

The Heart of the Mission

(A letter from Jim Rayburn to donors)

Dear Friends,

I want you to read this letter!

I am going to try to tell you something about Young Life's strategy for reaching high school young people for the Saviour.

It is easy for me to assume that you know more about the work of the Young Life Campaign than you actually do. I am so close to it. I have watched the progress and the changes that the Lord has indicated from the very start. Some of you who receive this letter know of these matters perhaps as well as I do, but many friends have suggested that they would like to have me tell them a little more about the inside working of Young life. We do have a unique approach to the problem of reaching young people.

You see we are after the **unreached**. From the very beginning, the burden that the Lord placed upon us was to *reach young people who were not being touched by any other methods*. The vast majority of young people are not in church and never hear the truth about the Saviour's love, so we are after them particularly. To reach them we have had to break with some traditional methods and, I am sorry to say, we have had to sometimes be misunderstood.

For example, take our **contact work**. By that, we mean the hours and hours that our leaders find it necessary to spend with the kids, meeting them where they are, going along with them, living with them. Now this is recognised procedure on any foreign mission field, but many well-meaning Christians have felt that we are wasting time. And yet it is this time spent with the youngster, before and after his confession of Christ, that has made Young Life something far more than the ordinary youth movement. Not only do we win a hearing among the most difficult and hardest to reach, but after reaching them, we stay with them, as a true missionary should. *The winning and establishing of a soul for Jesus Christ cannot be done on a hit-and-run basis.*

The Lord Jesus Himself is our example in this. His heart was tender toward sinners. He longed for them. He was not ashamed to be with them. His compassionate approach to the lost is what we are after. We try to be kind in our approach to the lost. We insist that gentleness is essential if we are to properly represent Him. I am afraid we are often times criticised for no other reason than that we are honestly seeking, under the Lord's guidance, to be as He was, the 'friend of publicans and sinners.'

Many people ask us about our 'Bible Clubs.' We do not have any! In Young Life, we have given years of prayerful study to this matter of the right kind of a Christian meeting for kids. What we call a young Life club is actually a Gospel meeting for high school young people. It is perhaps different from any meeting you have ever been in. But the differences are in small things. We sing, pray, and preach the Gospel in an atmosphere of friendly informality. The meeting is deliberately placed at their level. The language is that which will be understood and impressive to a modern adolescent. We avoid the clichés of evangelical terminology and *present the sweet story of how Christ died for our sins in simple terms, which young people can understand and appreciate.*

The Young Life club is but a phase of this work. There are weekend camps, parties, rallies, high school assemblies and our intensive Bible study units. Then there is our summer ranch program conducted on our three nationally famous Colorado ranches where more than one thousand young people are winsomely challenged with the Saviour's claim on their lives.

There are the leaders. We maintain a **high standard of our leadership**; all of them carefully trained in our own approach to evangelism. These men and women are not selected because of some personal charm or magnetism. There is *a deeper quality that makes for a successful Young Life worker.* It is sincerity, warmth, a personal walk with the Lord Jesus Christ, a desire to see this hard job done for His glory!

There you have the three important phases of the Young Life strategy:

- The emphasis on the direct and friendly contact with the high schooler. The emphasis on follow-up, follow-up, and follow-up.
- The leaders; trained, skilled, dedicated people willing to put up with kids, to live and play with them.
- The gracious, informal gospel meetings featured especially in our Young Life clubs, our camps and summer ranch programs.

There is much more to be said about Young Life strategy, but *the most significant thing is not the technique or the people. It is, this true compassion that comes from above.* Much of the gospel work today is hindered by the severity of its attitude toward the lost.

In Young Life, we try never to forget that Jesus 'looked on the multitude and had compassion on them.' We keep always before our minds that when He mingled with sinners, He did not condemn and judge. He treated them as friends. He longed for them to be His friends. We do too! He has led us that way. That is why a Young Life leader knows more young people than anybody in town. That is why he or she spends hours and hours sitting around soda fountains, going to ball games, wandering around the campus – doing things that may look kind of silly! But they are not silly, they are

essential. We go where young people are. That is where they can come to understand a Christian leader and love him and respect him and want to listen to him.

Because we are dedicated to such principles, we will never become a statistically prominent movement, but we know of no other way to reach young people for the Lord and get results in lives that will stand the test of time. Already, in the first eleven years of our work, the Lord has honoured us with an outstanding host of young men and women who have been reached in high school and are taking a prominent place in Christian circles. Most of these would not even have heard the Gospel if the Young Life leader had not *deliberately* gone after them. The quality of these young witnesses across the nation is sufficient demonstration that God is doing a unique work through Young Life. Scores of these young people are vitally associated with us as staff and volunteer leaders, going after more kids like they were when they were in high school.

We feel no sense of superiority nor do we feel that we have a patent on a special kind of evangelising. We know that the Lord has used these methods in every age and throughout the world. But we also know that these truly scriptural methods for reaching the lost are sadly neglected in America today. We trust that more and more of God's people will re-discover how basic and important it is to 'walk in wisdom toward them that are without' making friends and helping people for the glory of God and for the purpose of making known the Saviour and His love.

I hope that this brief review of some of Young Life's methods will help you to understand better our work and explain it to others. Pray for us.

Sincerely in Him.

Jim Rayburn