

Kirk

Good Counsel
*People Helping People
With The Hardest Job Of All*

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier
www.thefaithkit.org

Courtesy of Crossroad Publishing
www.cpcbooks.com

Don remembered that conversation for the rest of his life. He had been having problems with his girl. They had been fighting so much. She was talking about breaking up. He didn't know what to do. He decided to go see Kirk, the deacon at his church. Kirk was actually the guy in charge; and he was also married. Maybe he could help.

The conversation opened easily; Kirk had gotten good at making people feel at ease. Don, for his part, said what people almost always say ("I don't know where to start") and then did what people almost always do (tell their story pretty well).

Kirk had an easy time understanding the story. He didn't say so in so many words, but he had been there himself.

It seems that Don and Clara had struggled from the beginning. They started fighting as soon as they could get away with it—once it was mutually agreed that they were "going out"—and they fought often because any little thing could get them started.

Then there were things not so little. The latest round of fights concerned Don and these various other girls that he was "talking to."

"Talking to' means what?" asked Kirk.

"Just talking."

"Does it mean talking on the phone?"

"Yes."

"More than once."

"Yes."

"Do you make some of the calls?"

"Yes."

"Do you find that you call one of these girls pretty much every time you have a fight with Clara?"

"Yes."

"And at other times, isn't it like flirting?"

Don remained silent.

“It’s hard to give up attention, isn’t it?” Kirk asked this question in a way that showed that he himself knew how hard it is to give up attention.

“Yeah, I guess it is.”

“Has this been a problem for you?”

It took Don a few moments to say, “I think it has.”

“Listen, Don, this is human stuff. We all have to face it—but we can face it. Nobody is born secure. All of us are looking for help to believe that we are worth it, and us guys really want to think that we are worth it to girls, right?”

“Oh yeah.”

“But isn’t it true that if you try to hang on to all the attention you get, from every girl you know, you’re gonna get into trouble?”

“Oh yeah.”

And, there’s more, Don. When we depend on other people—any other people—for our idea of ourselves, we get in trouble. Other people change their minds. Other people like you if you make them feel good about themselves, and they don’t like you if you in any way challenge them. Other people are limited; they don’t have the time or energy to pay attention to us the way we want—the way we really want. Other people do not see our soul. They don’t know our story. Mostly, they’re pre-occupied with themselves. Think it through, Don; if we’re depending on other people for our idea of ourselves we’re not going to be happy; we’ll never really be at peace. That’s why it so important, SO important, that we think it through and believe in ourselves for the right reason—because God has made us who we are. I know you didn’t come here thinking we would be talking about this, but I really think this is the real issue. What do you think?”

“I think you could be right. It’s sounds right. But how do you just believe in yourself?”

“You don’t just believe in yourself. You believe in yourself for the right reason—because God has made you who you are. It’s true, Don. Let’s think it through. God is God. God is behind everything; He has His plan for everything that happens in His world. And God’s plan for everything is also His plan for you. How you started in this world, what happened next, and next, and after that. So far you *are* who God has made you. AND, since God is God, there’s no way that He put less into making you than He put into His other children, no way. Now, I realize that this is not always obvious, but, hey, compared to what we going to be in heaven the differences between us here are nothing; they’re just differences God is using to make us into the “seeds” of someone different... so heaven won’t be filled with the same person. Listen, Don, I realize I’m suddenly asking you for a lot of faith, but do you think you have a future trying to feel good about yourself through other people?”

“No.”

Kirk and Don talked some more about this point. Kirk acknowledged that it is a lot easier to talk about it than to live it, especially if a pretty person you can see is smiling in your face. But if I *need* this kind of attention, even if it means I am going to betray somebody I say I care about, or do something I say I don't believe in... where's the future in that?

"OK," said Kirk, "are we agreed that God is the way to go?"

"Yes," said Don.

"OK, then there are certain things that you can do to go with God. First, even if it hurts, you have to make good choices and let go of attention that you don't need. Are we really agreed about this?"

"Yeah."

"That's the first thing. But there's more. The way you believe in yourself for the reason right is to pay attention, not to what other people might be thinking, but to what *you* are thinking, and to catch yourself when you are comparing yourself to others, or criticizing yourself for something you can't change. When this happens you say NO. This is wrong. There is no point to this."

Now, Kirk started fooling with some papers. "And I can give you something that will help you remember this," said Kirk. It's a cool little memory thing; I got it from the net."

This is what Kirk gave Don:

No2C's

How We Practice the Love of Self

The two **c's** are **comparing** ourselves to others and **criticizing** ourselves for what we cannot do, or have done and cannot change. We say "no" to this on account of our faith.

Clearly and absolutely, our faith proclaims to us that God's plan for everything is also God's plan for us, and that He has put His whole self into making us, and no less than He has put into the making of anyone else.

Yes, our life is a struggle, but it's a special struggle that is meant to form us into the seed of a special person who will have a place in heaven no one else can fill.

And it does not matter that the world cannot see this—now.

Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)

Don liked No2C's. He also liked it when Kirk suggested that he come back in a week and tell him how things were going. As he walked out the door and around back to get to his car, he had the funny feeling his life had changed.

Don still felt this way three days later when doing his job required him to dump another job on the desk of one of his

colleagues. This guy wasn't too happy about it, and he was nasty to Don and even a little personal. (He was known for that.) Don kept his cool, stood his ground, and then walked away. As he walked away he started to apply his No2C's and then suddenly he was struck with an insight of his own. "If I don't care what this guy thinks of me," he thought, "what does his BS do to me?" "Wow," thought Don some more, "the only way other people's judgments can get you is if you choose to care. You have to *choose* to care. But why do that? Better to pay attention to what *God* is thinking. I'm gonna tell Kirk I thought of this. That will make him a little happy."

Don's story did make Kirk happy, and more than just a little. He wished he could always be this happy, that he always felt successful. But this was not the case. And when it wasn't—because he had tried hard to accomplish something and people just didn't respond—Kirk struggled with the feeling that he was no good.

It wasn't that he was worried about how he looked. This *was* his problem, in the beginning. But he talked to Father Mike about it and, as far as he was concerned, he had learned to practice what he now preached to people like Don. The problem was not that he was worried about how he looked, the problem was that he too often felt that he was not a good spiritual leader. He decided to go back to Father Mike and get his opinion.

He explained his feelings to Father Mike—his fear that he was not a good spiritual leader—and Father Mike's first question surprised him: "So what if you're not?"

"So what if I'm not?" This was about as far from what Kirk was hoping to hear as he might have imagined.

"So what if you're not?"

"Then I should get out."

"You feel the Church would be better off without you?"

"Well, yes, I guess, if I am taking a *good* spiritual leader's place."

"Who would that be?"

"Who?"

"The good spiritual leader you are keeping out of Saint Gert's."

"There must be someone."

"That's funny; there's wasn't when you were asked to go there."

"Come on, Father, just because they didn't have anybody to send doesn't make me a good spiritual leader."

"OK, what good work are you *not* doing? I mean, what good work that you could realistically do, are you not doing?"

"Filling the church. Getting through to all the people that come my way. Making them see that there's nothing better than faith. Saving marriages. I could go on."

"I guess you could go on, Kirk, but all you're really telling me is that you can't do magic. Think about it. You say you want to fill your church. Fill it with who? Those people out there, where do you think they've been. They've got a whole

life in their little worldly world. Do you really think there's anyone who can undo that talking to them *once*?"

Kirk had no answer. Father Mike went on.

"And by the way, how long have you been at it? How long have you been serving? How long have you been where you are, in the very rough neighborhood where you are?"

Now, finally, Kirk spoke up. "I understand what you're saying, but I have to think that someone else can still do better."

"So you're comparing yourself to some magically talented someone else?"

"Comparing." This word stood out. It wasn't that long ago—it was never very long ago—that Kirk had asked someone else *not* to do this, not to do it on account of our faith. Father Mike had got him. But he was happy to be got.

The conversation got freer. "But, man, sometimes it seems that you do everything right and still..."

"I know. Don't you think it happens to me too? This is just where we are. We've talked about this before. This is a time of transition like nothing else we've ever seen. The world is moving from childhood into adulthood and, well, you know what comes in between. This is the adolescence of the human race. And you know how goofy kids can be, so full of themselves that they don't know what's good for them. But God has got us this far. We'll get through it."

Kirk was happy he went to see Father Mike. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that he was guilty of the same sin of comparing that he had asked others to avoid. And then he realized something else: Like so many of the people he himself counseled, he was trying to get his idea of himself from others. He realized that it would be better to do what he urged other people to do: Do your best as God gives it, and be thrilled that you are you playing an irreplaceable role in His plan.

Kirk continued to perceive successes and failures, but now he was more peaceful about the failures. Indeed, now that he was more peaceful, he was more honest with himself about how things were going. This way he would keep looking for a better way to do things.

One thing he never did differently was "The Eight Points of Parenting," always the big attention getter at baptism class. As always, the class was open to anyone. He had learned to see the baptism of an infant as a way to at least try to receive a whole family into the Church.

One particular evening the class was quite full. Kirk had spoken, he thought, quite well. People reacted to the right things at the right times. This was one of those times that he felt for sure that he was a good spiritual leader. And when class was over and it was time to close up, it became clear to him that one of the participants had stolen his pen.

As expected, Father Mike got a great laugh out of it.

Father Mike laughed a lot. But not always.

He told others that everyone's life is a struggle, and this was also true of his.

His struggle was with the attention that others got for lesser ideas. Father Mike was a spiritual writer, you see, and he

thought he was a good one. Other people thought so too—the people who knew about him. The problem was that not that many people knew about him—and he thought that “everyone” should know about him. Making matters worse, he himself knew of numerous other writers, and other influential or at least famous people, who had not heard of him. “This was wrong,” he told himself, “because people are getting _____ when they could be getting steak.”

Out of his great care for the spiritual well-being of the world, he told himself, he kept working to get his ideas out. He left no stone unturned, and he was not too proud to appeal to any person he thought could help.

Now he turned Father Frank, his friend from their days in school, who only recently had achieved the fame that both of them had once looked at from a distance.

He reminded his friend of the beauty of his ideas, told the tale of his frustration, and then he said “if only...”

“If only?” he was cut off in mid-sentence.

“If only. Why?”

“But isn’t one of your great ideas that we should never say ‘if only?’”

“Sure, sure... when it’s ‘if only this I would be happy, if only that everything would be alright.’ That *is* wrong because as I *do* say, we were made for life with God and nothing here will ever fill us. To get one thing is always to want another. But because people don’t know this they suffer, they suffer envy; they don’t appreciate what they have.”

“Didn’t you also write that it is also wrong to say ‘but?’”

“Yes, but I was saying ‘but only this and then I would want for nothing more.’ And this *is* an illusion like thinking that you can get to the horizon.”

“*But* I was saying.... Isn’t that another ‘but?’”

“This has to do with sparing people pain.”

“And people will have no more pain ‘if only’ they know this?”

“Their lives will be better.”

“Certainly, but won’t there be a new spiritual problem for them to struggle with?”

Father Mike didn’t have an easy answer to that one.

“Listen, Mike, I know what frustration is like. How long did it take *me* to get people to talk about *my* ideas? It was hard sometimes. And I was envious at times, when everyone was talking about somebody else’s ideas... especially the dumb ones. And now things are better—but hardly perfect. And now I want new things just as much as I wanted attention before. That’s what you write about. And I know that you’re right.”

Father Mike did listen, and he couldn’t NOT see it. He even saw what his friend was trying to tell him without having to say it: The ‘if only’ in his case was really fame.

Fame. Wow. Looking for worth in the attention of people you don’t even know. Comparing yours to other’s work.

Setting your heart on something of this world... as if it would last... as if it could fill you up....

Not for the first time did Father Mike realize that the solution to his own spiritual problem was something he had said with conviction many times to others. Now he knew what he must work on, leaving no stone unturned.

This was precisely his thought when into his head popped an image of Napoleon. "Except for a few tourists, who else is thinking about him now?" Father Mike asked himself. "And what good does it do him?"

Father Frank told the truth. He had told his friend that now he wanted new things just as much as he wanted attention before. But he had not told him—nor was he asked—what he now wanted. If he had been asked, he would have said, "not to be hated." This was the price of proposing new ideas. The hatred mostly came by mail.

On one particular occasion—it was not the first time—Father Frank was complaining about this to his own father. On this occasion, his father had heard enough. "So you want everyone to like you?"

"That's not it. It just hurts to see other people so disturbed... when I'm really trying to help them... to give them a faith they have a chance to pass on to their children."

"Do you really suffer so much the 'disturbances' of people you don't even know?"

No answer.

"I think you just want everyone to like you."

Father Frank was not too happy to be corrected. After all, he was a big thinker and now he was even famous. His working-class father—his own father!—had caught him being childish. He was trying to get his worth from other people. He was supposed to know better than that.

Thinking this through in the car on his way home, he was probably a bit distracted. He drifted left into the path of the car that was trying to pass him. That driver had a horn and used it; and he used his mouth and a gesture too. "And there's another guy that doesn't like me," he said to himself. And slowly he started to smile. His father had been right.

Father Frank's father knew what he was talking about. He hadn't studied much but he knew about life. And he knew a little something about the need for everyone to like you. He knew that it came from insecurity. And he knew about that too. Like everyone else in this world, he had struggled with it. In his case, his main symptom was the inability to let go of any girl's attention. This was starting to cause him problems. Finally, he went to see his parish priest, whatever his name was. He got help to see the truth. He learned to let attention go. And he knew that if he had not, Father Frank's mother would never have married him.

If you would like to receive No2C's electronically, go to thefaitkkit.org and "Check Out The Faith Kit."

To read a story about "The Eight Points of Parenting," go to thefaitkkit.org/panorama and read the first of the "Letters to Theophilus."

To read more about Father Frank, go thefaitkkit.org/panorama2 and click on "Essence."