelling food, speak an oriental language or even know some Chinese Kung-Fu. More importantly, when people know that you are a Christian, they will associate what you do with what you believe. You are an example of a Christian. How you live your life on the outside reflects who you are on the inside. Let us look at the five items. First, speech. The way you talk and the terminology you use show who we are. Jesus said in [Matthew 12:34](#) “... For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” What

comes out of your mouth? Is it approval or criticism? Truth or gossip? Also, if you often begin a conversation with “OMG” how would people think of your God? Then Paul mentioned life. What he meant was conduct. Besides speech, people will judge you by your behavior. Paul said in [Ephesians 5:8-9](#) – 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth). God makes you a light to the world. Everything you do should be pointing people to the source of light. You should bring benefits to others rather than being self-centered. Next on the list we have love. You are first loved by God. Then you should spread God’s love to others. [1 John 3:18](#) reads: Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. Talk is cheap. Love has to be expressed in deeds. Let your compassion move you to action. Imitate after Jesus’ example to sacrifice your time and resources for others. People may not react the same way for the kindness you show them. But you have to make the right choice regardless of the response you may get. After speech, life and love Paul also added faith. Suffice to say, people cannot tell what you believe until they know how your faith directs your life. Jesus made a simple analogy in [Matthew 7:17](#) - Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. People can make any claim about what they believe. Eventually, it will show up in their lives whether their faith is real. More than likely, hardship will prove if you truly believe in the Lord. Do you still trust God when others are panic? Will you lie and cheat when others compromise their integrity? The last item on Paul’s list is purity. Of course, it has nothing to do with personal hygiene. Sometimes, dormitory is even worse than a half-star hotel! Paul was talking about purity in one’s heart. He said in [1 Corinthians 14:20](#) - Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. You need to have wisdom from above to discern right from wrong, and you also need to ask the Lord to guard your heart against sins. The world is more complicated than you can imagine. A sister told me that on a graduate school application form there are more than ten options for gender. That sounds crazy. I can only think of four: male, female, I don’t want to tell you and don’t ask me, I’m confused.

CONCLUSION

Be the leader God equips you to be! God calls you to be an example in those five areas. You may say: “I can’t do it.” Well, spiritual pursuit is never a matter of “I can” but “I’m willing.” When you submit to the Holy Spirit, God will enable you. One day you will realize that the world does not care which school you graduated from or what degree you hold. What matters is whether you are a person of good character. God is in the ongoing task of shaping you to be more like Christ. In closing, let me give you some final reminders when you arrive at the campus. It is as simple as ABC. I will start with the C. It stands for church. You have to find a good church. The basic criteria for a good church are three: it has to believe that the whole Bible is the Word of God, that a person is saved by God’s grace through faith, and the preaching and teaching are true to the Bible. Whether the church has a rock band or sing hymns with a pipe organ is secondary. Then we go to the B. No, it is not Baptist. It is Bible. Read the Bible every day. Let me know if you do not have a paper Bible. I would love to buy you one. Read it, highlight it and write down notes on the margins. Do not let busyness be an excuse. If you have time to stream movies and music, or hang out with friends, then you should have time to read the Bible. Finally, the A. It stands for attendance. By attendance I mean active participation. Find a church where you can serve. I guarantee that any pastor would love to hear it when people volunteer themselves. Rest assured, next time you come home I will ask you about those ABC.

Now I would like to ask the five of you to come forward. The congregation will join me to pray for you.

Father we give thanks for the blessings you have given to these five young people – Corey, Joy, Justin, Lilac and Nancy.

They are about to venture into a new journey in their lives.

Would you continue to watch over them in their near future?

Give them intelligence in their studies,

Alert them to any danger and temptation,

Empower them with boldness to witness for You,

Lead them to a church that faithfully teaches Your Word,

Put some mature Christians by their side to be their spiritual mentors,

Equip them to be the persons You intend them to be,

So that when they graduate what they accomplish is not just a degree,

But more love for You, a stronger faith and a greater heart to serve You and others.

Hear our prayer, in Jesus' name, amen.