

Youth Leadership

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH REFORM MOVEMENT Youth Department of the General Conference

My dear youth,

The general opinion is that young people do not have experience and that is why they make more mistakes and are not trustworthy when it comes to giving them responsibility. But this, although it has some truth, is not always the case. It depends on each young person and the decisions they make in their life. We must differentiate between professional tasks and the spiritual life.

Experience as a success factor

When it comes to carrying out professional activities, it is true that the young person does not have the aptitude that allows him to carry out this work. For example, to operate on a patient, if the young person has not prepared and studied for years, he will not be able to do it. To carry out the professional activity of a lawyer, an architect, a plumber, a mason, a pedagogue, an eye doctor, a cardiologist, etc., it is essential to go through a process of preparation, study, and training that will last for years, until reaching suitability. The practice, the accumulated experience, will make the person a professional who can be trusted.

My father became a good lathe mechanic, highly appreciated and sought after when it came to repairing trucks, tractors, and other things... He knew how to design

industrial machines: he designed, drew, and built them. He came to have his own company with dozens of workers. But this success did not come overnight and even less so when he was young. From a very early age he began to go to mechanic workshops where he was an apprentice, that is to say, they taught him the trade without paying him. He had to work hours and hours without pay doing any activity that the professionals considered appropriate. Thus, little by little and through the years, he was formed until he reached the professionalism that characterized him.

In the professional sphere and even in any area of life, experience is needed to reach the maturity and suitability necessary to function effectively. That is why it is extremely important that young people allow themselves to be advised and taught by adults, so that their learning bears good fruit, and not only this, but they will have to take the appropriate studies to achieve their goal. The young person who does not want to listen or learn will have a difficult time and will have to hit many blows in life to reach a certain degree of valid experience.

The youth and his spiritual experience

In the life of faith a process of years and years is not always needed to reach maturity. It is not that young people are incapable of living in consecration, because they are not old enough or do not have enough training to provide them with the necessary tools to achieve it. The devil deceives young people by making them believe that consecration, faith, and fidelity is acquired in adulthood, thus he neutralizes the efforts of young people who could do much for the advancement of the work.

The Holy Spirit can take a young person and make him suitable to live in holiness even in his youth, while there are adults with many years of experience in the church who are still spiritually immature. Take the case of Joseph. He was a seventeen-year-old teenager (Genesis 37:2) when he was sold by his brothers to some Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt to in turn trade him as a slave. What can be expected from a young man of this age who finds himself in such a circumstance? Very little, actually, but on both a secular and spiritual level Joseph was amazingly successful. What allowed him to reach this lofty summit and what distinguished him from other young people?

When Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, he had to make a decision that would define the rest of his life. Let us see how it is expressed in the Spirit of Prophecy: "His soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God—under all circumstances to act as became a subject of the King of heaven. He would serve the Lord with undivided heart; he would meet the trials of his lot with fortitude and perform every duty with fidelity. One day's experience had been the turning point in Joseph's life. Its terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pg. 214.

What could be expected from any adolescent who was found in the same circumstances as Joseph? Probably a total sinking into despair, disorientation, anguish, fear. And why didn't Joseph act this way? Because he received a spiritual legacy from his parents that served as a guide in his life. And here we find the key to motivate the young person to be spiritually strong even in his youth. If Solomon urges the youth to remember his Creator in the days of his youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1),

it is because he can be spiritually mature when he is young. The apostle Paul tells Timothy: **“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”** 1 Timothy 4:12.

These words denote that Timothy, despite his youth, could set himself up as an example of faith in the community where he carried out his ministry. Timothy also received the legacy of the Gospel from his grandmother Loida and his mother Eunice: **“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”** 2 Timothy 3:14, 15.

David was very young when he took care of his father's livestock, and in his youth he learned to face wild animals and to withstand inclement weather in the wild field. This served him well for his future life. In his youth he learned to love God and to have a close relationship with his Creator. There were also many other young people who showed the whole world that youth does not have to be an obstacle to serving God faithfully; I would say even more, there are children, like Samuel, who served God with love and simplicity of heart and had no experience in life. It was also the case of Jesus who, as a child **“... increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”** Luke 2:52.

Every young person can be an effective instrument of salvation for other souls. It is true that there are evangelistic methods and strategies that can help each young person to be more effective in his work, but without a doubt, the best thing a young person who wants to serve God and his neighbor can do is lay a foundation that is essential for success. Let's see some very useful steps in the faith life of young people who want to disciple.

The consecration of the youth

The youth who consecrates himself to God is on the path of the most exalted experience, and that produces more fruits in dealing with souls, much more than all known methods of evangelization. The surrender of the heart to God is the beginning of excellence. **“My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.”** Proverbs 23:26. What was Joseph's secret to obtain the success he obtained in his life? His deep relationship with God in his youth. A responsible and faithful youth will do much more work for souls for the simple reason that God inspires and guides him.

“Satan is a vigilant foe, intent upon his purpose of leading the youth to a course of action entirely contrary to that which God would approve. He well knows that there is no other class that can do as much good as young men and young women who are consecrated to God. The youth, if right, could sway a mighty influence.” *Messages to Young People*, pg. 204.

The discipline of the youth

The word “discipline” comes from the Latin “student disciple,” and refers to a coordinated, orderly, and systematic way of doing things, according to a method. The youth has at his disposal the example or method of Christ; if he follows it he will be

very successful in the activities he undertakes. Being disciplined in all areas of life brings very good results, especially to young people who are in the training phase.

“It is... by a repetition of acts that habits are established and character confirmed.” *Child Guidance*, pg. 199.

“The character is formed, to a great extent, in early years. The habits then established have more influence than any natural endowment, in making men either giants or dwarfs in intellect; for the very best talents may, through wrong habits, become warped and enfeebled. The earlier in life one contracts hurtful habits, the more firmly will they hold their victim in slavery, and the more certainly will they lower his standard of spirituality. On the other hand, if correct and virtuous habits are formed in youth, they will generally mark the course of the possessor through life. In most cases, it will be found that those who in later life reverence God and honor the right learned that lesson before there was time for the world to stamp its images of sin upon the soul. Those of mature age are generally as insensible to new impressions as is the hardened rock, but youth is impressible.” *Child Guidance*, pg. 199.

“It is the duty of all to observe strict rules in their habits of life. This is for your own good, dear youth, both physically and morally. When you rise in the morning, take into consideration, as far as possible, the work you must accomplish during the day. If necessary, have a small book in which to jot down the things that need to be done, and set yourself a time in which to do your work.” *Evangelism*, pg. 652.

Youth leadership

If as a young person you consecrate yourself to God, even if you have no knowledge about human psychology, even if you have no experience dealing with people, God will enable you to guide others, for that is the promise of Jesus: **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** Matthew 4:19. Good leaders make disciples, but to be a good leader you have to be a good disciple, submitted to Christ, as Christ submitted in His humanity to the Father. Successful leaders are formed in the school of Christ; at the feet of the Master Mary learned the most valuable lessons of life; at the feet of Christ is how we learn of His humility, His love, and patience, because contemplating is how we are transformed. Remember, dear youth, God does not call you because you have a great suitability, but because he wants to train you in his school so that you are suitable. Will you let him? So be it.

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For personal and group reflection:

Why is professional level experience needed?

Can a youth consecrate himself to God at an early age?

On what factors will that consecration depend?

What was the basis of Joseph's success on a secular and spiritual level?

What is leadership and how can a young person be a successful leader?

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