

## Commencement

Setting Sail In Life

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This is the time of year when most high school and college graduation ceremonies take place. In the United States this is usually from mid-May through most of June. It comes with the caps, gowns, diplomas, a lot of well-wishes and cards, gifts, and a great deal of advice.

Many of you may remember the movie called ***The Graduate***. I do not recommend that you go and see this film, even though I have a quotation from it. But for those of you who have seen it, if you will remember, after the graduation ceremony, they had a party at the house. Everybody was coming up to congratulate him, and give him a bit of advice. One man who had been chasing him around said when he caught him, "I want to say one word to you, just one word: Plastics!" That was the sum of his advice.

In the late 1960s when this story setting took place, plastic was the going thing to get into. If you wanted to enter a growing field, you got into plastics.

Of course, what do we have today? Everything is made of plastic. Even our cars are made with a lot of plastic. So, it was good advice for the time.

In a similar vein, today we might say biotech, or some other cutting-edge technology that continues to burst onto the current scene. It might be some financial advisor, too, with the way that things are.

But, of course, the biggest advice that graduates receive is in the commencement speech itself, given during the ceremony. However, these days the commencement speeches that receive the most attention are the ones given by politicians, most notably the recent speech by President Obama at Notre Dame University in Indiana.

Not surprisingly, President Obama used the platform to advance his own political causes and ideas, particularly, of all things at a Catholic university, abortion! That made up maybe a good 25% of his speech! It was really galling. I went and actually looked at the text of his speech, and he clearly intimated in that speech that it is the pro-life people (those who believe that abortion should be illegal) who lack open hearts and open minds, and compassion!

Huh?

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He said that if the pro-lifers would just compromise a little bit, we could put this divisive national debate behind us. This is what he said at a Catholic university during a commencement speech! It was slick, subtle, and very distorted.

But political people will use commencement speeches for all sorts of things. And he felt, as President of the United States, that was the kind of advice he wanted to give these graduating seniors at Notre Dame University.

But I digress. That is not what I am talking about today.

Commencement speeches are supposed to be (intended to be) the send off for another generation of young people setting sail into real life. Some will further their education by getting higher degrees, while others will start their career, many of whom have already been recruited into the various job opportunities.

Still others will marry and start a family. That was the big thing after Ambassador College. They used to say that you graduated on Friday, attended Sabbath services on Saturday, got married on Sunday, and left for your ministerial assignment on Monday! That was the way it was back there in the 1960s, especially for those ministerial trainees. It was just bang, bang, bang, and you were gone!

But I digressed again. Other people travel the world. They might take a year off on their grand tour of Europe, or wherever. Believe it or not, a lot of people who do this these days go to Asia as a spiritual thing visiting Tibet, and all these other supposedly holy places in Asia in order to get their minds clear before they launch into their careers.

Still other people basically do nothing after they leave college, and return home and mooch off their parents. This is just too common these days.

Commencement speeches are supposed to inspire, encourage, and motivate young people as they try their wings as adults. It is to be the great big sendoff so that they all go out cheering looking forward to their new beginning.

Unfortunately for most graduates, it is just another boring speech that they have to endure, and on their graduation day no less. Often the speaker himself is not up to the task. He is probably some luminary brought in for his name, and not necessarily for his ability as a thinker and speaker.

There is frequently a very wide disconnect between the graduate and the speaker. He

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may be twice or more their age. So, the audience might not have a good idea of where he is coming from. The speaker may not have ever attended the institution where he is speaking at. He may be from Washington DC, and he has never attended (and never intended to) "Poe Dunk State," but he has been asked to go there and give this speech to encourage the people to produce for the nation. He probably knows none of the graduates, so there is almost no personal feeling for his audience; he cannot look out into the audience and see some familiar face.

His life experiences may not have any relevance to those who are graduating. Think about how times have changed. Some speaker may have made his living in plastics, but has been given the opportunity to speak to a college full of computer nerds or something. What life experience does he have that could transfer over to them? Sure, there are some, but you can see how there can be obvious disconnects.

There are other disconnects as well. Things like, religious differences, ethnic differences, political differences, and social/class differences. These could put off some or many of the audience; they shut down depending on who it is, and will not listen.

Besides, in all the excitement of graduation day, a commencement speech is just another few minutes out of another whole day of activities, and parties, and a lot of fun that they expect to have all that evening, so it is in one ear, and out the other. Think about it—how many of us remember the commencement speech given at our graduation? Any graduation? Usually, they are not very memorable, are they?

So today, despite this being a time when most graduations occur, I do not want to give a typical commencement speech. I wish to speak to our young people about their future and tender some advice as they launch themselves into the real world of adulthood. And as for the rest of us, who no longer fit the category of young person, (1) well, you are young in your heart/mind; and (2), it is never too late to start anew or to make a few changes for the better.

Turn to II Corinthians 6. Paul writes,

**II Corinthians 6:1-2** We then, as workers together with Him, also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Now remember, he is speaking to the church congregation, the converted members

there.

We can look at these two verses in two different ways. Of course, there are probably other ways too, but I want to look at it in two different ways. And, one is a specific way, a specific application, and the other one is more general.

Now we usually speak about the specific application of this in the church. For those of us who are called and baptized into the Church of God, and the family of God, the specific application is that each of us has one and only one opportunity for salvation. There are really no second chances in this overall scheme of things. This is it! If God has called you, and you have accepted that calling, then now is the time that we have to prove ourselves worthy of Him of all that He is doing for us.

Now, He is going to give us all the help that He can, but notice that Paul pleads with us—begging with us—not to waste the chance, not to let it pass by, not to allow it to be all for nothing, not to let it slip through our fingers.

Notice how, in verse 2, he emphasizes the word "now." "Behold! Now is the accepted time!" And then he repeats it. "Behold! Now is the day of salvation!" He is trying to get them to fix on the present. "Look! You cannot let this go, I mean, you have got to work on it now. There may be no "later" for you. You must act now! We do not know how long we have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling."

I hate to say it, but we could die tomorrow! And, what will we have accomplished? Has the grace of God been given to us in vain? Obviously, God would not let us get killed tomorrow if He was not finished working with us. At least we can have that much hope and confidence in what God is doing. But even so, there are times when He allows things to happen. So, we have to think about that. "There is no time," Paul is saying, "like the present." Seize the day! This may be the only day. So you had better make the most of it. That was the specific application to church members.

The general application of these verses is a lot broader in scope, and it would fit anyone who is alive. And, I am looking at it from God's gift of life to everyone. We could paraphrase Paul's thought as, "You really have only one life to live. Make the most of it. Do not waste precious time."

As kids—and I know I did—I thought that life was long and slow. It seemed like ages would go by before we could finally ride that big roller-coaster where we had to be able to reach a certain height first. For years we were always looking up to it. And it is the same way for my kids too. Always waiting.

But it is more than that. It seemed like ages before we could go and get our "learner's permit" (the prelude to getting your first driver's license in the United States). And then, we had to wait so long (again) before we could actually get our license.

And then, for some, it was years before they could go on dates. And of course, going through school was the worst. School time was torture time. Did you ever hear the phrase, "The mills of the gods grinding slowly?" Well, that was school to me. It just seemed to drag on and on. Would we ever graduate?

And later on, would we ever find that special person to marry? Or, would we ever have children? Would we ever find that right job? Would we ever be able to buy a house?

Time just seems to drag out for the typical young person.

But as we get older, we wish time would actually move more slowly, because we figured out by this time, that time is not the tortoise, but rather it is the hare! And it has been speeding right along, and we blinked! Suddenly, we have a child graduating from high school! That is what I woke up to!

Did you know that my 25<sup>th</sup> high school reunion is going to be this year? And you wonder why I have all this gray hair. But this idea of time and how it moves relentlessly only gets worse as we age. Suddenly, you are an old man. That is what I figured out.

Do you know what I got this week, the first time ever? Reading glasses! I am 43 years old. Where did all the time go? I was playing little league ball just yesterday. Was it not just yesterday that telephones had rotary dials? Kids, do you even know what a rotary dial phone is? It was only yesterday that a keyboard was a piano or organ; not the thing you type on in front of or part of your computer. Did you know that "wireless" was another term for radio? Did you know that within my lifetime that an 8-track cassette player was a groovy upgrade? Did you know that green used to be a color? Now it is a cause to rally around, or against. You get the point. Time flies.

As many of you know, this is my favorite Psalm (Psalm 90). This is a Psalm of Moses. And, Moses is speaking to God,

**Psalm 90:3** You turn man to destruction, and say, "Return, O children of men."

What Moses will do now is show the difference in time as God sees it.

**Psalm 90:4-12** For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers. For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Now, 70 or 80 years may seem long to someone who is young, but actually human life is really quite brief. It passes in a flash. It is as Moses says here, like grass which sprouts in the morning, only to be cut down in the evening. And for some reason or another, some folks do not even make it 70 years. So their lives are even shorter.

There is a lot to pack into a life. There is a lot to do. There is a lot we want to do. But, there just does not seem to be enough time.

So, Moses' advice, here, is to ask God to instruct us how to get a sense of how much time we have. And the reason we need to have this understanding of our time is to have a wise approach to life. "Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

"That you may gain a heart of wisdom." This tells us that mankind does not have the wisdom to use our time properly. It is something that we must ask God for, because mankind without God's guidance and help, tends to fritter away time and waste it doing stupid things. We often devote whole chunks of our time to things that are not profitable for us.

And so, Moses in his wisdom, advises us—remember that Moses was probably quite old when he wrote this Psalm, maybe even 100, and he could look back over a pretty full life, and he could probably say, "I sure could have used those forty years before I fled Egypt for something better." But, God was using him, obviously, and making use of that time. But from Moses' point of view it may have seemed wasted time. And, probably those forty years tending sheep in the wilderness did not seem all that useful to him. All

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he did was sit there and watch sheep.

Of course, I am sure that he was learning about a lot of things—God was preparing him for the work that he would have to do with the children of Israel. He watched sheep for forty years, and then he watched "sheep" for forty more years.

But to him, looking back on his life, he could see that there were years—maybe many years—in which he could have used that time better. And so, in his wisdom, he advises us to ask God to help us to get an idea of how much time we have left, how we can use our time, so that we can be wise. And it is not just that He is going to give us this wisdom all at once, but rather, we have to gain it. There is much we have to do in it. But God, then, can direct that and therefore our lives will be the better for it.

So my first point—which today will come at the end of each exposition—is,

**(1) REALIZE THAT YOU ONLY HAVE ONE FINITE LIFETIME TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS.**

A quick summation of that is do not waste your time. And, do not put off until tomorrow what you can do today—tomorrow may not come for you.

Proverbs 4 speaks about a father giving instruction to his children.

**Proverbs 4:4-9** He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; keep my commands, and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you."

Obviously, this has spiritual overtones of the Father's instruction to us—His children. So that should be in our minds always as we go through this.

Back when I graduated from Ambassador College, 1988, I had absolutely no desire whatsoever to spend any more time in a classroom. I did not want to go and get a master's degree or anything like that. I had spent the last 16 years of my life in classrooms of one sort or another, and I was tired of it. I was tired of the studying. I was

tired of the tests. I wanted to live. I wanted to do some real living.

Now, in a way Ambassador College exacerbated that feeling for me, because I did not feel that Ambassador College was real life. Rather, it was this little enclave in Pasadena, California, where the world never really entered. Well, it did—obviously. But, I was a student living on campus, not getting off campus very often. My job was on campus too. A person could stay there all the time and pretty much have all his needs met. It was a cocoon. And after four years of living there in this cocoon, I wanted nothing more than to get out of that cocoon. Even though Mr. Hebert W. Armstrong and all the people who had set it up had very good intentions, for me it was very confining. I did not rebel against it. I did my four years. But, at the end of that four years, I wanted to live.

Rush Limbaugh talks about never going to college for these very same reasons. In fact, he probably would have quit high school had his parents allowed him to. He said that to him school was like prison. He wanted nothing more than to get out of there, because he felt that school was just holding him back. He already knew what it was that he wanted to do with his life, and he is doing it now. Even then, he had a talent for radio. And he knew that is what he wanted to do. He wanted to be a disc jockey. I cannot remember if he said becoming a talk show host had entered his mind yet or not, but he felt that school was oppressive. He was not really learning anything. It was just keeping him from doing what he wanted to do with his life.

Now I think that it is our present educational system that is primarily responsible for such feelings of oppression, feelings of wanting to get out, feelings of doing no good, because school as it is presented in most cases is boring and restrictive. Everything is done by rote. It is regimented. It is tedious. (There are stellar teachers and schools, but, oh, so few of them.)

These days it is even worse because in most cases it is politically and culturally biased. So they are telling you a version that emphasizes a certain way of thinking. And it is very difficult to keep that out of things. But, teachers and administrators did a much better job of it years ago than they are doing today. Now they are purposefully teaching various agendas.

And another thing that I think is one of the primary reasons that some people feel this sense of oppression is that school, in almost every case, moves at only one pace—the pace of the slowest person in the room, because everybody must move along at the same time. And if there is someone who is not getting it, then the whole class must wait until that person gets it. And other people who have quicker minds are way ahead. And so this is just wasted time while waiting for this other person who is lagging behind.

So our schools give education a bad name and a bad taste in the mouth of the students. They do not want to be there. They feel that it is useless; that it is not really helping them. And what it ultimately does is to sour people on learning. It just sucks the motivation to learn right out of them.

This is especially true in areas where it is most important, such as history. I mean, I have had some of the most boring history teachers in the world, because all they were doing was teaching toward a test of only dates, names, and events. They did not put anything into their lectures that made it interesting. And so kids do not learn history. They just learn what is needed for the test. It does not sink in. It does not give them a love for searching into history by themselves and learning things that might help them avoid problems in their own lives. You all know the old quote, "Those who fail to learn and heed the lessons of history, are doomed to repeat them." That is what is happening in America.

I probably have told you this before. The name "Manasseh," means "forget," or "forgetful." And, our whole nation is totally forgetful about our history—what got us here; how we were able to become a great nation in only a 100 years or so; and what those values and principles were that made this a great nation. And now, it is like everybody has historic amnesia. There are only a few that are crying out, "Hey! It should not be this way!" But too many people have stopped learning, because it is boring. They think that it does not help. They do not know how to apply what they do know.

But, you know that God does not have this approach at all! He wants us to continue growing and learning until we take our very last breath. As a Christian, we should never stop learning, and never stop growing.

Now notice in this passage of Proverbs 4, there was no mention of knowledge per se (at least the passage that we read). But, anyone can get facts about things. Those are readily available. We can all use Google these days or some other search engine, and find a fact. Or we might try Wikipedia and find a fact about something.

But, you see, God's focus is not on facts or knowledge, necessarily; at least not here. What did He say is the principle thing? Wisdom! And while you are getting wisdom, get understanding. Those are the things that God is interested in.

Now, let me explain in a very simplistic way the differences between knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. It is very simple.

Two plus two equals four—is knowledge.

Why two plus two equals four—is understanding.

Using mathematics to balance your checkbook—is wisdom.

Did you catch the differences there? Two plus two equals four is knowledge. Why two plus two equals four is understanding the mechanics of the mathematics. Using mathematics to balance your checkbook is wisdom. You see knowledge is just facts. Understanding is knowing the reasons behind those facts and why they are that way. And wisdom is taking that knowledge and understanding and putting it into practical profitable use.

So notice that what God says He wants here is wisdom: the practical and profitable use of knowledge and understanding. That is the principle thing. Knowledge and understanding rattling around in one's head means nothing unless it is put into practice and applied in life.

All you are with only knowledge and understanding is an egghead. But with wisdom added, you are a Christian, applying them in a Christ-like way.

So, yes, we will always be adding knowledge because the human mind is voracious when it comes to accumulating knowledge. But surprisingly few people actually try to figure out the reasons for things, or why they happen that way. And even fewer make use of that knowledge and understanding to enhance their lives. And still even fewer (we are down to the very small percentages, here) use their knowledge and understanding to serve God, and their fellow man. But, that is exactly where God wants us to be. He wants us to be in that small percentage of people who go from knowledge to understanding to wisdom, all with Him and His kingdom in mind. That means He is a God of education; He is not a God who is teaching us for a test, necessarily, putting answers down by rote. He is going to send us out on the road of life, "Okay now, use what I have given you. And, my Son is right in front of you. So, if you will follow Him, you will be doing well."

So, Solomon says here that wisdom is the principle thing. And verses 8 and 9 tell us why.

**Proverbs 4:8** Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honor, when you embrace her.

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Getting wisdom brings promotion and honor. And, we can say here that the general idea is physical, material, and secular success.

**Proverbs 4:9** She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you."

Getting wisdom in these verses has overtones of spiritual accomplishment and reward. And, putting wisdom and understanding to use in our lives will give us both. They will give us the physical things that we need, but more importantly it will give us spiritual rewards that are eternal.

So, pursuing understanding and wisdom will give us true fulfillment. Education never really ends. It is essential both to physical success, and spiritual maturity.

So even though the graduates have finished learning all that stuff in school, they are just getting started. That is why it is called a **commencement**.

## **(2) REALIZE THAT EDUCATION NEVER REALLY ENDS.**

Turn to Colossians 1 to pick up something that Paul said to these members in the congregation.

**Colossians 1:9-12** For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

Here, the apostle Paul prays that we would be filled with understanding, wisdom, and knowledge.

Why?

Paul answers his own question: That we would conduct ourselves according to God's will, pleasing Him; that we would grow and become strong in the Lord to produce fruit.

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If we do not continue to forge ahead to gain understanding and wisdom, as we have been told recently, we are then slipping backwards. And so the education must continue to continue so that we will grow, become stronger, and produce fruit.

This time we are going to go toward the end of the chapter in Proverbs 4.

**Proverbs 4:20-27** My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.

Now this world is severely distracting! And we in this nation, and many other leading nations around this world, have the wealth and freedom, and the time to pursue just about anything and everything that captures our attention. If you want to go climb Mount Everest, well then so be it. It can be arranged. If you want to compete in the Ididerod and mush across Alaska, it is possible. If you want to sail around the world in a sailboat, or even float around the world in a balloon, you can do it. If you want to go to Australia and do a walkabout like "Crocodile Dundee?" Fine! Go get your ticket! You can do it. If you want to go to Africa and try to find King Solomon's mine, go for it! There are possibilities everywhere.

Even if you want to become a space tourist, just put up your million or two, and you can go! Richard Branson is going to have his thing going by next year, I hear. So, you can just go up into space and float—if that is what floats your boat!

Anything seems possible these days if you want to do it and have the resources available for it, you can do it. Right? Just do it!

I may be taking this out of context, however the principle is correct:

**I Corinthians 6:12** All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

This could also be translated as, "All things are permissible for me, but not everything is

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profitable." Just because you can do something, does not mean that you should do it. This is where the previous point comes into play. Wisdom is the principle thing. We have to really think about what we want to do. We cannot just chase every rainbow and butterfly that comes our way. We cannot flit from here to there, just because it seems interesting. You must be smart about what you allow yourself to do, from everyday idle fancies, to the major pursuits of hobbies and other interests of our lives. We must really think about what we allow ourselves to do. Some things may be just fine. Some things may even be right and allowable. But, they may not be profitable.

Some things may be right at some point in your life, but absolutely wrong at another point in your life, because your circumstances have changed—you have different responsibilities. People are depending upon you.

You just cannot go and carve Mount Rushmore with the face of President Ronald Reagan because you think that it should be there. Not that I do, but there is a group around who does. If I were to go and do that, the people who depend upon me would be without my giving care. So, even though it might be okay for me to do that at some point in my life (not that I am going to), now is not that time for sure.

So, you must really think things through. You have to think about what you allow yourself to do, and when you allow yourself to do it.

Have you heard about the "funemployment" phenomenon? "Funemployment." That is putting the "f" in "fun" in front of "unemployment." "Funemployment."

This next quote is from the Los Angeles Times from this past Thursday, June 4, 2009, from the article entitled, **"For the Funemployed Unemployment is Welcome!"**

"While millions of Americans struggle to find work as they face foreclosures and bankruptcies, others have found a silver lining in the economic meltdown. These happily jobless tend to be single in their 20s and 30s.

"Some were laid off. Some quit voluntarily lured by generous buyouts. Buoyed by severance, savings, unemployment checks, and/or their parents even, the funemployed do not spend their days pouring over job listings, but they travel on the cheap for weeks! They head back to school, or volunteer at the neighborhood soup kitchen. And at least until the bank account dries up, they are content living for today.

"Never heard of funemployment? Here is the Urban Dictionary's definition:

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'The condition of a person who takes advantage of being out of a job to have the time of their lives.'

[Quoting a person in the article:] "I have spent all Tuesday at the pool. Funemployment rocks!"

"As frivolous as it sounds, funemployment is a statement about American society. Experts say that it is both a reflection of the country's cultural narcissism, and attitudes of entitlement, and self-centeredness, and a backlash against corporate America and its 'Dilbert-like' [an American comic strip] work environment."

Now, this, to me, is extreme irresponsibility. It reflects endless possibilities for distraction away from what is really important. In this article was a portion about some of these people, on a whim, just up and went to China! And, they were unemployed! Another fellow was spending his money on this or that, and having the time of his life, golfing three times a week, and his dad was asking him, "How can you afford all this?" He was getting concerned that his son was going through everything he had just like a kid without any cares in the world and would end up poor and on the street like a bum.

These people seem to be supremely confident that this is not going to last very long, and they might as well burn through what they have, and then they will get another job. There is no thought for the future. There is no responsibility for anybody else. They are just going to have fun while they are unemployed.

But life is not all fun and games!

These people have not grown up enough to understand that life, as God intends it, is not supposed to be self-centered. It is not supposed to be only me, me, me, and me. It is not supposed to be "**Self**," as the magazine proclaims.

And for us, we are not supposed to be narcissists. We are Christians. We are followers of Christ. We are people who have given our lives over to Someone Else; not so we can spend our leisure time doing all the things that make us happy and fulfilled. God has called us to have bigger goals and purposes than simple self-satisfaction and doing things because they are there. Like people say, they climb mountains because they are there.

So we return to what Solomon said, back in Proverbs 4:23, "Keep your heart with all

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diligence." In the Hebrew the idea is more like, "Of all things that we must protect, make protecting your heart your number one priority." That is a bit of a circumlocution, but that is basically the meaning of the Hebrew. Of all things we must protect, and there are many things we do indeed have to protect in our lives, make protecting your heart your number one priority. It is that important.

And then, Solomon answers the question, "Why?" regarding this in the next phrase, "Because from your heart flows everything that you allow yourself to do."

The idea, here, is of a literal heart. That is where the Hebrews thought the center of the mental and spiritual part of one's being was, right there in the heart.

But, think about the heart. What does your heart do? It pumps out blood. And by that means it sends out nourishment and other faculties of life to the rest of the body. It is constantly pumping and making things flow, and work in one's life to produce health—whatever you need for the physical activities that you want and need to do.

And so, Solomon is applying this spiritually in a wider context. Your heart is what you need to protect so that everything that you do will be good and wise, because as Christ said, it is from the heart that flow the issues of life. He used negative examples in the Gospels—envies, and hatreds, and those sort of things—they all flow out of the heart. But if you protect your heart, out of it will flow all the good things. So, that is what we want to do.

What God is doing here is cautioning us against giving our hearts over to ideas, causes, pursuits, and activities that are not good and evil, or not profitable—even those things that distract us from what is really important—the lesser priorities; they might be fine, but they should yield to the important things.

So, if we protect our heart, we can perhaps shield ourselves from things that may look good on the surface, but ultimately are wrong, deceitful, evil, perverse, and ungodly, because there is a being out there who is trying to sugar-coat everything to make us want to get involved in that particular thing. And what we find when we break through that crust...we find that it is dirty and rotten inside.

For instance, take the environmental movement that is going on. "Re-use and Recycle!" "Be good stewards of God's creation." It all sounds good, right? Yes and no. We do have a responsibility from God to tend and keep what we have been given in His creation. We should do that. But, the green movement in this country is not about conservation. It is not about tending and keeping. Once you peel away that outer layer,

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you will find a liberal, socialist political ideology. They could care less, really, about global warming, climate change, whether the seals and the polar bears are dying, or whether the polar ice caps are melting. They do not care. They are only using those things for their own purposes. And what are those purposes? When you see those layers underneath the sugar coat, what they want is to advance such things as massive population reduction through birth control, abortion, infanticide, and who knows what else.

One group wants to reduce the population to one-quarter of the current number! Others want to see only 10 percent. How are they going to kill all these people? I mean, that is ultimately what they have in mind! They are trying to reduce the population of the world! The drive to reproduce found in all human kind is too strong for them to mandate such a policy. It would have to happen some other way. And, that is pretty nefarious if you ask me!

And there is more! The modern green movement is about socialist and even communist government control over production and consumption. They do not want you to drive a car that gets below 35 mpg. Even if you need your car for whatever purpose you have. They want you to drive a "smart car," even if you have four kids. But, by the way, you should not have four kids, because you are adding to the population of the world! And you are using all these goods up!

They also want control of all levels of education. We can see that in the way that they have gone into our schools and turned the kids into these "greenies" who are telling their moms and dads,

"Mommy! You are not recycling!"

"Shut up, kid! Who told you that?"

"The teacher at school. We had three hours on that today!"

Now, I am exaggerating a bit on that. But, I have heard of people saying very similar things recently. The kids are being taught to be the "apostles" of this green movement to bring it forward. And what they did was to get control of their little minds at school.

And beyond all that, most of these greenies are not Christians under any stretch of the imagination. They either are atheists or pantheists of some sort—they love mother earth, and the "gaia" thing. They are not interested in the real Christianity at all. They are interested in their own things.

Now see? This is an example of something that seems good on the outside. We should be conservative. We should not pollute the environment. We should take care of the things we have been given. We should embellish things so that they are beautiful, and keep them from disintegrating, doing all the things that we can to make this earth the Garden of Eden once again.

But we surely do not want all that baggage of the green political movement that is moving this nation and frankly the whole world, against God in one way or another.

So, do we really want to be associated with environmentalism? Do we want to be a "green" church? If we embrace environmentalism, even in only a certain area, do we not open our hearts to these other influences? If we give to a so-called "green" cause, some non-profit which is promoting some recycling, or "green" product, or such for some environmental reason, do we really want to open ourselves up to that sort of thing and all of its assorted baggage?

I am not going to answer that question. You will have to answer it for yourself. There are always times to do something good along these lines, but are you guarding your heart against these other influences that come along with it? Do you want to tempt your heart to be open to these other ideas and influences? You see, that is what I am getting at. Solomon said to keep your heart with all diligence. Of all the things you need to protect, protect your heart, because we do not know what chink in the armor Satan is going to use to get at us with. So, be very cautious about what we take to heart, or what we give our hearts to.

### **(3) REALIZE THAT WHAT WE DO, AND THE CAUSES WE EMBRACE, TELLS GOOD WHAT WE REALLY BELIEVE**

God gives some advice through Solomon:

**Ecclesiastes 11:9-10** Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.

I have always liked these scriptures since I was a youth, because they helped me a great deal when I was young. God does not say that we cannot have fun, or that we cannot pursue our dreams. He is not saying that at all. He just cautions us to remember

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that He is watching our every move. He sees what all the children of men are doing. We cannot hide anything from God.

So He says, then, remove sorrow from your heart. Do you know what He is telling you here? He is not saying to be frivolous and happy, gambling about on the grass as if you were overjoyed all the time. Sorrow is set in the future. This means to guard your heart now, and you will not have the sorrows tomorrow. How do I know that? Because of what he says next. "Remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh." This means that if you put away these evils from your flesh right now, and do what is right and good right now, those future sorrows will not affect you, because they will not be there.

And so, it is a caution on one hand and a freedom on the other! He is saying that if you get rid of all these bad and evil things—the bad parts of your character—if you start working on them now, and you do not allow yourself to get into problems and troubles that are so common among people, you avoid all the evil problems later too.

So, if we do what He says here, we walk in all the ways of our heart—and our heart is pure—then, our lives will be so happy and abundant. That is what He is looking for. We will really be happy, fulfilled, and contented with life.

Okay—quickly, the fourth one.

Proverbs 11 may be the most practical of all these bits of advice today.

**Proverbs 11:1 4** Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

You probably know the old joke about the college graduate who is amazed how much his father had learned in the four years since he left home!

Parents, unfortunately, are too often an untapped resource. Most of them are 20 or more years older than you, and they have gone that much further along down the road. They have experienced a lot; they have learned a lot; they have hit a lot of "pot-holes;" they have had a few wrecks; they have a lot of wisdom. Therefore, they have learned from the "Hard Knocks University."

Many times and in the long run, experience in living in this world goes a lot farther than a diploma. It does not matter whether your dad or mom ever graduated from college,

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just by living as long as they have and experiencing life by the things that they have done, they have a lot of wisdom. They should have a lot of wisdom. And, it is there for the asking. It is the old "been-there done-that" wisdom that is absolutely invaluable to you if you have not been there to do that. Young people should take advantage of this free advice as often as possible.

You can turn to Titus 2:3-4 later to pick up an example later, but I will just tell you for now. This is where Paul tells Titus to tell the older men to do this, and the younger men to do that; the older women to do this, and the younger women to do that.

In the example of the older women, Paul tells them to teach the younger women how to love their husbands. Now you would think that the younger women would already be doing that. However, older women have a perspective on loving their husbands that younger women do not have. Paul goes on to tell the older women to admonish the younger women how to love their children. You would think that a young woman would just know through mother-love how to love their children. But Paul says that older women have experience with children that the younger women should take advantage of and use to their benefit. And Paul goes on and on of these things that older women can impart to younger women to help them along. And it is at a time when they may need it most.

And, this could work just as well for older men to give good counsel to younger men as they are getting started in the careers and family. Taking such wise advice, assuming that it is wise, and it should be too if it is given in all sincerity, will help young people avoid a lot of grief, just like in point three—if you work on your life now, you will avoid a lot of grief later. Well, if you get good advice from your parents and older folks in the church now, then you will again avoid a lot of grief later. That is just the way that life works.

If you see a sign on the highway that says, "right lane closed ahead," then you would take the advice and get over into the left lane, right, especially if it is protecting you from a sink hole! And if you did not get over, then you would end up at the bottom of that sink hole. [Take the advice to keep you out of the hole!]

Parents are that sign that tells you to do something to keep you safe. Read the signs, and ask for advice.

**(4) REALIZE THAT WE HAVE HUMAN RESOURCES AT OUR DISPOSAL TO GUIDE US DOWN THE PATH OF LIFE.**

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**Proverbs 19:20** Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days.

Is that not what we want? Do we not really, at the end of everything, want to be considered among the wise when it is all said and done? Does not the book of Daniel say something about the wise being purified, in Daniel 12, something along that line. Regardless, look at it spiritually. If you take advice, if you take counsel and receive instruction, and you are a member of God's church, you will be counted among the wise among those who will enter the Kingdom of God.

Finally, turn to Matthew 6.

**Matthew 6:33** "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

This is the best overall advice I can give to anyone at all at any time.

Truly put God first in your life, just as it says here, and He will make sure that your life now and ultimately will be successful.

Congratulations to all the graduates out there! Have a wonderful Sabbath!