

Set, Look, Fix and Run - Wisdom for Young and Old

I struggled this week trying to find the word I was to share this morning. I wrote one sermon on Friday and then Friday evening I sat down and began to write down some additional thoughts that turned into this message. By the time I'm done you may want to take a look at the one I'm not preaching today. I subtitled this message, "wisdom for young and old." David said he had been young and then he was old and he had never seen the righteous forsaken. I suppose it depends on the year you were born as to whether I'm young or old, but I think I'm starting to understand what David was talking about.

It's been an interesting journey these past few years for me. I'm still trying to understand and sort out all that I experienced and learned in caring for my parents and watching the aging process occur up close and personal. But given that experience plus my own birthday a couple of Sundays ago and I have to admit I've started to see things a bit differently. I've noticed that the Scriptures speak uniquely into the various seasons of our lives.

Turn with me to Colossians 3 and let me show you what I'm talking about. Let's see if we can find the wisdom for the young and the old.

SET

The bible says, "**Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.**" Colossians 3:1-2.

Here is the first point of the sermon title. Set. Paul is pointing out that we have found new birth and a new life in Christ, consequently we are going to live a new way. He tells us to set our heart and our mind on things above. He is referring to our affection, our desires. In the later verses he tells us to put to death certain things we used to chase after and to lay aside certain things that are no longer pleasing to God. Endeavor to go after the things that please God and reflect the nature and character of God. You are a new person, a new creation and part of a new kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, consequently, you need to embrace the values of the kingdom of heaven rather than the values of the world. Set your heart and your mind on things above. Direct your attention toward heavenly things.

When you are young, setting your mind on things above establishes values for the journey. You are deciding how you are going to live in this world, as a teenager, as a high

school grad, as a college grad starting a career, as a single person on your own, as a young couple starting a family. You are deciding which principles and values will guide and influence your life and all your decisions. You are making decisions that will ultimately reflect where your heart and your affection have been set. Will I set my heart and affection on obtaining money and power and influence? Will I pay any price to have those things, including sacrificing relationships or biblical commandments? Or will you set your mind on heavenly things, deciding that you are going to please God and obey his word – deciding that you want what heaven wants and you will reject what heaven rejects? Setting your heart and mind on heavenly things will give you the values you need to make wise choices for your life.

But what about us older folks? We are still living by those heavenly values, but many of those decisions have already been made. **When you are older those values keep us from falling into fear or regret.** You see, we are tempted to start looking back wondering if we missed it somewhere. Not much money, not much in the way of fame or fortune, but we are reminded it never was about fame or fortune, it was about obedience and trust. It was about living by the values of the king and his kingdom, being faithful to live as he instructed us to live. If we've done that, we can't be filled with regret.

When you are older those values of the kingdom help us make decisions about how we will finish the journey. We aren't panicked about retirement because our life is not just about a job, it isn't just about what we did for a living or the income we made, it was and is about living for Jesus. We aren't desperately scratching and clawing, trying to hold onto life here because we know that heaven is ahead for us. Those kingdom values we've embraced all along the journey are the values that now allow us to approach the final seasons of our lives without fear or regret. We hear about dying with dignity in our culture. I want to embrace the values of the kingdom so I can live with dignity and then I just want to die full of expectation and faith!

When you are young, setting your mind on things above establishes boundaries for the journey. When you decide that you are going to love what God loves and you set your heart and mind on things above, you are in essence choosing to live between the boundaries of his mercy and love. Jesus said concerning the road of life, **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.**

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

Matthew 7:13-14. You must have boundaries to keep you from wandering off the road and into trouble. You don't know all that is ahead in life and there will be lots of challenges and ups and downs, but keeping your heart set on heavenly things will keep you from straying off the path. It will keep you from landing in a ditch you can't get out of.

Those boundaries that were formed as we set our mind and heart upon the Lord, **When you are older, those boundaries help maintain our focus.** As we grow older and realize that there are more years behind us than before us, those boundaries help us focus and refine our efforts. It's easy to wander off the path as new concerns and worries begin to crowd our thinking. I've seen young and older Christians alike wander off the path that leads to life because their focus shifted from heaven to the cares and worries of this life. As we mature, I hope we see the need to work ever more wisely and invest all we can in the mission and purpose of heaven.

When you are young, setting your mind on things above establishes the direction for the journey. All these possibilities, all these roads set before you, potential in every direction, but setting your mind and heart upon heavenly things insures that regardless of other choices and decisions, you will always be heading toward heaven and home. There are so many voices calling, so many opportunities in life, but you need to always ask the question, **Does that path lead toward heaven and home?** Setting your mind on things above provides a compass for your journey.

When you are older, setting your mind on things above keeps your heart from being troubled. Jesus said in the last days (and as we grow older we realize we are coming to our own personal last days) men's hearts would fail them for fear. But then to us, those who have placed our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, he said, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going...I am the way, and the truth and the life.”**

John 14:1-6 We know the way because we know Jesus. We've been walking with him and walking in that way for a long time and because of that our hearts aren't troubled, not at any season of life. For the young and old alike we set our hearts on heaven and we are heading in

that direction that is always toward Jesus and home.

LOOK

The second word in the title is look. Turn to Hebrews 11:13. Speaking of the patriarchs and their children, the bible says, **“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” Hebrews 11:13-16**

These folks were looking for another city, a heavenly city. That’s part of what happens when we receive Christ as Savior and lord of our life. We become citizens of a heavenly kingdom with a new identity. As a result, we live here on planet earth feeling a bit like strangers and aliens, like we know somehow this isn’t really our home. There is another country where we belong and we will know it when we get there.

So we start out on this heavenly journey, walking with Jesus towards that heavenly home. He is the example and guide that leads us and we take up our cross and follow him. **When you are young, starting out on this journey with Jesus, there is a great sense of purpose.** I know what my life is about at some deep, core-value level, it is about journeying towards God.

Acknowledging that we are on a journey with Jesus, towards heaven and home, once again informs our decisions and choices. We are committed to being good stewards of the planet and seeking justice and peace for all while we are here, but we also acknowledge that we are aliens and strangers with a heavenly citizenship. As we said earlier, our values have been determined by that heavenly citizenship. We are here but this is not our permanent home. There is a sense of determination that goes with that purpose. We will get there.

When you are older, looking for this heavenly city fills us with a sense of hopefulness. I’ve been on this journey for awhile now and I recognize the nearness of home. It lies just ahead. The result is not fear or dread. Instead there should be a joyful anticipation and a growing awareness of heaven and the presence of the Lord. I said a moment ago, I want to live with dignity and die full of faith and anticipation. At the end of the journey, I want my heart to

be filled with the hopefulness and anticipation of seeing Jesus and being with him in heaven. I want to be actively looking for his coming and looking for that city, that better country of which the writer spoke.

FIX

The third word in the title is fix. Hebrews 12:2 states, **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” Hebrews 12:2-3**

Fix your eyes on Jesus. **When you are younger, he is the example we follow, the author of our faith.** He is the initiator of all things and the one who brings new life, the new birth to us. We are born again through Christ and he is the author of our faith. It means he is the chief leader, the one who takes the lead and is our example in all things.

Fix your eyes on Jesus because he is the author of our faith. He is the one who begins anew telling the story of redemption through our life. He moves us forward in faith, growing, maturing, developing, learning, becoming this sanctified, redeemed child of God. He is an amazing author, telling an incredible story of how his saving love could transform us forever.

But he is also the finisher or perfecter of our faith. When you are young he is the example and the author, the beginning of it all. **When you grow older, you are grateful you know him as the finisher, the perfecter of our faith.** We rest in the assurance and the knowledge that he is faithful. He will bring this sanctifying, saving, redeeming journey of grace to its perfect completion. He will complete all things. He isn't about to leave you as you grow older. But keep in mind he hasn't stopped working on you. He is still maturing, growing, completing, redeeming, sanctifying you. If you have been saved for sixty years, there ought to have been some progress made. If not, it's not his fault and you've still got time. Get busy surrendering your heart and life to him and let him finish strong in your life. Don't grow weary and lose heart. Keep looking to Jesus. Set, look, fix.

RUN

The last word is run. Paul writes, **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” 1 Corinthians 9:24** Run

to get the prize. Remember that feeling when you were a child and you ran down a steep hill and you were just all arms and legs and feet? It was the feeling of being sort of out of control and it was scary and exhilarating and funny all at the same time? Then you learn as you go to run with greater discipline and control. And then you grow older and learn how to pace yourself and run for distance as speed starts to fade away.

Knees and hips and feet and ankles may affect the physical race, but all of us are still in this race, young and old alike. Run in such a way as to get the prize. Run with discipline. Run with faith. Run with focus. Don't waste your time and effort pursuing the things of life that don't matter in the face of eternity. Run so at the end you cross the finish line and find yourself in heaven. Because at the end of the day, that's all that really matters.

I'm not running any races any more, but I am running in such a way that I plan on getting the prize. I am in it to win it.