

Virtus Speech

[This paper was originally intended to give to the Teen Youth Group, but never presented]

Today I am going to talk about how to protect yourself from unsafe conditions -- specifically, unsafe conditions caused by interacting with other people. For most of your lives, you have been under very close protection by your parents and those they trust. As high schoolers, much of this control is gone, and you are enjoying a great amount of freedom. Soon, you will leave home, and what protection you still have will be gone altogether.

Unfortunately, this control over you was never total. Some of you may already have been attacked. I daresay all of you know at least one person who was, whether you realize it or not. These attacks are simply heinous: all types of abuse, rape, human trafficking, forced prostitution, pornography, addictions and more. Sadly, many of these attacks aren't perpetrated by strangers, but by people well known to the victims: relatives, teachers, coaches, clergy, those they date and even "friends."

While this is a very broad topic, and much can be said about it, I am going to focus on something easy that can do a tremendous amount of good in keeping you from getting into trouble in the first place. I also hope to give you knowledge and courage on how to try to get out of a situation if you are already trapped, or how to help someone who may already be in trouble. One of the easiest and yet most important tools you can have in protecting yourself, and in helping others, is a healthy friendship.

There is one example in particular I would like to give. There was a young girl who became "friends" with a man on the internet. He convinced her to send him nude photos of herself. He later blackmailed her into doing things she didn't want to do under threat of making these pictures public, and ended up exposing her anyway when he was done with her. Things got so bad at school that the family had to move, but it didn't take long for her new classmates to learn about the photos. This girl wound up committing suicide.

It's easy for me to simply say, "Don't send anything over the internet you don't want the world to see," but I think this misses the point. This poor girl didn't know what a real friend looked like, and sadly, either no one stepped forward to be a friend, or she was too traumatized to ever seek friendship again. I believe that knowing what a friend looks like, and seeking true friendship, is much more useful than an endless list of dos and don'ts for social interaction. And Jesus is the perfect friend. If we find ourselves being encouraged by another "friend" to do anything we would be ashamed to share with Jesus, then this person is probably not a very good friend. As I go through this talk, think about this girl and how the predator interacted with her.

Not that long ago, I gave a talk on friendship which most of you attended. If you remember, I said friendship was one of the four loves, and is called philia. I defined friendship as a "unifying force that comes from sharing common interests." I said it is a reciprocal love, meaning that it can only exist if it is mutual. I also said it was a missionary love, that philia always sought out new friends to join the group. This is what a healthy friendship looks like. If one or more of these characteristics is missing or perverted, then it is not a healthy friendship.

If someone places themselves between you and your other friends and family, they are breaking

down the union of love you have with them. If someone is pressuring you to do something you do not feel comfortable with, then they are not sharing a common interest with you. If someone is placing their wants before yours, then the reciprocity necessary for friendship is missing. If they are making you keep secrets, then they are discouraging others from joining, and therefore not being missionary.

During my talk about friendship, I mentioned that the other three loves are normally one-way, while friendship is always two-way. I also said that the other three loves are often confused with friendship. This is because sincerity is common to all forms of love. Many predators often act sincere in their affection, passion or charity because, in their diseased minds, they really feel it. The lesson here is that one should not simply trust another because they seem sincere, but rather if the relationship is two-way or one-way.

So, what can one do if one finds oneself in this situation, or knows of someone who is? This is where just a little knowledge and a little common sense go a long way.

Predators are playing a high stakes game and they know it. They are careful and patient, and they look for easy prey. You may have heard easy prey being called "low hanging fruit," and when in the military I called it being a "soft target." They seek those who don't have a strong support system, and try to destroy what little exists. They seek those who long for something missing in their lives, and pretend to fill it. They seek those who have little or no capacity to resist, and use various methods to discourage any future attempt at resisting. Also note that popular culture is doing all it can to confuse the meaning of friendship, make you feel you must always compete for some impossible goal, and make you dependent on others. A good, healthy set of friends, a sense of self-worth, and the capacity for self-reliance makes you what we called in the military a "hard target." The idea is that the bad guys will leave you alone in hopes of finding easier prey.

But no matter how well you fortify yourself, anyone can be trapped, or perhaps you learned about this too late. In this case, the cardinal virtues of prudence and fortitude, along with the theological virtue of hope, are your best tools. Do not put yourself in unnecessary danger, but be brave enough to reach out for help when you can do so safely. Never give up hope, as this storm too shall pass.

And what can you do for others? Again, you can challenge cultural norms, specifically, the one that tells you to mind your own business. If you see someone who seems lonely and sad, then ask them how they are doing. If someone seems lost, then ask them if they need help. If someone is by themselves, then ask them to join you. If you see someone being picked on, then call out the tormentors. Of course, if someone you know suddenly acts strange, then talk to them about it as well. Again, prudence is the key. You can't save someone who refuses your help, so respect their privacy.

For those who do open up, your help might be as simple as encouraging words or a genuine show of affection. However, you may need to get adult help, so don't let pride get in the way of doing the right thing. Never confront the predator, as it won't be safe for either you or the one you are trying to help. You can't save a victim by becoming a victim, so always balance fortitude with prudence and temperance.

And this brings me to my final point tonight -- responsibility. If you do not have authority, you do not have responsibility. This goes against another cancerous lie our culture is encouraging. Many authority figures try to guilt those without authority on matters of responsibility. This is a classic example of what is known as gaslighting.

A predator has authority over his own actions, therefore he is ultimately responsible for what happens. Whatever mistakes the victim made leading up to the point of no return, the predator has manipulated the situation to deliberately undermine whatever authority the victim had. Blaming the victim is the most obvious, most direct, and ultimately the final victory the predator has over the victim. But it is ultimately the victim's choice at this point on whether to give the predator the final victory. Recognize mistakes you might have made and learn from them. Forgive yourself for being naive. But *never* believe the lie that you had authority over your attacker, or that it is somehow your fault. And this goes the same for those who failed to help someone. Perhaps you could have done better, so learn what you can. But remember that you do not have authority over those who killed themselves, or the predators who hurt those you know. Perhaps you could have handled the situation better, but it was not you that created the situation in the first place.

I sincerely hope none of you need this advice. As I said before, the best way to avoid trouble is to be ready for trouble. But even if you find yourself in a bad situation, or know someone who is, I hope it is helpful.

Thank you for your time.

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Original Publication Date: 9 November 2023