

# Make It Your Ambition



You have tremendous opportunities ahead of you. Take advantage of them. Do not let people despise your youth because you fail to use well this time in your life. Set an example for the people around you by your words and deeds. Keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Make it your ambition to be a devoted disciple.

Like everyone else on earth, you must decide whom you are going to serve with your life. You can go along with the crowd, fritter your life away in empty pursuits, and lose everything worth having in the end. Or you can follow the sometimes lonely path toward heaven, invest your life in God's service, and gain everything worth having in the end. When we stop to consider this simple comparison, the choice is not much of a choice. Only the second option will satisfy our deepest longings.

## **A Great Trust**

Our parents have trained us from birth. They have given us knowledge and skills and taught us first of all to fear the Lord. We should be thankful for the lessons they have learned the hard way, for the sacrifices they have made for our benefit, and for the opportunities they have enabled us to enjoy.

We have spent so many years being different from our peers, and we have developed such a different view of life, that we do not want to follow the example of our peers. Many of them are going to college, getting a degree they will not use, getting married, working a 9-to-5 job, having a couple of kids, and buying a suburban house with a mortgage. Later on they will have a mid-life crisis, retire, play golf, and die in a nursing home. I have different goals for my life.

I would like to marry and have children (more than two, God willing), but that desire is part of my long-term vision for serving the Lord. We who have come to know the Lord at the feet of godly parents have received a great trust. God has given us a head start on making a positive difference in our generation and on rearing another generation of godly children.

Since we want our children and our children's children to be faithful to the Lord, what should we do now to work toward that goal? For those of us who desire to marry, that is one of the primary questions we must address. Parents cannot force their children to follow the Lord, but parents are responsible for their failure to train their children properly (Jer. 5:7). How will our decisions now about work, finance, education, and other areas affect our parenting ability later?

Even if we are blessed with faithful parents, we do not have a free ride to success on earth and a home in heaven.

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We must make the same decision that those who do not have faithful parents must make. That is, each of us must make a conscious, personal decision to walk in the good way. Our families affect us greatly for good or evil, but ultimately, each of us is responsible for his or her own actions (Eze. 18). As we grow older and earn the freedom to make more choices about how and where we spend our time, we must also accept the responsibility that comes with that freedom.

## **The Foundation**

God's word tells us how to use the liberty we have in Christ. The Bible is the foundation on which we must build healthy families, churches, and communities. We cannot ignore the beauty and power of its instruction if we wish truly to succeed.

Scripture is sufficient and efficient to prepare us to live as God desires. Our world has all sorts of experts who provide special counsel to others. Sadly, many of them offer their own brand of what is falsely called knowledge (1 Tim. 6:20), and none of them can match the true wisdom which God has revealed to us. We should examine for ourselves what Scripture says and learn to discern good teaching from bad.

Our culture has as many idols as any ancient civilization. We may use different names and give them different shapes, but still we have the temptation to give our attention to created things rather than to the Creator. Wealth, security, popularity, entertainment, and more vie for our time and focus. Worry and frustration necessarily accompany any effort to make it on one's own. Self-gratification is not all it is cracked up to be. It leaves its victims cold and lonely.

When I am thinking clearly, I easily confess that God is in control and that everything will work out for good under his direction. However, when I allow the minimal pressures of my young life to cloud my vision, I start worrying about how everything will turn out. Seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness puts everything else in perspective. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and press on toward the goal. We must trust the Lord with all of our hearts and acknowledge him in all of our ways.

Ignorance of God's word leaves us undefended against spiritual attacks. Many of our peers do not know basic facts about Bible people and events, much less the deeper concepts of Scripture. They may claim to know Biblical principles, but that is not the same as knowing the Bible. "I think" is not the same as "God says."

Our knowledge and understanding of God's word should continually grow. We do not live on earth long enough to exhaust its deep mines of wisdom. We should not stake our claim on the teachings of any one man or denomination and then assume that we have all the answers. Other believers, past and present, can help us to see things that we have missed. Together we can build up Christ's church in our generation.

We may not share messages before large audiences, but all of us know people whom we can encourage and exhort in God's way. Neither personal pride nor self-righteousness should motivate us in this sharing of God's truth. We are not spiritual aristocrats condescending to help the lowly. As someone has said, we are spiritual beggars helping other beggars find bread.

Youthfulness does not disqualify us or exempt us from teaching others. God can use infants to prepare praise, and he can use young men and women to communicate his message. Young people who know the Lord have more to

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share than old people with a wall full of credentials and a heart empty of faith. Be humble. Be confident. Bless other people with God's truth.

## Reflections

The following chapters provide my observations on several issues of significance. My burden is especially for other young men. Some young men I know have been drifting through their 20s without direction. Their training in public school and college has left them unprepared for real life. They have poor vision for where they want to go in life, so they are struggling to get ahead in the true spiritual sense.

Perhaps I can help you avoid some of the pain and struggle I have seen others face and have experienced myself. God cares about our family life, our education, our work, our money management, and our social interaction. He cares so much that he has told us how we can honor him in these areas.

Based on my study and experience, these are things that I am trying to put into practice in my life. I do not want to be like the Pharisees, chaining others down with burdens that I am unwilling to lift myself. I have not already attained completion in these areas. I must continue the daily struggle with my flesh to subdue my selfish desires, lest I, having preached these things to others, should myself become a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27).

I expect my understanding of these issues to deepen in coming years, but I also expect my core principles to remain the same. Please do not accept my perspective as your final authority. Explore these ideas for yourself and discuss them with your parents and other wise people around you. I do not expect you to do everything the same

way I do, but I do expect you to think about the issues, make conscious decisions, and live them out confidently.

Of the few Greek words I know, one of my favorites is *parakaleo* (par-ah-kal-eh'-o). As used in Titus 2:6, for example, it literally means "to call alongside," that is, to encourage or to exhort. I am calling you alongside to share ideas with you, to encourage you in your efforts, and to exhort you to press on toward maturity.

My prayer is that these words will challenge and encourage you to appreciate the blessings of home, to dream big dreams, and to pursue a life of holiness. We need to take advantage of our current opportunities and prepare well for our future roles. We need to fulfill our purpose in our generation. To know and serve the Lord is the highest possible ambition, the only purpose to which we should devote our lives.