

You're Never Too Young to be Used by God

Rich Nathan

June 3 & 4, 2017

Recognition Weekend

1 Timothy 4:12-16

I want to begin by telling you about some remarkable young adults who have made this world a better place. Let me introduce you to Dale Partridge. When Dale has a new business idea he asks himself, "If Jesus started a company, what would it look like?" And then he tried to create it.

Take Sevenly, for example. It sells apparel to raise awareness and funds for charities. Each week the company creates a t-shirt or hoodie with a design inspired by the work of a different nonprofit. For seven days, Sevenly promotes and sells the gear, mostly through Facebook and other social media and then gives \$7 of each purchase straight to a charity – orphan care, autism research, clean water. Since launching in 2011, they've given away \$3.6 million. He's given speeches at Facebook and Adobe. He's been featured in Forbes. He's using business as a platform to care for people.

Then there's Nabeel Qureshi. Nabeel was raised in a Pakistani American Muslim family. He came to Christ in medical school after reading the Bible in order to prove to a Christian friend that he was wrong – and he ended up becoming a Christian. Now he shares his testimony around the world through Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. He came out with a book a few years ago provocatively titled,

Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus

He lectures and debates, encouraging Christians to love, serve and ultimately share the gospel with Muslim neighbors. As some of you know, there are about 5 million Muslims who live in the United States. That's a great opportunity right here in this country to love, serve and share the gospel with friends, co-workers, neighbors. By the way, pray for Nabeel, he has advanced stage stomach cancer.

Consider Thomas Lake. Thomas Lake is 33. He's a committed follower of Jesus. He is a pastor's kid and an award-winning writer for *Sports Illustrated*. He often writes about sports figures faith – whether it's a high school football coach or a football player or a big name like Tim Tebow. Thomas Lake wrote a 15,000 word article about Tim Tebow for *Sports Illustrated*. Because of Thomas, secular readers read a sympathetic, warm, thoughtful approach to Christian faith.

It's just wonderful to have Christians in key places of influence helping to interpret and communicate Christian faith to a secular audience.

Just one more example. Let me introduce you to Olivia Hallisey. Olivia's 17. She's a high school student in Connecticut. She invented a new way to test for the Ebola virus that doesn't require refrigeration or electricity – which is a huge boon for the rural areas in Africa that have been most affected by the epidemic. Olivia won top honors at September's Google Science Fair because of the life-saving potential of her invention.

You are never too young to be used by God to make this world a better place. Today as we recognize the 5th, 8th and 12th grade students who are graduating from their respective schools and moving on to their next stage of life and as I finish up this leadership series from the Apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy, I called today's talk "You're Never Too Young to be Used by God."

Let's pray.

1 Timothy 4:12-16

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. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Paul writes,

1 Timothy 4:12

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.

We don't know exactly how old Timothy was when this was written. Timothy served with the Apostle Paul during Paul's second missionary journey which was in about 49 AD. Assuming that 1 Timothy was written after Paul's third missionary journey after Paul's imprisonment in Rome and subsequent release, which would mean that 1 Timothy was written in 62 AD. That's 13 years after we meet Timothy in Acts 16. And assuming Timothy was a teenager when we first meet him in the book of Acts, Timothy is probably in his late 20's or early 30's.

The idea of youth is obviously a relative thing in the culture in the context, but if we assume that the church in Ephesus contained people that Paul had evangelized years

before who are now older, they would have been long-time leaders. It would have been natural for them, particularly in that culture, to look down on Timothy who is now the pastor of the church.

Timothy, a guy in his late 20's or early 30's, is trying to pastor people who may be in their 50's or 60's. And he is facing a colossal task because false teaching is spreading in the church and Timothy, this young guy, is tasked from the Apostle Paul to stamp it out. As I said, you're never too young to be used by God.

Let me tell you a story. There was a little boy named Billy. He was in second grade in a Christian school in Kalamazoo, Michigan. His class was reading a story about this old priest named Eli and God speaking through a young boy named Samuel. The recess bell rang and the class ran out to the playground and Billy sat in his chair, not moving. Normally, he would be racing out ahead of the other kids.

The teacher said, "Billy, what's wrong?"

Billy said, "Do you think God still speaks to boys?"

The teacher said, "I believe with all of my being that God still speaks to boys. I think God will talk to anyone provided they listen." The teacher reached into her desk and she pulled out a little paper with a poem written on it. She said, "If you are really interested in what this Bible story talked about, you might want to read this poem later tonight."

The next morning, the recess bell rang and Billy ran towards the door. The teacher grabbed him by his shirt and said, "Billy, what did you think of the poem that I gave you last night?"

Billy said, "I really liked it."

The teacher raised one eyebrow and said, "Did you even read it?"

Billy said, "Yeah, I memorized it."

Now, she's really suspicious and says, "You did not."

"Yes, I did."

"Then, recite it for me. Tell me what it said."

Little second grade Billy said,

"Oh give me Samuel's ear,

An open ear, O Lord,
Alive and quick to hear each whisper of thy Word,
Like him who answered to thy call,
And to obey thee first of all.”

The teacher was shocked and said, “Billy, you keep listening to God and he’s going to do something great in your life.”

That little boy grew up to be Pastor Bill Hybels. Hybels is the pastor of one of America’s leading churches called Willow Creek. Sometimes when God wants to do something really important, he uses a child. Do you believe that?

The Apostle Paul says to Timothy, a young man in his 20’s or early 30’s, don’t let yourself be put down because of your age.

Don’t be put down

Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young. This phrase “look down on” is from a Greek word that literally means “despise”. And it’s interesting that we find exactly the same Greek word in Matthew 18:10. Listen to what Jesus says,

Matthew 18:10

¹⁰ “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

There’s a tendency on the part of older people to dismiss or to despise younger people. In the Bible, I think of David who became the second King of Israel. The first time we hear about David was when God was going to choose a king to replace the first King of Israel, King Saul. God sent the prophet Samuel to a man named Jesse in the city of Bethlehem to pick one of Jesse’s sons to become the new King of Israel.

Samuel automatically went to the older sons. God said, “No, I’m not picking one of these sons.” He went down the line and God kept saying no, not him. Finally, Samuel turned to Jesse and asked, “Do you have any other sons? Because God is not picking any of these young men.” Jesse said, “My youngest, David, but he’s tending the sheep. He’s too young. He’s just a boy.” Samuel asks him to call him. And God says to Samuel, “David’s the one. David is the future king.”

At this point in his life, David was maybe 11 or 12 or just a young teenager. His father didn’t think there was any way that this young kid could become the king. Samuel didn’t think that God would pick the youngest, the smallest to do something great for his people. But I love what God says:

1 Samuel 16:7b

The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

God designed the church so that every single one of us is needed. Every part, every organ is necessary. Because the church is a body. The church is not an institution or some inanimate structure. The church is a living thing in which every person is necessary, especially children and young adults.

Listen to the wise words of Wess Stafford who up until recently was the CEO of one of the largest Christian charitable organizations in the world, Compassion International. Here’s what Wess Stafford said:

“Whenever a child is mentioned in scripture I have found that God is up to something important. In fact, it is sometimes a task too important to entrust to an adult whose cement has long since set. I guess we adults think too much. Maybe we know too much. Probably both: we think we know too much!”

So, how do you deal with being dismissed by older people if you are a child, a teen, a young adult? How do you deal with older people who do look down on you because you are young? They think you have to earn the right to be heard. This attitude is even in the church despite all the biblical examples of young people being used to make a difference in the world – Daniel, Esther, Mary the Mother of Jesus.

I want you to note in this passage what Paul doesn’t say. He doesn’t say, “Timothy, stand up for yourself! Demand respect! Fight back! Put those old farts in their place.” Sometimes we do need to stand up for ourselves. Sometimes we do need to say, “Hey, that comment that you just made, that decision that you made, felt like a put-down. I don’t think that you would have treated someone so disrespectfully or rolled your eyes at someone who was 30 and who said what I just said, or who was 40 or 50 or 60, and did what I just did.” But Paul does not say to Timothy that the way for you to deal with the disrespect you’re experiencing because of your age is to assert yourself more. Instead, Paul tells Timothy to live in a way that commands respect.

Be an example!

1 Timothy 4:12

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.

Paul tells Timothy: don’t be put down, but instead be an example. This is a series on leadership. I started the series by saying that a leader is someone who has followers. A leader is somebody who is out in front. Here’s the simplest definition of leadership that

I can think of: leaders are people who lead. Let me say it again: leaders are people who lead.

The problem regarding most leaders, and even Christian leaders, is that leaders rarely lead. They mostly just point. Most leaders are pointers. They say, "There is the way. Go do that." The reason Jesus was a leader was because he wasn't a pointer. He didn't say, "There is the way." He said, "I am the way." He didn't say, "Go walk over there." He said, "Follow me."

I think people today especially in the church are desperate for a leader. Someone in whom to observe a truth in the Bible being worked out in their lives. People need a model.

Some of you kids here today, some of you teens who are listening to me, you are the oldest child in your family. If you've got younger brothers and sisters, there is a calling on your life from God to be an example. To not just fight with your brother or sister, to be annoyed by them, but to lead. To be a leader to your siblings. To influence them on behalf of Jesus. Demonstrate for them the way to do life. You are never too young to live for Christ. People need a model.

That's one of the ways we try to teach here at Vineyard Columbus. We try to encourage you to pray for the sick. Our classes on healing are not just talk. We demonstrate. We model. We say, "Here's the way you pray for the sick. Do what I'm doing." There's something so incredibly powerful about having a model, an example. That's the beauty of many of our Support and Recovery Groups here at Vineyard Columbus. A person goes to one of those recovery groups and a question that is certainly in their minds is this: is it possible for someone like me with my particular problem to actually get free. I have had this problem in my life for years, maybe decades. I've been this way for as long as I remember, is it possible for me to recover. Is it possible for me to change? After the trauma or the grief that I've been through, can I be healed? You can read all the books in the world about getting free, about being healed, but being in a support group, being in a recovery group led by someone who says, "I was exactly where you are and the Lord set me free or the Lord healed me." – That's powerful.

One of the most successful ministries we have here at Vineyard Columbus for the last 20 years or so is called "Begin Again". It's designed for couples whose marriage is on the rocks. It's designed for married couples who are contemplating divorce, maybe they've already hired attorneys. The Begin Again ministry is designed for couples who have lost all hope that their marriage can be healed. Over the last 20 years, we have seen hundreds and hundreds of couples pull back from the brink, given fresh hope for their relationship. They not only decide to stay together, but they discover life-giving marriages that they couldn't imagine that they could ever have achieved. We bring

couples through a process that is led by other couples who themselves had their marriages rescued and healed.

By the way, if you want some information about our marriage reconciliation ministry here at Vineyard Columbus for yourself or a friend or a family member, you can contact our Marriage and Family Life ministry.

Marriage & Family Life

Mindy.layman@vineyardcolumbus.org

There's power in example. There's power in a model. When someone tells you that they were exactly where you are, ready to throw in the towel, but you could become like we are now. Paul told Timothy to be an example.

How do you get respect from someone who doesn't show respect? Be an example. Here's the second thing:

Be different!

1 Timothy 4:12

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.

Paul lists five qualities for Timothy that will make him different than the rest of the world. Two are outward: speech and conduct. Three are inward: love, faith and purity. It's outwardly and inwardly. Paul says, "Tim, be different than the rest of the world and you will win respect."

I want to talk to those of you who are graduating in particular right now. The rest of you can overhear what I'm saying to these graduates because this obviously applies to everyone here. If you want to make a difference for Jesus in this world, you need to be different than the world. Christians always think that the way I'm going to build bridges with those outside the church, those who don't give God a passing thought is to be like the person I'm trying to influence. Act like them. Do what they do. Jesus says that conforming to the world is precisely the approach that won't work. The whole Sermon on the Mount can be titled, "Be Different". Jesus wants his followers to be different.

Paul says, "Be different!" And the five qualities that he tells us to be different in are bookended by these qualities, speech and purity.

1 Timothy 4:12

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.

Young people, talk about two things that will mark you off as different than everyone around you in school. First, be different in your speech. Young people, older folks, words have so much impact – both for good and for ill –our words can wound, our words can heal.

Proverbs 18:21 says:

Proverbs 18:21

²¹ The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Do you think about your speech? Do you think about what's coming out of your mouth? If you want to be used by Christ, pay attention to your speech. You know the negatives – gossip, slander, lying, complaining, boasting, exaggeration. Fight against these. Your speech will mark you out, and not just what you say orally, but what you say online.

I want you to imagine Jesus leaning over your shoulder as you post something on Snapchat or Twitter or wherever. And he whispers in your year, "I want you to be different than the rest of the world. Don't write that. Be encouraging. Be hopeful."

Graduates, be different in your speech and be different in your purity! Purity obviously has broad application, but I do believe in this context, Paul is talking about sexual purity. You talk about things that will mark a person off – speech and purity. I know this one personally. When I met Marlene and I was 17, I thought she was beautiful and I wanted to date her, I wanted to hook-up with her. She was a Christian who understood this principle that if she was going to have any influence for Christ, she had to be different. So she drew a line. She said, "Sorry, I'm not going to date you. I only date Christians." And when I didn't understand what she was talking about, why she had a religious test, she proceeded to tell me in lots of detail about her faith. It might not have been the most sophisticated approach ever, but it had enormous impact on me. Because Marlene was different regarding her speech and her purity, God used her to bring me to Christ.

Be an example. Be different. Here's the third thing:

Slide

Be devoted to scripture!

Slide 1 Timothy 4:13

¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

Paul is talking to a pastor and he's telling this pastor that the pastor needs to be a scripture-centered in his ministry. He needs to encourage people to obey the Bible, and he needs to explain to people the meaning of the scriptures. What Paul is saying has been the practice of church leaders for thousands of years.

This is what we read in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 8:8

⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

If you're going to build a healthy church, it fundamentally needs to be built on God's word. The church needs to be and do everything that the Bible calls the church to be and do. I've always believed that the center of my ministry as a pastor is to explain God's word and encourage you to read God's word and obey it. Devotion to God's word is not just for pastors, it's for all of us - all of you who are listening to me today. And it is for you graduates. You need to develop a habit of spending time in God's word.

There's a book out by a professor named Christian Smith who studied young adults to find out what exactly it is in a teenager's life that caused them to continue to follow Jesus in their 20's and into older adulthood. Every youth group has teenagers in it who are excited about Jesus, but as these teens get older, as they go off to college, as they get involved in the workplace, many of these teens cool off. They are no longer hot for Jesus. Many teens who are leaders in church youth groups, as younger adults and older adults stop going to church. They make no difference for Christ in the world.

Christian Smith studied the factors that if they are present in a teen's life they'll likely indicate that they'll continue on in the faith. One factor is to ask a teen if they pray frequently. If a teen prays frequently, that's a good indicator that they will be followers of Jesus as adults. Have you had your questions answered? Teens have lots of questions about faith. Have you been supplied with good answers, good material, good reasons to continue to believe? Teens who have their minds satisfied are more likely to continue on in Christian faith.

Are their parents serious followers of Jesus? Or is there at least another adult that the teen can look up to who encourages them to believe? Having an adult role model of faith really helps. You know what one of the most important things of discovering whether a teen is going to continue on in their faith? It's whether they regularly read the Bible. Do they spend all their time watching TV, playing games online or do they

regularly read the Bible? A teen who regularly reads the Bible, along with these other factors, will more than likely than not continue to follow Jesus as an adult.

Be devoted to scripture. Here's the forth thing:

Be open to the Spirit!

1 Timothy 4:14

¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

Now most traditional commentaries will suggest that the gift that was given through the laying on of hands was the gift of the office of pastor. In other words, Timothy is being exhorted here to not neglect his calling as a pastor that was given to him at his ordination ceremony. I don't think that is a probable meaning of verse 14. When it says "Do not neglect your gift, the word for gift is the Greek word "charismatos". Paul is almost certainly talking about a spiritual gift and he mentions the same thing in 2 Timothy 1:6 when he says,

2 Timothy 1:6

"For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

I don't quite understand these things, but biblically I think that Paul is talking about an impartation of a spiritual gift through the laying on of hands. I don't quite understand it, but I believe in it. I believe that it is possible and, indeed, biblical for a person with a gifting under the leadership of the Holy Spirit to impart that gifting. Not at will, but under the leadership of the Holy Spirit to impart that gifting at least in some measure to another individual by laying hands on. You see that with Moses giving a measure of the spirit, some authority, a leadership gift to Joshua. You see it between Elijah and Elisha. And I think Paul is referring to that here when he says that Timothy ought not to neglect the gift that was imparted to him, the charismatos.

Graduates, the rest of you who are listening to me today, God wants to give you spiritual gifts. Be open to the Holy Spirit! Ask gifted individuals to pray for you, for an impartation – that the gift that is in them will be in you!

Be an example. Be different. Be devoted to scripture. Be open to the Spirit. And, finally:

Keep going!

1 Timothy 4:15-16

¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

I think many people and many leaders misunderstand what people want and need. I don't believe people expect perfection. If so, they are only going to find it in one person – Jesus. You're not going to find perfection in any human leader, in any pastor, in any small group leader, in any youth leader. You're not going to find perfection in yourself. None of us have arrived and we won't arrive until we see Jesus.

What people need to see is somebody who is committed to grow, someone who is spiritually maturing. What people need to see is a person committed to walking continually with God. My hope for my life and for your life is that it would be said about us – that others have seen us grow. You are kinder than you were five years ago or ten years ago. Your teaching has a different quality than it did when you first started. You are more loving. You are easier to talk to. You look more like Jesus now than you did before. What people need is not perfection. What people need to observe is progress and perseverance. Step by step – left foot, right foot, left foot.

Graduates, keep going in your relationship with Jesus! Keep growing! You are never too young to be used by God! And you'll never be too old to be used by God! Make a commitment to stay connected to Jesus regardless of what is going on in your life and the Lord will bless you. And we want to bless you here at Vineyard Columbus.

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- I. Don't be put down!
- II. Be an example!
- III. Be different!
- IV. Be devoted to scripture!
- V. Be open to the Spirit!
- VI. Keep going!