

Earth Needs Your Witness

I was fortunate to have grown up in a small, southern, very protective community. Certainly there were opportunities to challenge parental authority, but you just didn't do that sort of thing back then, especially not with everyone in the city watching your every move.

But after high school graduation, I went away to college in Boston. Not only was it the coldest place I'd ever been during the winter, I had difficulty adjusting to the climate in other ways, too. Socially, politically and spiritually, Boston was a shocking new experience.

I met young people from all over the world, most of whom had not grown up with a background anywhere near as conservative as my own. I was far from home and immersed in an environment that offered more temptations than I'd ever known existed.

I'm sorry to say I didn't always follow the Lord back then, and I truly regret every choice I made outside of His will for me. But it has made me extremely thankful that His grace is greater than my foolishness.

There were, however, a few occasions when I did the right thing. This always set me at odds with some of the new friends I'd made. The pressure to conform was enormous, and their rejection of me was very painful. In the long run, compromise hurt even more.

But as time went on, I understood that although my college friends criticized and shunned me, in reality their opinions of me were quite the opposite. In my presence, they clearly expressed their disapproval, but their true feelings emerged whenever they were in trouble and needed help. They'd turn to me.

It took me years to realize that the deepest need my friends had was for me to hold fast to what I said I believed. I wasn't much of a witness back then, but as faulty as my faithfulness to God was, my friends depended on me.

They were, in a sense, testing my resolve. And they needed me to be strong. As believers today, we are tested, too. We're characterized as out of step with reality and portrayed in the media as though we are living 1,000 years behind the times. But let's not be fooled; the world needs our testimony. In fact, the most vocal critics are probably the most desperate to know the reality of Jesus.

I know no better treatise on the subject of Christian character and integrity than Psalm 15: "Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken" (NIV).

Commenting on this passage, Matthew Henry says: "If we would be happy, we must be holy." In truth, then, integrity is not only the measure of our spiritual maturity, it is also the determinant of our peace and joy. It's not just that we agree that certain ideals are good, it's that we believe these ideals are attainable and should be practiced.

Paul says: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed" (Rom. 8:19). Keep this in mind as you read this issue, and rely on the power of the Spirit in order to "'walk straight, act right, [and] tell the truth'" (Ps. 15:2, The Message). Remember that heaven is watching—so is your neighbor.