



"The idea that God will pardon a rebel who has not given up his rebellion is contrary both to the Scriptures and to common sense."
—A.W. Tozer

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Wisdom for the Young (Part Four)

Proverbs 15:21 makes an interesting comment on the subject of foolishness: "Folly is [joy](#) to him who is destitute of discernment, but a man of understanding walks uprightly." Solomon suggests that we tend to fool ourselves when our main goal is to have fun. We think having fun by doing foolish things brings us joy, but the wise know that folly cannot bring joy. It is oxymoronic, a contradiction of terms. We only think that because we have trained our minds to equate "having fun" and "feeling pleasure," which we confuse with joy. Pleasure and joy are not absolutely synonymous because true joy—the kind of joy that is a fruit of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and that [God](#) wants us to have to abundance (Romans 15:13)—is a product of [goodness](#).

This idea is expressed in the proverb's second half: "a man of understanding walks uprightly." Those who truly understand what life is all about live a godly life, and they receive the joy that the undiscerning madly seek through foolish pleasure. Recall that [Proverbs 29:18](#) cautions that, without vision or revelation, people "cast off restraint." This proverb is saying a similar thing. Without discernment of what is good and right, we tend to pursue folly and reap the bitterness it eventually produces.

When young, we often lack the wisdom to be able to distinguish mere foolish fun from real joy. Sometimes such wisdom has to come with age and experience—the hard knocks that result from bad decisions. However, if a person can grasp the difference while young, it will save a whole lot of misunderstanding and misery.

If a young person takes the time to consider the consequences ([Deuteronomy 32:29](#)), and if he is honest, it will begin to dawn on him or her that the "wild life" hurts. Doing foolish, careless, or rebellious things causes trouble. For one, when caught and the hammer comes down in the form of restriction or even imprisonment, it impinges on freedom. At other times, depending on the type of foolishness, a youth may have to pay a heavy financial penalty in fines or compensation. Young women sometimes have to "pay" with a trashed reputation or an unwanted pregnancy—and both sexes pay with sexual diseases. College-bound kids sometimes have to forfeit scholarships and even admission when their transgressions come to light, often ruining career possibilities forever. These painful lessons should teach that *sin* does not pay. Doing the wrong things will bring down some form of penalty.

Conversely, people who have not lived foolishly have little to no baggage and few regrets. They can talk openly about their past without deceit or embarrassment. They do not have to carry their indiscretions around with them like a black mountain chained across their shoulders. The godly pleasures that they learned to appreciate are not tainted by guilt. Among their peers, they demonstrate sterling examples of virtuous conduct, and in time, they also provide them to their children. Spiritually, when God calls them into His Family, they have far less to overcome, and to them, God's way of life is familiar and a joy to practice.

Unfortunately, too many young people tend to think of God and His way as something for old folks. In fact, they think of God as old—He has existed forever—and that He does not really identify with the young. When they read the Bible, which is itself two thousand years old, they sense that the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles are old and not very hip.

The parents of these youth frequently came into the church in middle age, which is ancient to a youngster. And, it is true, a quick glance seems to show that the church has a disproportionate number of senior citizens to young people. To top it off, most of the ministry in the scattered churches of God these days is ageing too. The church, then, as a whole, tends to appear old all over. It is no wonder that some young people think that God's way is for when a person's hair turns gray, and no sooner!

With this perspective, it is easy to imagine that young people fail to see the relevance of God's way for them today. How does it affect them in high school or college? What does it have to do with iPods, texting, dating, their first job, video games, Algebra II, a dismal economy, pop music, or the twelve-year-old rattletrap in the driveway?

However, this is a mistaken view. God's way—*righteousness*—is for young people too!

For starters, a young person might be surprised to learn just how many people that appear in the Bible did some of their greatest deeds for God when they were mere youths. One could even make a good case that God *prefers to call people when they are young*. Youth has many advantages that God can employ to His glory. Energy, strength, zeal, idealism, resilience, courage, and a boldness to go where angels fear to tread—these are things that God can use!

Perhaps the only advantage that an older person has over a youth is experience, since the aged have been over the rocky road of life and know where the potholes are. One might think that, unlike the young, older people have wisdom too. They should, but a youth can have it too. Anyone who follows God's Word has wisdom, regardless of age! A youth can read the Bible with ten-year-old eyes, and if he does what it says, he is wise. Wisdom can direct the actions of anyone who performs what God wants him to do.

So, with whom did God work in the Bible? Consider this list: Joseph was seventeen or so when God began working with him, and he refused Potiphar's wife just a few years later. He was only thirty when the Pharaoh made him Prime Minister of Egypt! Samson was a young man when he became a judge in Israel, and God used him mightily to throw off the Philistine yoke.

We should not forget Samuel! He was just a little kid when Hannah dedicated him to God, and soon thereafter God prophesied through him. Not long thereafter, when no one else in Israel would stand up to the giant Goliath, a faithful seventeen-year-old named David volunteered and said, "I'll do it because he is blaspheming the Lord."

Many others did wonderful things for God as young people: Ruth, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel (and his three friends), and Esther. As far as we know, all of Christ's disciples were fairly young men when they were called, as was Paul. Mark and Timothy were youths too. Many scholars believe Mary was in her mid-teens when the angel appeared to her and told her that she would bear the Son of God. And let us not forget that John the Baptist and our Savior [Jesus Christ](#) completed their ministries while still in their prime. *God likes to work with young people!*

Even today, God wants to work with the young, just as He worked with these heroes of [faith](#). They answered His call without thought of what their peers thought of them. Do you have the courage to do that?

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Samson and the Christian \(Part 1\)](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh asks if we have known people who seemingly had everything going for them but never reached their potential. Samson had what it took but made horrible mistakes and lapses in judgment. Nevertheless, Hebrews 11 says that he will be part of the first resurrection. Even with his dalliance with women and problems with prevarication, he is counted among the saints. God can use people despite their flawed character. During the time of Samson, the Philistines wanted to dilute Israel's identity and assimilate them into their own culture (Hamitic by race, but Greek in culture). Samson's faithful parents were from the tribe of Dan, one that produces good leaders, yet who sometimes do things underhandedly and not by the rules. By taking on these characteristics, Samson did not live up to his potential, and nearly lost it altogether.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[How Much Is the Bible Worth To You?](#)

by Staff

In one sense, we take the Bible for granted. In other times possessing God's Word was rare and expensive. Here is why having such ready access to God's Word is one of our richest blessings.

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