



WHO ARE YOU WHEN EVERYONE'S LOOKING?

A few years ago, a Christian book challenged the Christian community with the question, “Who are you when nobody’s looking?” It reminded us that inner character, rather than outer appearances, is what really defines the Christian. The question is meant to address our corrupt desire to use outward action to put on a false image of spirituality and gain popular approval with other Christians.

On our college campuses today, we face a somewhat different challenge. The college culture offers us a deceptive compromise; we may believe or do anything in our “private” lives, so long as we do not let it effect our public lives or our interactions with others. This compromise allows us the freedom to be “Christian” in our personal private lives, but at a steep price. We must never claim that our Christianity reflects any sort of objective truth that either effects others or what we expect from others. Our Christianity is fine as long as it is kept out of the public sphere of life. However, Christian maturity consists of integrating our faith with what we do and say. In today’s world, the Christian is asked to pull his world apart and keep his personal beliefs separate from his public life. It is a compromise we cannot make.

While we are facing a different challenge in today’s secular campus culture, this challenge has much in common with the problem of “keeping-up-appearances” within the Christian culture. Just as many of us in the Christian culture are tempted to put on a spiritual image in order to gain approval, in the secular college culture many of us are tempted to put on a secular image in order to gain approval. This can consist of trying to seem as “cool” and “unspiritual” as possible, as well as surrounding oneself with non-Christians. Sometimes, this can include a spiritual life that only involves private Bible reading without any meaningful contact with other Christians. The strength of this temptation is understandable. In the college sub-culture today, identifying oneself as a Christian is the equivalent of asking for social ostracism, inviting criticism of both one’s intellect and morals. “Christian” is one of the few labels that it is fashionable for students to be prejudiced against. Yet, we are still called to stand firm in courage and love against this peer pressure. As 1 John 3:13 (NASB) says, “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.” We should expect the worldly culture around us to be hostile towards our faith.

Almost 2000 years ago, the Apostle Paul warned Christians, “Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor 15:33). The warning is still every bit as true as it was 2000 years ago. Many believers enter the college campus with the naïve notion that they can keep their Christian morals without consistent Christian fellowship. This is an attractive lie. We can have God and still surround ourselves with worldly friends. More often than not, those who embrace this myth make a series of compromises and conclude with either discarding important Christian beliefs (such as the belief that our faith is objectively true) or allowing their morality to become eroded in areas like dating and sexuality.

What is the solution? There is a difficult balance we need to strike. We need to find a supportive Christian community while remaining meaningfully involved in the secular world all around us. Just as Daniel’s small community of faith that consisted of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, enabled the four of them to continue in their faith; even a small Christian community can enable us to persevere in our faith through the college years. As we encourage



each other, learn together, and share our lives, the challenging college culture can actually be a place where our faith strengthens and where we can positively influence it for Christ, as Daniel did the culture of Babylon.

While one extreme is allowing ourselves to become immersed in the secular culture, the other extreme is allowing ourselves to become “cloistered” from the rest of the world. If the only people we have meaningful contact with are Christians, how can we expect to reach the rest of the world with Christ’s love? We must learn how to be in the world, without being of the world. We must learn how to build bridges to the culture around us to reach the lost.

Our witness for Christ is in danger if we go to either extreme. If we allow peer pressure to corrupt our world view, it will destroy our Christian witness, but if we withdraw completely and surround ourselves with only Christians, we will fail to reach anyone with our Christian witness. We must avoid both mistakes. We must embrace our community of faith, without abandoning those who need Christ around us.

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The Compass is the discipleship curriculum for Campus Crusade for Christ’s Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We’d love to hear your feedback on this lesson. Please write us at centerfield@uscm.org