

The Bible's advice to the young

Various scriptures

Dwight Moody was the foremost evangelist of the 1800s in the U.S. One time he had a campaign and the next morning he was talking with a pastor. The guy asks: "Did you save any souls last night?" Moody answered, "yes, Two and a half." The guy smiled, and said, "you mean two adults and one child?" Moody answered, "no, I mean two children and one adult." Moody understood that a child who determines to live for God is giving his or her whole life to God. An adult who does the same thing has already lived half his life.

There are churches where they will not admit the salvation of a child. They say she is too young to know what she's doing. Jesus says the opposite:

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not

receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Mark 10:13-15)

Jesus not only encourages children to express faith, He says it's the highest example of faith. Is it any surprise he used young people so often:

- David
- Daniel
- Ezekiel
- Jeremiah
- Mary
- Naaman's slave girl
- Josiah

So the Bible has things to say specifically to young people. Lots of things. More than we can cover in a single message, but here's some of them.

Seek God sooner rather than later

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"—
(Ecclesiastes 12:1)

People associate the energy and forthright manner of the young with sin. This is not the best way to think. Rather, it is important to

realize that God can use your energy. He can use your decisiveness. Many people in the Bible began special work for God when they were young, some very young indeed.

Some people think doing bad things is fun, and it can be. But it comes with a high price both spiritually and sometimes physically as well. People think they should take time while they are younger and do as they please, before they have no choice but to settle down. They think, later they'll follow God, because that's not as exciting as the things they want to do now.

Solomon, as an older man, is writing Ecclesiastes, and he says that's a bad idea. Instead he says you should be seeking God as early as possible. It is a very normal thing for people to get older and to have regrets. They usually regret not doing things they wish they had done. I have heard a number of people say, "I wish I had given my life to God sooner.

Here's the thing. A younger person can do things and go places that are harder for an older person. Also, younger people tend to be more optimistic. They want to try new things and big things. Older people get jaded, weighted down by what they think has

already been tried or what is even possible. Our experience is good, but it can also stifle our opinions.

The other hard truth is that as we get older, we slow down. We're less able to do things and experience lots more health problems. Solomon is letting you know that pursuing God when you are younger is a lot more fun. You feel better while you're doing whatever He wants you to do. You can do it when you get older, but putting energy, enthusiasm and all the good health you have behind it is just more enjoyable.

So look to God while you are young. When you get older, you'll be glad you did. And while you're younger, you'll find living for God provides a great deal of adventure and opportunities to do great things.

Live according to God's code the same as everyone else

All Christians have the same book, the same guide to help us through life. It is the Bible. What applies to one person applies to everyone. While people of different genders and different ages may have various practical responsibilities, the moral rules are the same.

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. (Psalms
119:9)

I won't try to hoodwink you. The Bible is a big book and it's not always easy to read or to understand what you should take away from it. Sometimes I read a passage and think, this must have some importance for me later, because right now, I just don't get it.

On the other hand, many things are pretty straight forward. The ten commandments are easy to understand and take a life-time to master. Most other dos and don'ts in the Bible are related in one way or another to the ten commandments and help us to understand them more thoroughly. Jesus teaches us that we have to even move beyond the ten commandments in our moral understanding, to get to the point beneath the command and obey the spirit. He said it's not enough to avoid killing people, we have to avoid even hating people.

It is at times easy and at other times complicated, but we all have the same challenge. If you stick with the Bible, it will be a life-long companion for you. The more you read it the better you'll know it. The better you know it the more likely you will be to find help

from it when you need it.

The writer of the psalm is encouraging you to let the Bible be your guide in all your behavior. Learning what God wants done will help you overcome temptation and do the right thing in all kinds of circumstances. Get a Bible, read it, and keep reading it. It will help you know the right thing to do.

Paul helped his young friend Timothy understand how the moral code of God applies to young people:

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

The “code” of Christianity is not just dry rules in a book. It’s a living exercise in trying to be like Jesus, copying the goodness of God as much as we can. It seems to go without saying, but God is good, sin is bad, and if we want to copy God’s goodness, we have to avoid sin and find the good things we can do. We read the Bible partially to learn what sin is, but the challenge comes with living above sin in order to do actively good things.

Here’s what you need to know about being young. Sin looks for you. It hunts you down

like a predator and tries to capture and destroy you. The Bible specifically describes Satan as a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. You are caught in the crosshairs because younger people are more ready to try things than older people who tend to be more careful. And sin looks attractive, it looks bold, and impetuous, it looks dangerous. It looks like something strong people do. So younger people are drawn to it. They want to be seen as bold and strong. However, it's important to remember that it's often the greater challenge to do the right thing than the wrong thing. It may look like a bad thing demonstrates strength, but it's usually the path of least resistance. Picking on a smaller person may look strong, because you are physically stronger than the smaller person, but loving them is the right thing to do even though it's less flashy. Fighting may look strong, because it's easy to see physical muscles, but bringing peace into a situation is actually much harder and it's the right thing to do. It actually does take a stronger person to do the harder thing. The truth is, the most difficult things in life do not always get the most attention or recognition. The strength required is not always evident.

In short, you are going to be tempted to do

wrong things: things to do with sex, violence, deception, and betraying God. All of us face these temptations, but younger people will face them more. Paul is simply telling Timothy, when you face these temptations, run away from them. Go the opposite direction. People will want you to do things that are bad for you and bad for others. They'll want you to do sinful things. Don't do it. Get out of the situation as effectively as you can.

Don't use youth as an excuse

Toddlers learn early what "he's tired" means. It means he can be fussy and uncooperative, and others will excuse him by saying, "he's tired." And it starts out true. But by the time a toddler understands that it's true, he starts using it to his advantage. When somebody gets on his case about fussiness, he says, "I'm tired."

Adults do this too. They find things that are acceptable to other people and use them as excuses to get what they want. In our age, popular psychology excuses some inappropriate behavior, like sexual promiscuity, or poor decision making, by saying young people's brains are still

developing. After awhile young people figure out that they have a well accepted excuse. They start using these excuses that have been handed to them on a silver platter by the people who are supposed to be the responsible members of society teaching them the right thing to do.

Don't do it. Sure, your brain is still developing, but that doesn't mean anyone thinks you're stupid. This is the most formative time of your life. As your brain develops, it will develop along the paths you cultivate. You get to choose. A developing brain does not keep anyone from expecting you to learn math or writing, and it does not excuse you from learning good moral decision making. Paul tells his young protegee':

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

Paul says not only are you not to use your youth as an excuse for sin, instead you are to be an example to everyone. Look at the five ways Paul says you can be an example:

- The way you talk: using clean language, speaking the truth, being encouraging and uplifting to others, showing kindness
- The way you live: honestly, working hard, being fair, with integrity, promoting peace
- Showing love: helping others, being generous, being gentle instead of harsh, being humble enough to consider others first, serving other people, helping the helpless
- Exercising faith: Praying often, learning the Scriptures, sharing Jesus with others, involving yourself with the Church, believing and acting on the promises of God, accepting His forgiveness
- Being pure: This is about sin in general. Often we associate it with sexual sin, and that's legit, but it applies to all kinds of sin. Paul is simply saying be an example to others by keeping yourself unstained by sin.

Your opportunity here goes beyond doing the right thing to being an example. Timothy was a younger guy in a position not just to be an example to people younger than he was, but to older people too. Let your determination to live faithfully to God be an inspiration to everyone around you, maybe even your parents and adult role models.

Jeremiah tried to use his age as an excuse to get out of following God:

But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. (Jeremiah 1:7)

Age does not exempt you from obeying God in everything. God promised Jeremiah, and promises everyone that when we follow Him, He will be beside us all the way. He will help us know what to do and what to say. He will help us avoid sin and know the right thing to do.

It applies to old and young alike. Now is the time to decide that when sin and temptation come along, you're going to avoid it. Now is the time to begin a full understanding of what it means to do and to be good. Don't wait till you're older, because you can waste a lot of time between now and then ... and you never know where your life path is going to lead you.

Now is the time to dedicate yourself to God. Now is the time to determine in your heart that you are going to follow Him, no matter what.