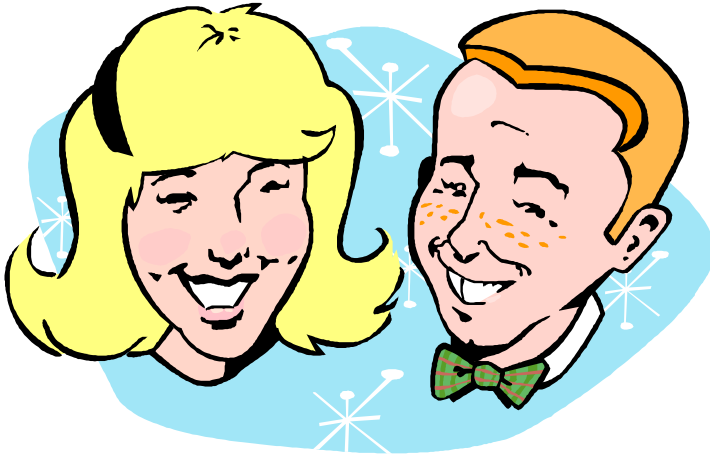


Booklet 12

Helps for Young People



***My Parents Won't Let Me Talk About God
(And Other Answers)***

Am I A Real Friend

Compiled by Hervey Bay Gospel Chapel for its young people

My Parents Won't Let Me Talk about God

I'm the only Christian in my family.

I pray for them, but I'm afraid they won't go to heaven unless they accept Jesus into their lives. The problem is, my parents forbid me to talk to them about God. If I obey God, who says we should spread the gospel, I will be disobeying my parents. If I obey my parents, I'm disobeying God. Who should I obey, God or my parents?

Your situation isn't an easy one, but I think you can obey both God and your parents. First and foremost, continue to pray for your family. God loves them and wants them to follow him even more than you do. And continue to obey your family. You don't have to talk about God to show your faith to your family. Your Christian lifestyle of love will say more to them than any words could ever do. As St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel! And if necessary use words."

I also grew up in a family that wasn't very enthusiastic about my faith in Jesus Christ. One day during my college years, I was sitting in a chapel service and the speaker stood up to give his message. He didn't start with a scripture, a funny story or even a greeting. He just said, "You are the only Jesus somebody knows." He then said it again, "You are the only Jesus somebody knows." This guy repeated that statement nine times and on the tenth time he pointed right at me and said those same words again. I don't remember another word he said that day. But it was as if God was speaking directly to me. The message was clear: I represented Jesus Christ to a family who did not know him. If they wanted to see what Jesus Christ was doing in the world, they were going to look at me.

You're right. Your family won't go to heaven unless they decide to put their faith in Jesus. But remember, they need to make the decision to follow Jesus on their own. Your responsibility is to simply live as much like Christ as you can.

You are God's representative to your family. Nowhere in the Bible does it say it will be easy. But God does promise to walk with you. Your job is to obey God and obey your family. Take a look at the Ten Commandments. God's will for our lives is spelled out clearly. In commandments one through four, God tells us to love and honour him. The fifth commandment says, "*Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you*" (Exodus 20:12).

You've got your work cut out for you, but by loving and obeying your parents, you are obeying God.

How Do I Share My Faith with a Teacher?

My English teacher is a great person. I'd really like to help her become a Christian. I know how to bring people my own age to Christ, but I'm not so sure about adults. Can you help?

I would approach her the same way you talk to people your own age. Most people who become Christians become interested in Christianity through a relationship with another Christian. They are attracted to the faith through that relationship.

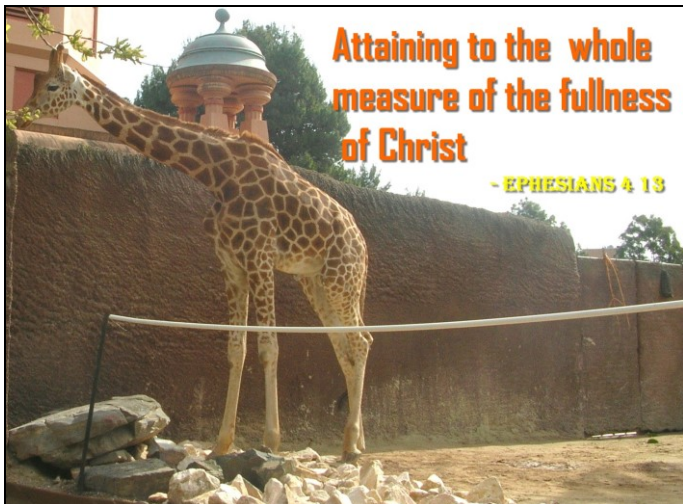
Let me tell you about Mr. Peralta, my eighth-grade Spanish teacher. Mr. Peralta was not a Christian when he first started teaching school. He had spent very little time in church. He wasn't anti-Christianity; he simply didn't know much about it.

During his years of teaching, God brought several Christian students and co-workers into Mr. Peralta's life. One of those students invited Mr. Peralta to hear her sing in a special program at her church. He agreed to go. That night, someone talked about what it meant to be a Christian. Later Mr. Peralta said he'd never realized he wasn't a Christian until he heard that simple talk about a real relationship with Jesus Christ. When the church program was over, Mr. Peralta decided he'd come back for a regular worship service. Later that year, he became a Christian.

I'll bet the student who invited Mr. Peralta to that church service never realized God had been working in her teacher's life through other Christians over the years. Because of God's work, her simple invitation changed his life for eternity.

Pray for your English teacher, and don't be afraid to tell her about your faith. You don't have to preach at her or argue with her to show her that Jesus Christ is your Saviour. And don't worry about the age difference between you. Your witness can be as strong as anyone's. Remember the advice Paul gave to Timothy, *"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"* (1 Timothy 4:12).

One more tip. Since your English teacher most likely loves literature, you might want to ask your pastor to recommend a good Christian book or a modern translation of the Bible you could pass along to your teacher. Authors such as C.S. Lewis and George MacDonald were excellent writers who were also Christians. But remember, the most important witness is a life and testimony that gives glory to God and attracts people to the Christian faith. Just ask Mr. Peralta!



I'm Torn Between Friends

There's a new girl in my school who's fun, funny and sweet. The problem is, none of my other friends like her. They insult her and make fun of her. I'm just about her only friend. But I can't hang out with her and my other friends at the same time. How can I be friends with both sides?

The way you describe the new girl, she sounds like a pretty neat person. And your other friends sound a little jealous of her. Whatever you do, be sure you don't stoop to their level of petty insults. True friends rise above the temptation to tease and instead find the good in each person.

Even though your friends hurl insults at your new friend, you can take a stand and make a difference by continuing to be her friend. Eventually, your old friends may tire of their pettiness and follow your lead. Frankly, a loyal friend is hard to find and a lot of people will respect you for your stand.

I believe every person is created by God and should be treated with respect. I don't have to hang around with everyone, but when I look at each person who comes into my life as a child of God, it's easier to be kind to them. At this point your friends have the problem, not you. I want to challenge you to set an example and lead them toward kindness.

How Can I Help My Brother?

I'm a college student sharing an apartment with my younger brother. Our parents kicked him out of the house because he's had problems with drugs and with the law. I'm the only strong Christian he knows.

I think he's had problems for so long he doesn't know how to turn his life around, or how to let Jesus help him. He doesn't have a high-school diploma or a regular job. I keep praying for him, but this

situation is breaking my heart. He's a good person, and I'll never give up on him. How can I help him get his life in order?

It sounds like you're just the kind of caring person your troubled brother needs in his life. Your love and concern, along with God's help, may be just the thing to eventually turn him around.

By seeing past your brother's troubles, you're following Christ's own example. Jesus had the ability to believe in someone even when they didn't believe in themselves. I call this kind of love "irrational love." It's love that breaks the rules of reason. Jesus looked beyond a prostitute's reputation and saw her as a needy, hurting individual. He resisted the pressure of the crowd and forgave an adulterous woman's sin. Time after time, Jesus offered grace and hope to people who'd made mistakes in their lives.

In Jesus, we see a person who loved deeply. But Jesus also asked for commitment and accountability. His forgiveness came with the command to "go and sin no more." In doing so, Jesus was setting up boundaries so people wouldn't take advantage of his mercy.

I think you can do the same for your brother. Let him know of your love for him, but set healthy boundaries in your home. Such boundaries are important for both of you. Along with helping him, boundaries are essential for your own safety and sanity.

Establish a "contract" for living together. Keep it simple but straight and to the point. For example, you should have a "no tolerance" rule for drug and alcohol use in the house. If you are lending him money, set up ground rules for him to pay it back. Be honest about your expectations of him. If he breaks the contract, then he, not you, is making a decision to leave the comfort of your home. Sometimes irrational love is tough love.

You don't mention whether or not your brother is still struggling with drug abuse. If so, he may be addicted. Addiction to any substance is

really difficult. Not only does an addict's body crave the substance, but their mind forgets how to cope with the stresses of life. Even if he's no longer using drugs, your brother needs to re-learn how to deal with the problems and stresses in his life.

In order for your brother to learn healthier ways of dealing with his problems, he needs to be in an accountability relationship with a Christian person or group specializing in addictions. The Bible is clear, "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure" (Proverbs 11:14). You can call a local drug and alcohol treatment program and get all the information you need. Then, when he is ready for help, you can point him in the right direction.

Remember, you are not responsible for changing your brother. Only God can change a life. So be patient, set boundaries and let your brother make his mistakes. Continue to pray for him and trust that God is watching out for both of you.



Am I a Real Friend?

As Lisa crumpled another piece of notebook paper, I knew she was about to lose it. "I don't know why I can't get this problem to work out!" she sighed.

Lisa and I were sitting at a table in the library. Pencils, books, paper and calculators were spread all over the place as she looked to me for help. Her usually bright, lively brown eyes now had a look of failure. "I don't know what I'm going to do," she told me. "I really need to get a high grade on the test tomorrow since I failed the last one. And I think I'm making the same mistake over and over again on this one problem."

"Lisa, it's OK," I said. "We'll work on it until the bell rings, and you can call me tonight if you need more help."

That night she called me with lots of questions. I tried to answer them as best I could. Then early the next morning we had a mini cram session before the test.

A few days later when we got our tests back, she'd ended up with a C. She was pretty disappointed, but I encouraged her not to give up. We continued studying in the library day after day. And when the next test came around, she got an A. She was so excited, and I was happy that our hard work had finally paid off.

I know helping Lisa may not seem like a big deal, but it sure was important to her. Obviously, she was happy about getting a better grade. Even more than that, though, she appreciated my willingness to stick with her and offer her encouragement when she was really having a hard time.

The Book of Acts mentions someone named Barnabas, whose name means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Barnabas apparently was a behind-the-scenes kind of guy. He didn't do much that would make him real famous. He didn't lead any big evangelistic crusades. He didn't write any letters that got included in the Bible, like his friend Paul did. He was just there, helping out and doing little things that showed his concern and friendship.

I hope someday when people think of me, they'll remember me as someone like Barnabas. Some one who was around to offer help and encouragement. That would mean a lot to me. More importantly, it would mean I'd become the kind of friend I'd really like to be.

Rachel enjoys sharing her fave ice cream, raspberry chip, with a good friend.
