

## How Should a Young Christian Live?

This recent discussion, which took place on-line between a West Point Cadet and COL Mike Tesdahl, provides food for thought for young Christians as well as for those who are trying to be a resource.

Letter From a Cadet (via email)

To whom this may concern (I think it may be someone called Papa T?):

I'm not really sure why I am writing this. Actually, as I write I am scratching my head wondering what I am doing, but I feel strangely led to do it, so here I am.

I grew up in a Christian home, and went to a private Christian school from kindergarten through twelfth grade. At one point in third grade I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior and then in eighth grade I really started to try to live for Him. However, since the tenth grade I have been on quite a rocky path. I know that the normal believer struggles in the faith, but there are facets to my struggle that I am sure must not be common.

First, I am a philosophy major, and as you can assume, I love reading anything from C.S. Lewis and Sproul to Rand and Nietzsche. I am compelled to point out the flaws in the arguments that are presented, which makes me ask a lot of questions. Additionally, I am an Augustinian; I tend to binge on pleasure and then retreat to an almost monastic existence, but it is difficult for me to maintain either state for too long. I have been pegged by some as fickle and by others as just plain unbelievable and insincere. Consistency is a problem for me, as is staying focused.

I love the Lord with all of my heart, and want to give my life to Him in whatever way He might ask of me. I am not sure why I am telling you this but I thought that I should. I read your name in the OCF newsletter and decided to email you. Thanks for listening.

- a Cadet

Dear Cadet,

Thanks for the note. First of all, philosophy is not a bad thing. There were just as many great thinkers who were strong Christians and/or otherwise good people with good intentions, as there were others who were destructive.

The search for truth, the meaning of life (and death), the understanding of good and evil, and the intrinsic nature of man is not only a worthy exercise but also an essential one. It establishes your worldview, the particular set of lenses through which you filter things, judge events and people, and make decisions. Whether you see man as being ultimately good, controlled by the Spirit, or ultimately bad (controlled by the sin nature), determines everything from how you approach relationships to how you view the role of the state. The power of reason, through which we search for God's existence, is itself a sign of God's creation. Our ability to think is a sign of God's character because He is the source of all reason.

You are at the season of life where you are naturally beginning your own moral and ethical search. If you are not in a stressful time, it's probably because you're not paying attention! If there is any poverty in the discipline of philosophy, it is in taking a purely intellectual approach to the subject, which never demands a personal commitment to any worldview. A variation of this poverty is to act the chameleon, being both double-minded and having a double set of ethics, depending on the situation.

Questioning is not bad, it's essential. Without reason, we have no legitimate basis for faith, let alone any claim that one system of beliefs is any better than another; all talk of God or religion would be senseless babble. If God is rational, we should expect his revelation of Himself and His plan for us to be reasonable. True faith requires an agreement of the intellect, the emotions and the will. What do I understand? With what am I comfortable? What passes the common sense test, and what works? What am I compelled to DO about it? Don't ever quit questioning, and don't ever quit demanding answers.

The binge-and-bust phenomenon is often a manifestation of emotional struggle, experimenting to figure out what works for you and where you fit in. It's a common and natural part of growing up. The Bible teaches us that there is a much broader range of conduct that is permissible (not sinful) than the

range of things that are beneficial to us. It also teaches moderation. Just about anything to excess can be destructive. Most of the instructions on right conduct in the Bible are principles, not laws. While many of our decisions and actions to act contrarily might not be sin, they generally prevent us from enjoying the abundant life that God promises, from “being all we can be.” Over time we each learn that when we choose to act contrary to biblical principles there are consequences. Hopefully those consequences are as light as a hangover and not more catastrophic or hurtful to you or to others.

Accountability, sound biblical teaching and dialog, and good fellowship with likeminded company, seem to make up the environment that allows us to search and grow in a healthy manner. Let’s get together and see where I myself, and OCF as an organization, can help you do that.

“Papa T”

*Papa T is COL Mike Tesdahl, USA (Ret.), OCF Staff Representative, United States Military Academy. He is committed to providing cadets with biblical fellowship, and to changing individual lives through discipling, encouraging, equipping, and prayer.*