

The Gospel and Young People

Youth plays a significant part in the life of our world today.

We know that young people have played important roles in the changes in the world: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the defiance in Tiananmen Square, protests against war and poverty, the technological revolution and the rise of social media, to name but a few.

In the world of fashion, and especially in Western countries, youth is well catered for. Here is a big spending group that so many advertisers seek to attract, and no day goes by without reports of youth in trouble, in drug taking, sex issues and violence. Many young people in these countries are succumbing to the temptations of a materialistic society and look for short-term “kicks” out of life, whatever the risks.

However, this is only part of the scene. We must underline the fact that so many young people of our generation have fine ideals, are willing to lend a hand, and are clean-living individuals, working firmly with a purpose in view. We simply cannot generalise and put youth in one category, any more than we can predict what all middle-aged or elderly people in our society will do or not do. What meaning does life hold

for this important part of our world’s population?

They will inherit a world which has an increasing emphasis on material values. Wise men and women can see that the bubble of prosperity could one day burst, resulting in uncertainty and often unmanageable economic trouble. We can add to this social change and unrest, and a lack of trust in political leadership.



Seeking Direction?

What sound, sane advice can the Christian faith give to the young person anywhere in the world, whether in Europe, Australia, India, USA, Africa or elsewhere? We can say with confidence that anyone seeking a purpose in life should turn to the Bible, whatever their age. A Bible-based faith is directed by God and the Bible has a crystal-clear message. It tells us:

- ❖ why our world is so sick
- ❖ what is the challenge of Christ
- ❖ what real believers must do today
- ❖ where our world is heading
- ❖ where we can be heading.

In short it gives to all, young and old, a message of hope and confidence; a

chart for navigating the treacherous and difficult waters of life.

For young people in particular, note the wise words written by Solomon 3000 years ago, but still valid:

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

This is a call to action. Put God first and remember Him even when we are young; make it an early habit to practise belief in Him. This will ensure a growing awareness of His purpose in our world, and in our personal lives.

Jesus showed the way. We read of him at the age of 12 years, asking questions and discussing with the wise men of Jerusalem.

Now so it was that after three days they [his parents] found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. So when they saw him, they were amazed; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I have sought you anxiously." And he said to them, "Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:46-49).

The Challenge

The Bible says that the world is sick because it has turned its back on the true God. Disobedience to God brings only suffering and, ultimately, death. The ills of today's world are brought about in part by men and women



ignoring God and His purpose. Many deny His existence and will mock those who do believe.

The challenge of Jesus Christ is to think for ourselves; to study the Bible and learn to obey God and put Him first. The Gospel says that there must be repentance for sin, and belief and baptism into His family. Then we try to follow Jesus' example and live God-centred lives.

There are so many gems of thought in the Bible, particularly applicable to youth. The Apostle Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, a young man who believed the Gospel and was trying to please God, working in several of the early churches. He told Timothy not to let his youth be an obstacle, but to put his energy to good use:

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Timothy 4:12).

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:1-3).

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing [handling (ESV)] the word of truth (v15).

He also explained that we must accept God's Word as it is the guide to right living and being equipped for life.

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

It is of great benefit to spend an hour with the Apostle Paul and to read these two letters. They contain wonderful advice for a young man or woman.



Warnings and Help

There is a particular passage in 2 Timothy which gives a remarkably accurate picture of our days, as well as those of 2,000 years ago.

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be

lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Other modern versions translate the perilous times as “times of stress”, and that is part of our modern society, as well as loving money, being disobedient to parents, being lovers of pleasure. In particular, these days it is common for men and women to have a form of religion – moral codes or belief systems – whilst denying the divine power which should be behind them.

What is the answer that the Apostle Paul offers? It is a call for all of us to get back to the Bible; to let it instruct and direct us. By putting our trust in God, we can have firm faith and purpose in our activity.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching (4:1-2).

Young Examples

The Bible sets practical standards by which we are able to judge whether or not something is right or wrong. The standard is, ‘What does the Bible say?’ or ‘What would Jesus do?’. It is full of examples from the life of Jesus, and also of other godly people, many of them young. We can read about how, even under stress, they remembered

God's principles and put them into practice.

There are some fascinating stories to inspire us to action. The tale of Joseph and his adventures tells about the 17-year-old favourite son of Jacob, who underwent severe trials in



slavery and prison. But he kept his faith in God, and ultimately was greatly blessed in Egypt. You can read this story in Genesis chapters 37 to 46.

David, who would later become king of Israel, spent much of his youth as an outlaw. As a young man, he went through the highs and lows of life: from adulation after he killed Goliath to depression as a fugitive when he was chased into exile. He stood firm, trusting his God in spite of great stress and physical threat. Read about it in 1 Samuel chapter 16, 17 and onward... you won't be able to stop reading! David's advice is clear:

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word (Psalm 119:9).

Young women also feature in the Bible as examples of godliness. Two great stories of this are found in the Books of Ruth and Esther; each can be read easily at a sitting.

Ruth gives inspiration to us, especially if we have been brought up in a

home without Christian principles. She was a Gentile who learnt to love and believe the God of Israel. She married into His people and promises, and became an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Esther was a devoted Jewish girl who remained faithful even when confronted with difficult and dangerous situations. She was part of His plan to look after His people after she rose to a powerful position as queen in a Persian court.

We could go on, with lesson after lesson in how a young believer can succeed in a difficult world. In the examples given, we have the message of practical faithfulness where the believer was able to judge whether or not a course of action was right or wrong, and decide how to respond to events around them. The key is reading and following God's Word.



As we said at the start, these messages are as valid for the old as for the young. Whether we read our Bible on a tablet, computer, smartphone or as the traditional book, let's absorb its message and put it prayerfully into practice.

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