

Scriptural Foundations of Our Ministry

By Glyn Henman

Introduction

Our lives are often filled up with the “doing” piece, so much so that we rarely slow down to think about the “why” piece. We move from one relationship, program, or event to the next, and we rarely take the time to ask ourselves why we are doing all these things, and why are they important? It is often the same in Young Life, and it can be so as we do contact work, run clubs, camps, small groups and simply do the work of reaching young people.

It is as important to stop and ask the “why” questions in ministry as it is in life. Jim Rayburn, Young Life’s international founder, keyed in on four foundational scriptures that helped him coin a few guiding phrases for his burgeoning ministry. These phrases have continued to help us think about reaching the unreached young people with the message of hope in Jesus for over 75 years internationally and over 40 years in Australia.

4 Key Scriptures

I first remember hearing these scriptures being taught by John Miller as a young volunteer leader in 1986. John was a personal friend of Jim Rayburn up until he passed away. John was visiting Australia and over the subsequent years we had many opportunities to talk about the significance of these scriptures upon our lives and ministries.

- Colossians 4:5: “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without.”
- 1 Timothy 3:7: “Have a good report of them that are without.”
- 1 Thessalonians 4:12: “That you may walk honestly toward them that are without”.
- John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

In our fast paced and instant world, we often reduce life to little more than an information swap. But these scriptures call us to slow down and engage in relationships deeply and walk with integrity toward people, especially toward those who do not know Jesus.

To walk in wisdom, to have a good report and to walk honestly before people takes time, energy and patience. Whether we are dealing with young people, their parents, school authorities or any other government or community group, we are called to exercise wisdom in how we relate and communicate with them. So when the opportunity to share our faith does come along, it is shared with mutual trust and respect.

We need to honour our word and follow through with people - to do what we say. This is fundamental if we are going to build trust and respect. That means turning up on

time or calling if we are going to miss the appointment or are running late. We need to watch our language and not use big spiritual/church words when sharing the gospel or communicating what Young Life does. Lots of people may not understand the big words you want to use.

5 Fundamentals

From these four scriptures Jim Rayburn coined some key phrases that have helped us remember who we are as an organisation and have continued to bring direction to all that we do with young people, their families and the wider communities where we work.

- Walk in wisdom toward them that are without.
- It's a sin to bore a kid with the gospel.
- Win the right to be heard.
- Assume our young audience does not know anything about the Christian faith. Therefore, always be in the posture of a teacher, never a preacher. There is tremendous difference.
- We need to go and dwell with young people in their world.

These ideas have helped shape Young Life through its entire history and continue to do so today.

The idea of leaving our comfortable environment to enter the world of young people is radical in nature; our model for this is Jesus himself. He left the comfort of heaven to come and dwell with mankind in order to be known and to make himself known. To leave our world and enter the world of young people, we are following the model of Jesus.

To walk in wisdom and win the right to be heard is a powerful idea no matter what age group you're trying to reach. If we think about it, we all like to be treated with respect.

If the best we can do is bore people with the gospel once an opportunity presents itself, then we need to get better acquainted with Jesus. He is the most influential and interesting person to ever walk the planet.

Most people we meet will tell you they know something about God or Jesus at some basic level. However, it seems that the information that most people have is misinformation. You may also find that their experience is with religious groups who have alienated them. Once we have won the right to speak, and to be heard, it is important to not assume too much knowledge. Start with the basics and build from there. Remember, in most cases you will get a second and third opportunity if you have built the relationship well. Mutual respect and love will also cover many of the mistakes we may make.