

This is a great time to be young! Those of us who are no longer young look back on days when we were children, and teenagers; and things were quite different then. Now if we're feeling nostalgic, we may refer to our times as "the good old days" – and many of us have happy memories of times that seemed a little more relaxed than they are today. But there were some "not so good" elements to life back then, and certainly many advantages for young people today that weren't available to us.

Of course there are pressures and difficulties today we didn't face. But the advantages are many: better information around health and nutrition; better information, facilities and support for parents raising their families; much more diversity in education and career options, good food, better sporting facilities, huge advances in medicine and technology; and of course, Park the Kids! This is a great time to be young!

I. Good Advice!

One of the tendencies we discover as we grow older is the need to pass on good advice to the next generation. Now I know this can be frustrating for those on the receiving end; I can just remember how I felt as a teenager! The good advice I want to pass on this morning is not my own; it comes from the Bible, and while it's relevant to those who are young, there is a message from these great passages for all of us.

Solomon is remembered today for his great wisdom, recorded in the books he wrote. Ecclesiastes is an interesting book, the reflections of an old man, expressing some regret for not always having lived himself according to the good advice he now shares with those who are younger. I loved what Allen Meyer said at the Men's Dinner recently (and I wish I could remember it exactly). It went something like this: "Experience isn't your best teacher. Your best teacher is the idiot who just did what you are thinking of doing!" We're wise when we learn from the mistakes of other.

Solomon says

A. "Remember Your Creator..."

...in the days of your youth." If Solomon was around today, and writing now what he wrote back then, he'd probably be classified as a "grumpy old man!" He's not too happy about life as it is for him now. And many of us can relate to him! Not too many of us found ourselves improving physically when we reached fifty! Or forty! Or thirty-five! Solomon sounds a bit pessimistic: "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years approach when you will say "I find no pleasure in them."¹

Even if we don't want to sound as gloomy, or grumpy, as Solomon, we want to say to our young people, "Enjoy life where you are today. Make the most of this time. Enjoy life, but don't forget

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:1

God, don't leave him out as you experience the good things life offers. He created all these good things. It works a whole lot better when you follow his instructions for enjoying them."

Paul has a bit of a reputation for handing out good advice, and he had plenty for young Timothy just starting out in Christian service. He said, more or less, "It's great to be young! Don't let anyone look down on you for this." And he went on to tell Timothy to

B. Be an Example!²

We shouldn't miss the significance of this. We usually expect those who are older to be role models for those who are younger; and of course this is right. But Paul gives us a different perspective. Those who are young have an opportunity, and a responsibility, to be examples and role models to us "oldies!" Have you ever thought about that?

Park the Kids shows us this in practice. Our teenagers at Park the Kids are great role models for the children; but what an example they are to us who are older! They work together beautifully. They bring their different gifts together, so the team functions efficiently, as each person plays their part. Paul would be proud! This is how the church is supposed to function, he tells us; and our teenagers set an example the rest of us can follow.

Let's note the ways Paul tells us young people can be an example others can follow. It's quite a list! Let me challenge our young people to be examples, firstly...

... **in speech**. Think about how you speak; not only the things you say, the words you use, the words you *don't* use; but also things like tone of voice. You can be role models to adults, to your parents, in the way you speak. You can be an example...

... **in life**; in the way you live. What are you like to live with at home? How do you conduct yourself at school? With your friends? Playing sport? What about being an example...

... **in love**? Again, the obvious starting place is at home, and the way you show love to your parents and siblings. Paul writes to Timothy about his role in the church; we're also called to love the people in our church. And of course there are our other relationships; the ones we have now; the ones we hope to have in the future. Will those who observe us be encouraged in their relationships by what they see in us? Young people can be a real encouragement to us all...

... **in faith**; and by the way they live out their faith. I want to thank our young people, on behalf of the church, for the way we see you putting your faith into practice. One of the things that encourages us most, as we grow older, is to see another generation "taking the baton" of faith and running with it. One of the challenges for those who are older, is acknowledging the growth and maturity of this emerging generation, and relaxing our grip on the baton!

Paul lists one more element, and it's a big one! Young people are called to be examples...

² 1 Timothy 4:12

...**in purity**. It's no good us "oldies" moaning about the decline in standards we see around us; in speech, morality and sexuality. It happened on our watch! We should have done more. We should have been better examples ourselves! The next generation is growing up under conditions we helped establish. How will they, how will you...respond? Will you continue the slide? Or will you be the example a watching world needs of Christian purity in your lives and relationships?

One last piece of good advice, from an Old Testament prophet, not specifically for young people, but relevant to us all. Micah wrote to God's people at a time when spiritually, things were pretty bad. They were still going through the motions of worshipping God, but their behaviour and lifestyles were a long way from what God required. Is that a danger for us today?

In Old Testament times, worship was built around sacrifice; what the people brought with them when they came to the temple to worship. Micah told them plainly, God was not pleased; and he lists three things they needed to attend to, in

II. Living to Please God.³

Times have changed, but we all, young and old alike, do well to note these things, and practice them, as we seek to please God today. Firstly, we are to

A. "Act Justly;" or in my words this morning, we should –do the right thing.

There will always be a place and a need for education. But I don't think our primary problem these days, at least for those in the church, is ignorance; it's disobedience. It's not that we don't know what's right; it's that doing the right thing often runs contrary to what we want to do.

God is not impressed when we turn up for worship on Sunday, regardless of how well we "do" it, if we habitually do the *wrong* thing on the other six days.

Let's note in its Old Testament context, "acting justly" includes treating well those whom society and circumstances had treated poorly; especially those disadvantaged in some way. Issues of social justice had a central place in God's expectations then, as they do today.

God's people, young and old, are to

B. "Love Mercy"; put simply, we're to be kind.

This isn't rocket science, is it? God's expectations of us aren't hard to understand; they may not be easy to practise consistently. While kindness, or "mercy" should begin as an attitude in our hearts, there is a practical requirement here, taught throughout the New Testament. Again, the obvious places for us to begin with this are in our homes and our church. Let's treat kindly, and

³ See Micah 6:8

Speak kindly to those around us. But let's not stop there. Where we have enough, we are expected to share with others in need.

And it shouldn't stop with our friends. Paul tells us, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."⁴ Not only are we to do these simple acts of kindness; we're to *love* them! What a privilege to represent our kind and merciful God in the way we treat others! Last point (you've probably already filled this one in!) We are to

C. Walk Humbly with Our God (we are to give God his rightful place.)

Micah's first two points speak of the way we relate to others; here he speaks of our relationship with God. He is God; we are his creation. He knows everything; we know some things (but not as much as we often think we do!) He is the great provider; we are great consumers! He is self-sufficient; we need his constant presence to sustain us. He is sovereign; we are his subjects.

Micah reminds us we are on a journey; we're wise if we walk with God; not run ahead or lag behind. We should walk with him; not head off where we want to go and ask him to walk with us. He is our God and our Father. We know something of his great love and compassion for us. Why wouldn't we walk with him, in gratitude and humility?

Way back then, Micah wrote something that is even more true for us today, than it was when he wrote it for the people back then. He wrote, "He has shown us... what is good..."

He certainly has! Our God is not a grumpy, know-it-all God, who sits in heaven handing out good advice! He has shown us what is good; firstly, through his word and his dealings with his people in Old Testament times; and now, more completely, in his Son, Jesus.

What an example he was, as he lived among us. He spoke words of kindness, healing and compassion. He lived a life without fault, without sin. He demonstrated love for us that has become the benchmark for real love; he died to set us free. His faith and trust in God was absolute, as was the purity of his life and behavior. So much more than just good advice. Jesus has shown us how we should live.

He always "did the right thing." He "loved mercy" and treated people with kindness. He walked humbly with God, in spite of the cost, all the way to the cross. He has shown us what is good; and he's shown us it can be done.

Now it's our turn.

⁴ Romans 12:20