

Victorious Youth: Identity, Legacy, Perspective.

A couple of weeks ago I sat at a meeting at one of the local institutions of higher learning and discovered that most of the students that attend college and university in Port Elizabeth are in fact students from out of town.

This struck a chord with me and I wondered at the implications on the youth of Port Elizabeth – where are they? I drove around the townships on an impromptu observation/ study.

I found them – young men loitering on street corners, corner shops and taverns. Young women doing more of the same, some with babies or swollen bellies. This was the picture I saw.

Google the words “South African Youth” and the very first page will illustrate the same story. The first three results will tell you that 15-34-year-olds make up a third of the population, while the next one will tell you that more than half of them have no money to pay for their tuition – 62.2% live in income poor households.

You will also be told that the youth graduate unemployment rate increased in the first quarter of 2019. Discourse about South African youth is centred around poverty and unemployment, along with all the social ills that stem from these.

Jarring statistics on drugs and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, school dropout rates, suicide and depression inform the content of our conversations whenever we talk about the youth. And, if we’re being honest, these conversations only surface in our national consciousness around youth month.

We fall into the line of drawing parallels between the youth of 1976 and the current generation – a generation of “Victors” and a “lost” generation.

Our analysis, however, falls short at looking at what it is that set them apart and inscribed them in our history books forever – and what it is that would turn the tide for the current crop.

I want to argue that Identity, Legacy and Perspective are the three elements that differentiate the youth of ’76 and that of 2019.

Franz Fanon writes that, “each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.”

For the '76 generation, it was a fight against an unjust system that sought to further subjugate and keep them perpetually set within the limitations the system had defined.

At its core, it was a fight for their identity – against “maid”, “garden boy”, “tea girl”, “cheap labour”. Their mission was to reclaim, reinforce and affirm their identity.

The labels may have changed, but the battle is still the same. Today's youth is battling outside stimuli that seeks to overshadow and ultimately erase their God-given identity.

The most deceptive concept that young people fall for is the idea of time – that youth gives you licence to mess up. You'll live right when you're older.

If you were to ask most adults, they would tell you that if they could only go back in time, they would do things differently. The decisions you make in your youth determine whether you will be an overcomer and a victor in life.

Strength, vitality, passion and reckless abandon are inherent features of youthfulness and it is these exact characteristics that give you the edge and ensure that you are strategically positioned for victory.

But, without the discipline that comes with knowing who you are in Christ, these are the very same characteristics that make you susceptible to youthful troubles. The tools to overcome are inherent but the choice to use them lies with the individual.

The second factor that set the '76 generation is Legacy. It was the knowledge, wisdom and lessons that their elders shared with them that informed their actions.

Parents, teachers and other authoritative figures have an inalienable duty to pass on the lessons they were taught onto their children, but the challenge with parents these days is their insistence on not raising their children the way that they were raised and in so doing, they neglect the lessons as well.

This is where socio-cultural groups like “izikhotane” crop up - parents overcompensate for the lack they suffered growing up with material things they can hardly afford. The result is passing on a culture of bowing to peer pressure and the pressure to perform.

These are legacies that can be ascribed to apartheid and the consumerist nature it created within the black community, but we must come to a point where we realise and resist these legacies and guard what we pass on to our children.

With that said, the choice ultimately lies with the individual. One's background does not determine where a person will ultimately end up.

Today's youth literally has the world in their hands and in their pockets. They have a wealth of information and knowledge in their hands, but it is their perspective that will determine whether they become the victors or a generation that will forever be thought of as a wasted opportunity.

A victorious youth. The youth we are advocating for is a youth whose identity is firmly rooted in Christ.

Uncompromising and consistently righteous. This foundation changes your perspective. It is a counter-culture narrative that changes your trajectory despite your background.

I write to you, young person, because you have the power to overcome the evil one. I write to you because of who you are, because victory is ingrained in you. Because victory is an inherent feature of youthfulness.

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