

Timeless

Dear Young Life Leader,

Have you ever considered what makes Young Life unique? It's obviously a ministry that you have chosen to be a part of. Maybe it's a ministry that had a direct impact on your own young life growing up. But so many of us who have given our lives to this mission have never really stopped to consider what are the real essentials of this method that God revealed to those early leaders. So often we are too busy doing it to really think about it! But I want to encourage you to think about this a little bit today.

What helped a lot of us really consider this question was when Young Life first began to expand internationally. Those original brave pioneers were a delightful couple, Rod and Fran Johnston. God had laid it on their hearts to reach the youth of France and so, in 1953, off they went to Paris to get Young Life started.

Quickly, it became apparent to the Johnstons that kids in France were hungry for the very same thing that kids in the States were hungry for: meaningful relationships with caring adults who took the time to share the gospel with them in a way they could understand (in this case, in French!).

By the time I became President of the mission about twenty-five years later, Young Life had a presence not just in France, but Brazil, Canada, Bermuda, the Philippines, Australia, Germany, Korea, and a few other countries. Today Young Life's reach has continued a beautiful presence around the globe, and I give God the glory for that.

Every time we would help introduce Young Life-style ministries in these countries it was a reminder to us of what really made something "Young Life." It wasn't the clubs or camps or even the name—most of these outreaches went by names other than "Young Life."

No, what made something Young Life, whether it was in the high-income neighborhoods in France or the heartbreaking slums of São Paulo, was leaders—just like you—establishing relationships of love and trust with young people outside the faith and using those relationships to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to a hurt and broken world.

That is Young Life. And it works in every culture. This should come as no surprise to us as it was the same method our Lord used: "Look at him," the Pharisees said with disgust. "He eats with publicans and sinners!" (cf. Luke 5:30). Over and over again in the Gospels we see the same thing: Jesus—building relationships with "sinners." There were no camps or club meetings, no T-shirts, special musicians, or gimmicks. There was Jesus, loving those on the outside.

Jim Rayburn used to expound to us on Colossians 4:5: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without" (KJV)—"without" being an old-timey word meaning "outside." "*That's* who we want to reach," he would thunder. "Young Life is not about reaching kids in the church, it's about reaching those kids who are on the outside. And there's only one way to do that. Jesus taught us by

example: ‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14, KJV). They’re not going to go to anything advertised ‘Christian.’ We have to go to them and build personal relationships of trust. Walk alongside them, listen to them, care for them.”

We continue that incarnation internationally today. We go to be among them all around the world. My friend Bob Reeverts headed this effort for years and taught us so much.

Just a month ago as I write this letter in the summer of 2012, Claudia and I were given the opportunity to speak at a camp in Wales to the Young Life team working in the various nations of the United Kingdom and Scandinavia. Several countries were represented. What a joy it was to hear them share exciting reports of the great work God is doing through them in their countries with kids who don’t know the Good News.

It works in every culture. It worked for Claudia and me in those early Dallas clubs in the 1940s as we went from being “without” the Christian faith to “within,” and it is working today, over seventy years later, with kids in dozens of countries who are, in the words of Ephesians 2:12, “without hope and without God in the world.”

I am so thankful for what you are doing—whether it be in an American suburb or somewhere in a Third World country. Be encouraged. Keep at it. Walk in wisdom toward those precious ones who are outside the faith.

Love in Christ,

Mitch