

This is a brief article that I wrote years ago. It ended up being a chapter in 'Youth Evangelism'.

## **The power of being different!**

There is a terrible destructive myth in the area of youth evangelism: in order to reach non-Christians effectively you must not be too different from them. If you are different you will shock or scare them. Therefore, what has happened in some youth groups is that they are no longer distinct from those they are trying to reach. They look, act and speak the same as the secular world. This stands in clear contrast to what the Bible teaches about who we are and how we are to reach out. Furthermore, if the group looks and acts the same as those it is trying to reach it ends up having nothing to offer newcomers.

Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:13-16 (You are the salt of the earth ...you are the light of the world).

Jesus is telling us to be different in the way we live. We are to be salt—full of flavor and tasty, definitely not bland. We are also to be bright lights. Living for Christ means that we do good things for him. As we do this, we shine the light of Christ. Following on from this people will see us and praise God.

Reflect on this verse from 1 Peter 2:12, '*Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us*'.

Here Peter is telling us to live in such a way that we stand out because we do good things. While some non-Christians may accuse us of doing wrong they will ultimately glorify God on judgment day (in that culture Christians were criticized and even killed for not worshipping the emperor, they were also accused of being cannibals because of the Lord's Supper).

Both these passages are saying something that must be clearly understood. *Be different*. Be characterized by leading holy lives rich in good deeds. Stand out for Christ. If we do this people will notice.

### **What this means for your group**

If you are running a youth group that looks like a group of non-Christians, it may quite possibly be non-Christian. We are to be different. Following Jesus must be seen in the fact that we live like his people.

My goal for the young people in my youth group is that they live very different lives from those around them. Since the young people in my group are committed to Jesus this is seen every day in the way they live. At first, non-Christians are upset by the difference. They may give the Christian a hard time or even say things like, 'You think you're better than us'. Soon, however, some may begin to see that this Christian young person has something to offer. This may intrigue or attract them to want to know more. This is the time for a chat about the gospel. They can be invited to come to youth group to hear more about what it means to be a Christian. The bottom line is that we must show this world that Jesus has changed us. Most non-Christians will not respond to half-hearted Christians who are uncommitted and act just like them. They want to see the 'proof of the pudding'.

### **Teach on it**

Teach the young people in your group to be different. It must be immediately apparent that the youth group is made up of people who live differently to the world. Here is a brief list of how we should be different:

Our speech—speak in love, with patience, no foul language

Our clothes—dress modestly, not like someone on MTV (girls see 1 Peter 3:3-6, 1 Timothy 2:9-10)

Our attitude to our parents—respectful, obedient (see Ephesians 6:1-3)

Our attitude to our teachers in school— respect their authority

Accepting newcomers or those who are different from us (see James 2:1-13)

Work—show up on time, don't rob your employer of time or products. Work as if you were serving the Lord (Titus 2:9,10)

The list is almost endless. One helpful way to teach on this may be to do a Predicament (see *Creative Christian Ideas for Youth Groups*, p.63). This is where you set up a situation and the youth group must respond in a creative and godly way. Many of the above suggestions could be used here.

### **Example-**

As I write the fashion is to wear pants as low on the hips as possible. A few years back Christians used to have the reputation of wearing outdated clothes and looking like a pack of nerds. These days many Christians have gone to the other extreme. By looking at them there is no difference when it comes to unhelpful and ungodly fashions. Instead of being influenced by God's word, many follow the teachings of MTV.

This is not helpful. Or, to put it another way, is it being different? The Bible is clear; we are to be different in every area, including the clothes we wear.

Make sure you regularly include a teaching series on what it means to live for Christ. The book of 1 Peter is a good place to start.

### **Model it**

The leaders must be role models in this area. Is your leadership team made up of people who are salt and light? Too many leaders are chosen because they are merely attractive people or nothing more than warm bodies who can provide a bit of discipline for an evening's activity. Aim to produce a team that is striking in its commitment to Christ. This must be seen in the way they speak, drive, dress, spend their money and relate to each other.

### **Checklist**

*Are the young people in your group seen to be different because of their commitment to Christ?*

*Are the leaders role models?*

*Have you taught from the Bible on this topic recently?*