

Sermon 8

Youth Movement in Action

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Main Text: 1 Timothy 4:12

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

Introduction

God has always manifested a special interest in children and young people. When Ishmael and Hagar ran out of their water supply while they were in the wilderness of Bersheeba, Hagar put him under the tree expecting him to die of thirst. But "God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there" (Genesis 21:17 NIV). Matthew 19:14 forbids the disciples from stopping children from coming to Jesus. When the disciples showed disdain for children, Jesus gave them ample attention and used them to illustrate how a Christian must behave. We draw inspiration from biblical stories that depict how God used young people: the story of the slave girl who advised Naaman to go to Samaria, the spiritual revival that was occasioned by the rulership of Josiah in Judah, the boy whose bread and fish were blessed by Jesus to feed five thousand people, and the stories of Esther, Daniel and many more.

Why is God interested in the youth? In Genesis 21:18, God told Hagar that Ishmael would be a great nation. Sarah despised Ishmael, but God saw in him a great nation even before he achieved that status. Ishmael's circumstances were not favorable - born of a slave, Sarah didn't like him, and he was homeless because Sarah demanded that they leave her home. But God saw his vulnerability and capitalized on it to bring hope and an infusion of energy by supplying him with his immediate need – water and encouragement.

The words of Paul to young Timothy are relevant to all young people who, like Ishmael, are despised. In some cases, the youth suffer because of a low self-image. How should you, as a young person, navigate a situation of being overlooked? How do you serve the Lord when you or others think you are not gifted enough? Young people often despair and retreat into their cocoons when despised or undermined. Others become arrogant as a knee-jerk reaction to assert themselves when attacked or slighted. Paul offers a solution to this dilemma. This sermon will expound on 1 Timothy 4:12 to give you a biblical approach and practical ideas to respond to these matters. Instead of being arrogant or feeling bad about yourself when despised, Paul offers the youth an alternative response - "set an example for the believers..." He mentions the following central tenets of Christianity as key principles every youth should consider when despised:

- Speech
- Conduct
- Love

- Faith
- Purity

Speech

It is often said that God gave us two ears to be good listeners and one mouth to think twice before we speak. James put it well, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness." (James 3:9 NIV). The tongue enables us to speak., that is why James uses this analogy. All of us should learn to choose our words when we talk to other people. "Of all the gifts that God has bestowed upon men, none is more precious than the gift of speech. If sanctified by the Holy Spirit, it is a power for good. It is with the tongue that we convince and persuade; with it we offer prayer and praise to God; and with it we convey rich thoughts of the Redeemer's love" (*Testimonies for the Church Vol. 6, p. 336*).

The General Conference Youth Department encourages church leaders to involve young people in all aspects of the church—assign specific roles to the youth and encourage them to participate in mission work. Unfortunately, this ideal is not always prevalent in the local church, and the lack thereof frustrates the youth. On the other hand, it is also true that some youths have failed to accept nominations and invitations to serve in the church; this too is regrettable. Sometimes, youths display arrogance towards the church leadership when they have no part to play in God's work. This approach doesn't usually yield good results; it polarizes the youth and the old folks. Even if their unhappiness is justified, there is a way of sharing your displeasure that won't create animosity between you and the leadership. The Bible is right: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1 NIV).

This approach will endear the youth to anyone who has wronged them and may bring a change of heart that will benefit young people in the church. We should not mistake candidness with rudeness. It is possible to express your wounded feelings without being abrasive. An exemplary youth in speech can be a good example to everyone at home, church, and society. This formula will make your peers, parents, schoolteachers, and church leaders respect you because you are mindful of what you say.

Conduct

Matthew 7:16 declares, "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" Our behavior is a public display of who we are. Which kind of conduct is Paul referring to? The Bible provides characteristics of a person who professes to be a Christian. We will consider a few of the biblical references that define who we should be:

- Found in Exodus 20, God's Ten Commandments serves as a compass to everyone who claims to love God. While obedience to the laws of God does not grant us pardon from sin, they serve as a mirror that screens our lives and exposes our character defects and propensities towards sin. God introduced the laws on Mount Sinai because He desired to detox the nation of Israel from the idolatrous life they had lived for over 400 years in Egypt. Embedded in the Ten Commandments are the two dimensions underpinning human relationships – the vertical connection with God and the horizontal connection with humanity. In the New Testament, Jesus said: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40). This profound definition and summary of the Ten Commandments flies in the face of legalism. Love is the foundation of the moral law of God. John 14:15 expresses the same thought: "If you love me, keep my commandments."

- Galatians 5:22-23 says, " But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law." God dispenses these virtues to all who call themselves Christians.
- In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul prescribes the "full armor" of God to all of us. This narrative's context is spiritual warfare, or the great controversy. We can't expect to win in this war when we rely on our righteousness and ability to conquer the devil.
- Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." This passage addresses a crucial matter – the mind. The Spirit of Prophecy lays bare the function of the mind: "Every organ of the body was made to be servant to the mind. The mind is the capital of the body" (*Testimonies for the Church Vol. 3, p.136*). When young people allow the Holy Spirit to tame their minds, their conduct will match what they profess. We should never forget this admonition from scripture, "For as he thinketh in his heart..." (Proverbs 23:7 KJV).

Love

We have already said the Commandments of God are founded on the principle of love. We cannot claim to love God and hate our enemies. Satan offers us a counterfeit of the love God wants us to have. Gospel and secular songs have been written on love, and yet this is still a rare trait among God's people. Romantic movies and songs continue to captivate our minds because humanity admires those who seem to have the capacity to love. It also shows that love is as elusive as a mirage.

Jesus challenged all His disciples when He said: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35). Ellen White has written extensively on love.

Let me share some of her excerpts on love:

- "Love must be the principle of action. Love is the underlying principle of God's government in heaven and earth, and it must be the foundation of the Christian's character. This alone can make and keep him steadfast. This alone can enable him to withstand trial and temptation" (*Counsels on Stewardship, p. 197*).
- I have found no sterner rebuke to those who trivialize love than this one Ellen White has issued to young people: "To trifle with hearts is a crime of no small magnitude in the sight of a holy God. And yet some will show preference for young ladies and call out their affections, and then go their way and forget all about the words they have spoken and their effect. A new face attracts them, and they repeat the same words, devote to another the same attentions" (*Letters to Young Lovers, p. 74*). If the youth want to be taken seriously by their parents and others, they should take this counsel to heart and do as admonished. We often weaken our case against any legitimate injustice or genuine concern if we default on matters of love relationships.
- "The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God... The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian" (*Ministry of Healing, p. 470*). Beneath the Adventist Youth Ministries uniforms should be the uniform of love.

Imagine a world where Adventist youth possess the Agape love from God. Indeed, like the early Christian church, many souls will be won into the Kingdom of God.

Faith

Hebrews 11 is known as the hall of fame for the men and women of faith. Martin Luther and fellow reformers based their theology on Romans 1:17, “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” The Adventist faith was also founded on this same premise.

1. Paul’s counsel to the youth on faith is twofold: First, they should accept the righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith. As the Bible says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6 NIV). When the world denounces the biblical account of creation and the miracles in the Bible, the youth should affirm the Bible. When morality is at its all-time low, the youth should uphold biblical teachings on abstinence and temperance. In other words, the Adventist youth should believe and embrace these principles.

Secondly, the youth should not be ashamed to engage in apologetics to defend the Seventh-day Adventist Church's biblical principles and teachings. Like Paul, the youth should say, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Romans 1:16 NIV). The Bible also says, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

Faith is not a passive virtue. Seventh-day Adventists are known as the people of the *Book* – let us do more than distribute the Bible and our literature, let us be people who practice our faith based on the Bible. Isaac believed when he was told by his father, Abraham, that the Lord would provide a sacrificial lamb. He did not escape when his father raised the knife to kill him, as instructed by God. His faith kept him on the altar until the Lord provided the lamb the father had spoken about. Paul says Timothy and the youth should possess this kind of faith.

Ellen White says, “Isaac believed in God.... After affectionately embracing his father, he submitted to be bound and laid upon the wood. And as his father's hand was raised to slay his son, an angel of God, who had marked all the faithfulness of Abraham ..., called to him out of heaven, and said, ‘Abraham.... Lay not thine hand upon the lad ...: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.’”—[*The Story of Redemption*, 80-82](#)

Purity

What does Paul mean when he says Timothy should be an example to the believers in purity? What does it mean to be pure? We will look for answers from the Bible and the writings of Ellen White.

- 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.” When you rent a car, you are expected to return it in its condition you received it in. Failure to comply will make you financially liable for any damage to the company’s property. Our bodies belong to God, who created us (Genesis 1:26-27). Purity is about stewardship and temperance. It is a recognition that everything belongs to God and is given to us in trust. God expects us to keep what belongs to Him with care.
- Daniel 1:8 says, “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.” Daniel set the moral bar very high when he and his friends were offered the foods and beverages of Babylon. God honored the young Jewish men who had chosen to abstain from unclean foods for ten days. They were healthier and better in appearance than their peers because they were disciplined.

- Ellen White describes the conduct of Daniel and his friends, “At the very outset of their career there came to them a decisive test of character. It was provided that they should eat of the food and drink of the wine that came from the king's table. In this the king thought to give them an expression of his favor and of his solicitude for their welfare. But a portion having been offered to idols, the food from the king's table was consecrated to idolatry; and one partaking of it would be regarded as offering homage to the gods of Babylon. In such homage, loyalty to Jehovah forbade Daniel and his companions to join. Even a mere pretense of eating the food or drinking the wine would be a denial of their faith. To do this would be to array themselves with heathenism and to dishonor the principles of the law of God” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 481). This story is a prime example of what young people should or should not do. Moral degeneration is rampant because of popular culture. Daniel and his friends demonstrated that purity is possible even when surrounded by bad influences.

Conclusion

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul offers Timothy and all young people a blueprint to respond to people who undermine them because of age. The proper use of speech may earn the youth respect from those who do not think much about them. How we conduct ourselves says a lot about our integrity or lack thereof. Love is the litmus test for everyone who claims to be a Christian. When we exercise our faith following the Bible and do not shy away from sharing with others what we believe, our testimony will be a witness to many people. Striving to be pure is a testament that we owe everything to God, even our existence and bodies. God can't wait to make you 'a great nation' just like He did for Ishmael. When God makes you great, you should always honor Him by being an example to all believers. All who are faithful followers of Jesus are already great. God has declared you a “royal priesthood and a holy nation.” There's no need to despise yourself and allow others to do so when you know your identity. Those who know their identity will share Christ's message of salvation with those without hope.

Prayer

Dear God! We come to you as the giver of life and grace. We recognize that we fall short of the standard outlined in 1 Timothy 4:12. We do not have the strength to obtain and practice the virtues Paul shares with us. Only you can give us the ability to practice what we preach. Our heavenly Father, we confess our sins and feel ashamed for disappointing you because we have been hypocrites in many ways. We need a meaningful connection with you so that we can be witnesses for you. Help us, Father, because without you we can do nothing. Teach us to spend time with you so that we can possess these qualities. We come to you by faith, believing you will answer our prayers. In the name of Jesus, we pray, amen!