



A Word To the Young

Over the last few days I have felt compelled to write the following word to the youth who receive this publication. I ask you to prayerfully consider the things you will read. If you find any truth in what is written, then I admonish you to adjust your life accordingly. Do not waste your life!

Remember the Brevity of Life

The first man was created in the image of God. If he had submitted to the will of God, he would have been immortal. He would have passed through the years of his unending existence from strength to strength, without deterioration or decay. The passing of time would have brought him to greater levels of maturity, contentment, and joy. His existence would have abounded with purpose and glory.

With the advent of sin, all was lost, and man's existence became tragically twisted and deformed beyond recognition. Man became a mortal being of brief duration, weariness, and futility. He now lives his life until all vitality is drained away, all purpose is demolished, and the body finally returns to the dust from which it came. It is not without reason that the preacher cries out, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

As a young man or woman, you must constantly fight off the temptation to forget about the brevity of life and the vanity of even the longest life lived apart from God's will. You must learn from the Scriptures that your life is less than a vapor. You must become convinced of this truth, and then you must set it before you as a constant reminder. You are mortal and your days are numbered!

"As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no longer" (Psalm

103:15).

“...You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

You know the Scriptures are true. You know that death is a certainty for you. Every tombstone and eulogy bear witness to the inescapable reality that you are going to die. And yet, how is it that you so quickly forget and give yourself to the passing vanities of this life? It is because you are surrounded by a culture that does everything in its power to avoid any thought of the end of life. It is because the god of this age works with all his cunning to keep you entertained and distracted. It is because, although you have been redeemed, you still dwell in a body of fallen flesh that runs for all that is carnal and temporal. Knowing these things, you would do well to both memorize and often pray the prayer of David in Psalm 39:4:

“LORD, make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days; let me know how transient I am.

Keeping your mortality at the forefront of your thoughts is not for the purpose of being morbid or lamenting as those who have no hope, but to compel you to hope in Christ alone and to give yourself wholeheartedly to His will for your life. Only in Christ is the grave swallowed up in victory and temporal futility replaced by God’s eternal and glorious purpose for you.

Remember your Creator

Knowing something of the brevity of life, “How then shall we live?” The writer of Ecclesiastes answers this question for us in the form of a command:

“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth...” (12:1).

The word “remember” comes from the Hebrew word *zakar* which means to recall or call to mind. This command to remember God is calling you to more than a casual recollection that there is a God. Its requirements are not fulfilled by simply bowing your head every time you pass by a steeple, or even by attending church faithfully every time the doors are open. This is a radical and life changing command to know and understand the God of Scripture, to acknowledge His preeminence in all things, to seek His glory in all things, and to strive to obey Him in all things.

The great importance of this command becomes clear when you realize that in this fallen world you are constantly bombarded with temporal distractions designed to make you forget the worth of God and the joys of His will. Unless you purpose in your heart to remember God and use every means at your disposal to remain true to that purpose, you will fall into vanity and your life will be wasted! Consider carefully what I have written. I am not asking you to simply agree with me. I am pleading with you to purpose in your heart to fix your eyes on God as though your life depended upon it (for it does) and to actively, aggressively, even violently (Matthew 11:12) seek out and use every means at

your disposal to keep from being distracted and falling into the vanities of this fallen age!

It is important to note that the preacher of Ecclesiastes not only commands us to “remember God,” but he tells us the most convenient time to do so - in the days of our youth. It does little good to prepare for a battle at the end of the battle, or to wait until the last lap of the race to tie on one’s running shoes. Likewise, it is a ridiculous notion (found in the head of many young people) that one should delay living for God until later in life and usually after a great portion of life has been wasted. Do not be like the prodigal who “came to his senses” only after squandering his fortune and the strength of his youth. Come to your senses in the early days of your life. Set your heart to seek God now - to know Him, worship Him, serve Him, and rejoice in His goodness. As one older than you, as an ambassador for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through me, I beg you on behalf of Christ, do not waste your life.

“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance” (Isaiah 55:2).



Set Your Heart to Follow Him

I am hesitant to use this type of language with you because I am afraid that you will misinterpret. To most Christians, the admonition to “follow after God” conjures up thoughts of duty, obedience, and ministry, but these things by themselves will only leave you tired, hollow, and bitter. I have been down that road and I will do everything in my power to keep you from it. It leads to a horrid place!

When I speak of following Him, I am primarily referring to fellowship with His person; to acknowledge Him and share with Him every experience; to purpose not to hide from Him or shut Him out of some area of your life; to see everything as sacred and nothing as secular; for Him to have preeminence in every moment of your life, every thought in that head of yours, every word that proceeds from your mouth, and every work that you endeavor to do - walking, talking, eating, drinking, laughing, crying, working, playing - experiencing all of it in Him, through Him, for Him, and most of all WITH

Him!

Do you realize that you can do almost anything for all the wrong reasons. You can do ministry for the personal satisfaction or fame it may bring. You can even grow in knowledge and piety for the reputation they may reap for you among other believers. But it is the true and loyal heart that seeks only to be with Him for the sake of being with Him!

I know you look upon me as a godly man who has learned many things, but I have been so wrong in so many ways, and this has been my greatest error. I have always pressed hard to accomplish something, when I should have pressed hard just to be with Him! Yes, my dear young Christian, you can even waste precious drops of your life in the work of ministry and missions!

Remember this: To confine God to a quiet time is grotesque, to reduce discipleship to only obedience is pathetic, and to make ministry into something other than Christ's life flowing through your intimate relationship with Him is to make it nothing more than a stupid work of the flesh.

Read the Bible

Now there's a novelty! One of the greatest things a young Christian can do is to make a lifelong practice of reading the English Bible systematically from Genesis to Revelation over and over again. If you can do so in the original languages it is even better, but I know only a handful of men capable of such a thing and I am not one of them.

Most Christians' knowledge of the Scriptures is very fragmented because they have only read parts of the Bible. I have known individuals who were brilliant in certain aspects of doctrine, but whose overall knowledge of the Bible was very weak. To avoid this pitfall, you must read the Bible systematically and from cover to cover. No one in their right mind would read a work of literature by bouncing to and fro through the book and randomly reading only certain chapters. They would begin at the beginning and move progressively through the book chapter by chapter until they reached the end. And yet very few Christians have ever read the Bible this way! Remember: the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God given to us in book form. To understand it in whole and in part, we must read through it!

One of the most rewarding ways to read the Scriptures is to write your insights and questions as you read through the first time. On your second reading through the Scriptures you will notice that you are able to answer many of your old questions and that new questions have come to mind. You will also be able to refine and clarify many of your previous insights. By this means, you will learn that the Bible is the best commentary of itself. One word of caution: Most people never make it though the entire Bible because they wear themselves out trying to understand everything or trying to write a commentary on each book. Two suggestions: First, write your questions and keep on reading. Secondly, only write down the things God has impressed upon your heart to remember and be brief. We already have enough commentaries to bankrupt every seminary student on earth!

To a young Christian, the Bible can seem overwhelming. This will never change. The Bible is overwhelming! It contains more truth about God than any man will ever comprehend or obey. Nevertheless, it is a magnificent journey to read through its pages

and not only learn, but be transformed. Christianity requires that the mind be fully engaged, but it is not solely or even primarily about the intellect. It is about knowing God in a personal and intimate manner and being transformed into the likeness of His Son. Do not be discouraged! Every day that you give to the reading of God's word will eventually add up to years of study and a wealth of biblical knowledge. Every day lost will reduce the size of that final treasure.

Pray

I divide my praying into two separate categories: Praying in my walking shoes and praying in my work boots. The first category refers to communion, adoration, and thanksgiving. It is walking with God as an ever-present companion, enjoying His fellowship, and seeking greater and greater manifestations of His presence. This type of praying has one purpose - to know Him and to simply "be" with Him. A part from this type of praying, all the knowledge in your head will never be anything more than second hand theological jargon. You will spend your entire life speaking correctly about someone you do not even know and about things that have never become realities in your life.

I have heard people say that they do not have a specific time of seeking God in this way, but they commune with God throughout the day as they go through their daily activities. It has been my experience that the ability to "practice the presence of God" throughout the day and in the midst of my activities is only made possible because I have separated myself from my daily activities and sought God in specific times of prayer. This seems to have been the practice of our Lord Jesus Christ during His incarnation:

"In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there" (Mark 1:35).

The second category of praying - praying in my work boots -refers to intercessory prayer. Let know one mislead you, this type of praying is hard work! It is not a small thing for a mortal man to wrestle with God (Genesis 32:24-32) and against the devil (Ephesians 6:12). The stakes are high and everything is won or lost on this battle field. We labor in prayer for the Glory of God, the Great Commission, and the advancement of the Kingdom (Matthew 6:9-10); we labor in prayer for the preservation and sanctification of the Church; we labor in prayer for every need and for the fulfillment of every promise that God has given. This may very well be the most holy task given to men!

I will leave the subject of prayer behind with a bit of advice that has been very helpful to me. It was given to me by an older preacher, who received it from an even older preacher. It goes something like this:

"Pray until you can pray, and then pray until you have prayed."

Often when we bow our knees in prayer we do not sense the liberty or power to pray. It seems as though there is a sky of brass above us. This should not be a cause of discouragement, but it should lead us to wrestle in prayer until we have "broken through"

to God. It is then that we should set ourselves to praying until our burdens have lifted and we know that we have prayed.

Seek Out Godly Companions

At the risk of offending you, I must say that if you are young there is probably a great deal of foolishness still bound up in your heart (Proverbs 22:15). If the greatest influences in your life are other young people just like yourself, then you are a companion of fools and walking down a dangerous path. The Scriptures teach a very lifesaving truth that is often neglected today:

“He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” (Proverbs 13:20)

The idea of a “generation gap” was born out of the godless counterculture of the 60’s and has now been thoroughly adopted by most churches. The idea that young people need to be with other young people is a direct contradiction to the Scriptures. Although periods of supervised fellowship with other youth can be both enjoyable and profitable, the Scriptures everywhere teach that young Christians need to be with older and more mature Christians so that they might learn their ways and avoid the pitfalls of the young and naive.

According to the Scriptures, the greatest influences in your life ought to be your mother and father, provided they are godly and mature Christians. Following them, it is the role of the church elders and the entire adult congregation to model the Christian life before you. In summary, you will do well to surround yourself with men and women whose progress in sanctification and usefulness to God are evident. Get to know, not only the godly Christians of our time, but also the saints of yesterday through their writings and the writings of others about them.

Flee Youthful Lust

In Ephesians 6:10-12 you are commanded to make your stand against the devil. In James 4:7 you are given the promise that if you resist him, he will flee from you. Nevertheless in II Timothy 2:22 you are commanded to “flee youthful lust.” It is rather amazing that you are commanded to be strong, take your stand, and fight against fallen angels, while at the same time, you are commanded to flee with fear from youthful lust. This demonstrates that the youthful lust of your flesh and the unbridled sensuality of your culture is more dangerous than a face to face battle with the devil.

I have known countless Christian youth who demonstrated genuine evidence of conversion, and yet upon entering into a relationship with the opposite sex, they fell into immorality. I have known them to memorize Scripture, pray, and even fast to be pure in their relationship, and yet still they fall. Why? Because they do not understand that all the spiritual disciplines in the Scriptures cannot save them from youthful lust. They are trying to wage battle while God commands them to flee. To put it simply: You cannot be alone in a relationship with a person of the opposite sex for any extended period of time

without falling. Therefore you should never be alone together in a house, car, or any other place where lust can be kindled and failure is certain.

Give Yourself to Noble Purposes

I see young Christian men in the university who squander away their time playing video games and frequenting malls and movie houses, when they should be giving themselves to more noble purposes. You were not bought by the blood of the Lamb in order to give yourself to such things. You have been adopted into a royal family and royal deeds are expected of you. Shun the mindless entertainment of the age and give yourself to the will of God. The Scriptures declare in II Timothy 2:20-21:

“Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”

Do you desire to be vessel of honor and used for noble purposes? Do you desire to be an instrument in the Master’s hand? Then cleanse yourself of the foolish games of little boys and vain girls, and become the man or woman you were called to be. I believe it was A.W. Tozer who said that on the tombstone of America would be written the words, “They entertained themselves to death.” This is a pathetic epitaph when compared to what was said about King David:

“[He] served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers...”

What legacy will you leave? What will be carved into your stone? Most importantly, what will God declare about your life on that great Day of Judgment that awaits you? May God have mercy on you and grant you grace to far surpass the character and deeds of the one who is writing to you this letter.

Your brother,
Paul Washer

