

"The Road Less Travelled"

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October 14, 2011

With times becoming more modern and cultures rapidly infusing together the topic of morality is exponentially becoming more complicated. There is no one set of rules or one guide that tell people, specifically our youths, the proper code of behavior or more simply, what is right and what is wrong. Who do our young people look towards as mentors or influences? Who provides the moral foundation for knowing the difference between right and wrong which directs all future minuscule daily decisions as well as the decisions that affect the rest of their lives? Is it our parents, teachers, peers, or the media? The truth is that it is a combination of all of these, varying in degrees of penetration with every differing young person. The pressures of doing the right thing is overwhelming, nevertheless, young people need to realize that inevitable, listening to their conscious and ignoring the negative influences will only give them a larger sense of self.

During my adolescence, and even during the early part of my adulthood life, there was a battle between doing what my flesh wanted, also known as what everyone else was doing, instead of what I knew was morally right, also known as what my parents instructed me to do. Growing up, my parents taught me the difference between the two. They had done their best to instill in me concrete knowledge where wrongdoings would lead me and the importance of making a habit of listening to my conscience no matter what temptations came my way. Even with that training, for the majority of my young life I was unable to choose the road less traveled. There are a few reasons as to why doing the right thing so difficult. The media including the television and the internet print the vast black holes of brainwashing messages available to youth today. It is as if they are being spoon fed the "I must have" eye candy every single minute of the day. It praises all the almost primitive, instantly satisfying, morally combative behaviors we innately crave to do but know are wrong. All these reality shows for example, illustrate binge drinking, promiscuity, wild unhinged lifestyles to young people who absorb it all in like the

porous sponges they are. Media producers promote these wild bestial actions to the easily influenced, our youths; the future of our society. Now, if this is what our young people are getting fed to believe is the right way to live, what type of future do you think they have to look forward to? Media promotes its viewers to drown their lives in instant gratifications, erratic behaviors like violence, sex, illegal activities like drug use, gang relation, the list never ends and all this without considering the consequences. With or without the right guidance from home it's easy to slip into the grasp of peer pressure. Ironically, these offerings are delivered by the people they consider to be their "friends." It is merely and sadly the blind leading the blind and it happens millions of times a day. A young girl giving advice to a young girl regarding the opposite sex or a young man influencing another young man to get high with him introducing it as innocently as, "just try it once" or "It will make you feel so good." The young pregnant teens, kids strung out on drugs, and active participants in gang relations who are barely teenagers are all proof of how our youths are sucked in and having their opportunities for a brighter future taken away in a blink of an eye. Unfortunately, our young people's lives today seem to lack a total sense of morality; thereby making them a statistic and impairing their ability to be a contributing, active and just patron to society.

How can we begin to engrave how paramount living a moral life is? How can we show them that living a good life comes with a price that in the long run is immeasurably worth not being a part of the in crowd? Doing the right thing will put someone in scrutiny by their peers, because being different isn't considered "being cool." So it is easier to just say, "Yes" when their conscience is blatantly telling them to say, "No." It takes a long time to learn that regardless of the rejection and hardships one must endure in order to resist temptation; that doing the right thing, listening to the heart, that inner voice of reason is the most gratifying feeling of them all.

Being too foolish and impatient to wait for that feeling and instead succeeded in drowning myself, my sorrows, my confusion in all that was within my reach, harmful or not was my downfall. My peers and the world made all of those things readily available to me and my inability to say no caused deep fall into the depths of an immorally lost existence.

My life is a testimony for all those that care to listen, whose hearts yearn for the fillings of true joy and what doing the right thing eventually brings. I implore young people to listen to that inner voice, their higher power, the sound advice of their parents, teachers, mentors; whatever sound entity they receive advice from because they are only trying to steer them in the right direction. Their ability to make good choices, moral choices regardless of the persistent current trying to lead them astray, results in a bright future full of possibilities. Distinguishing themselves from the masses of youths who believe what the media portrays as good, will result in a future overflowing with potential and possibility. Choosing the road that the minority chooses, the road governed by their will to do right, will test, strengthen and define their character as an individual. Making the right decisions is always harder but as the youth practice doing it more readily, what starts off as difficult will soon become as involuntary as their eyes blinking and their heart beating. Young people won't have to think as much anymore and will sleep more soundly at night, because their dreams will be filled with desires of a pure heart. They will consist of an accumulation of virtuous, honest, and moral decisions, accomplishments, and deeds.

It is common for youth to learn from their personal mistakes, but a wise person learns from another individual's mistakes. Instruction is not our enemy in fact it is necessary for growth and progression because instruction will prevent mistakes and going down an immoral path of life. At 30 years of age, the decision to make a drastic change in my life was not an easy road at

all. There was enough appeasing of my friends for the sake of fitting in, fear of being different; leaving me with a never ending feeling of regret. In finally finding the courage and strength to tap into and practice the principles of goodness and righteous living that were instilled in me by my parents and belief in God as a child, I have learned and grown tremendously. Although temptations are never ending, it has been proven to me now more than ever that they lead to only dismal and dark places resulting in a heavy life and guilty heart. I sleep soundly at night now because I allow my conscience to guide me and that directs my path. I encourage every young person who I come across to do the same and recommend that they use my mistakes to learn a lesson. I would like to end with a quote I remember from a poem I read as a child; a poem that at the time for some unapparent reason was special and significant to me but did not gain a true significance until adulthood after having so many life changing experiences. In the words of Robert Frost from "The Road Not Taken"- "I shall be telling this with a sigh, somewhere ages and ages hence: two roads diverged in a wood, and I -- I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."