

The Trendsetters?

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Date: 01 July 2018

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[0 : 00] Now imagine you've just turned 18 and passed your driving test. And mom and dad tells you they've bought you a Mazda 3.

Which version would you prefer? This brand new one? Or this 1980s version? Or how about this? Which mobile phone would you rather have? The one on the left or the one on the right? Left, okay, yes. And given it's World Cup at the moment, how would you rather be watching the World Cup? On this TV? Or on this 52-inch flat screen? Now you probably can't watch on the old TV anyway because it doesn't have digital reception.

But anyway, but you get my point, don't you? In each case, we prefer the new rather than the old. And that's because they have better functionality. And that's often how we think about life as well.

[1 : 04] That our hope for a better life can be achieved when we toss out the old and bring in the new. By improving ourselves or reinventing ourselves. After all, whether it's at school or at work, that's what they keep telling you, don't they?

To work on your personal development. Which leads us to look for trends. To listen to the trendsetters or the thought leaders. Like for example, TED talk speakers. What new idea is going to make a decisive change to my life? What is the next big thing I should get on to? And I suppose what happens on a personal level happens at a societal and global level as well.

Particularly in the West. Because ours is a progressive society. We believe that the goal and destiny of the human race is progress. We believe we live better than our parents or grandparents. And our hope is that the next generation will live better than us. Economic growth. Technological advancement. We believe in these things without even questioning them.

[2 : 18] And by and large, progress, I have to say, is good. Finding a cure for cancer or having a medical breakthrough so that people can live longer.

But that's a good thing. Being innovative and using technology to work better. To save us time so that we can do the things we enjoy with the people we love.

That's good. So there's nothing wrong with wanting a better life and a better world. On the face of it, at least. Finding new solutions to all problems is a good thing.

In fact, the Bible tells us we're actually wired or created for it. So in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 28, that's our creation mandate as we've got on the slide. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number.

Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and every other living creature that moves on the ground. Subduing means solving problems.

[3 : 20] Means finding solutions, new solutions to all problems. But I guess with anything, there's always a danger. And the danger here comes when we believe that old is always bad and new is always good.

And in our rush to embrace progress, we can adopt everything that's new without questioning. Discarding the old without care.

And so we see this in our attitudes nowadays, don't we? The word old-fashioned, that's used as a put-down nowadays. Or when we say, oh, that's so 1950s.

Or, you know, it's the 21st century. Why are they still stuck with 16th century thinking? Now, what's the problem with that, you may ask? Well, because even if new may be good, it's also untried.

So it could simply be a fad. Or worse, it could turn out to be dangerous. So for an example of a fad, just take diets.

[4 : 28] Dieticians keep creating new ones, don't they? There's the Atkins diet, the paleo diet, the high-fat, low-carb diet. You name it, they've got it.

But of course, the problem is that they keep changing their minds. One minute, something's bad for you. The next, it's good. So take pork belly as a case in point.

Everyone used to think it's bad for you. You know, that fatty and all that sort of stuff. But do you know what? Not anymore. This year, proof on the screen, a study showed that it's now a top 10 nutritious food.

I kid you not, it's even on the BBC website. Now, don't ask me why. All I can say is, eat as much of it now as you can, because you never know, it might become bad for you again very soon.

Now, as far as it goes, you know, that particular fad is probably harmless, right? I hope. But sometimes they can actually be dangerous. Like, for example, advocating gender reassignment surgery for those with gender dysphoria, especially with young teens, when we really don't know much about the potential long-term harm, physically or mentally, that that could do.

[5 : 46] Further, we often think new things are being presented to us in a neutral way, when often there are actually inherent biases or conflicts of interest with those favoring or promoting what's new.

So, for example, companies always promote new products, don't they? Whether it's new ice cream flavors or new Tim Tam flavors. Now, why do they do that?

Is it because it's better for you? No. I don't think so. They do it to boost their own profits, don't they? Have you ever wondered why artists and filmmakers love producing provocative art and film?

Do the ideas in them always have merit? Not always, because what they're doing is trying to create publicity and attention for themselves. I think it's the same reason why pop stars and celebrities like to dress and look edgy.

The publicity, whether good or bad, helps promote their film or their music. That's why they say in the industry, all publicity is good publicity.

[6 : 54] And even when it comes to what we may consider the bastion of objective truth, that of scientific inquiry and academic research, even this is susceptible to conflict and bias.

Why? Because the system itself actually rewards new discovery. That's how you earn a PhD or get yourself published. Not by repeating or reaffirming old ideas, but coming up with new ones, groundbreaking ones.

And so whether consciously or not, in the pressure to gain reputation in their field, academics are actually tempted to embellish the truth, to make speculative findings more certain than they are, or even outright invent theories, just to get funded, published, or recognized.

And if the public then jumps on their bandwagon, well, so much the better. And so what happens then is when we embrace the truth, is often what also comes with it, is that we discard what's true and good, simply because it's old.

So we've seen, for example, how modern mobile devices have taken over the world. And look, I've embraced modern technology, but have you ever considered what we may have lost by following this trend?

[8 : 19] For instance, when family dinners look more like this nowadays, rather than this. It's meant to be there talking to each other.

Now, has our ability for deep conversation suffered as a result? Our ability to express emotion and empathy? Have we lost the art of good listening? And do families suffer now more so because of that?

Likewise, we now have all the info we need at our fingertips, just by Googling. But in the information overload, we have lost the art of wisdom and discernment, perhaps.

Do we now judge people more by how much they know, rather than the character that they possess? Integrity, honesty, humility, and things like that. We don't often know, do we, what we lose by tossing out the old.

And the irony is, we think we've done better overall by embracing the new. When in reality, if we stand back and just look at things soberly, we really haven't made our lives in this world much better.

[9 : 30] So just look at some of the indicators for wealth and happiness. Even with all the advancement in medical research, rates of depression and suicide levels are still very high, even all-time high, particularly among our youth.

Our mortality hasn't really improved. In fact, because we exercise less and eat more, obesity and heart disease is still a big problem. With technology, we're supposed to have more time to enjoy

with loved ones.

And yet, because of the pace of life, our stress levels have just been increasing, hasn't it? Those are not good trends, are they? And it's the same globally.

We have the technology to feed the world many times over, and yet people are still dying from starvation. Wars and conflict, crime, lawlessness, gangs, they're still afflicting too many people. And if you look at the refugee crisis in Europe, that's just one symptom of what's happened. And so despite decades and centuries of progress, nothing really has changed.

[10:41] Not in the areas that really matter, in terms of happiness and contentment, in terms of stability, caring families and relationships. And this sentiment is captured perfectly in our first reading tonight, where the writer in Ecclesiastes chapter 1 laments the unchanging nature of the world.

First, he looks at the physical world in verses 5 to 7. But then in verse 9, he says humanity too is trapped in this inescapable existential rut.

So he notes, what has been will be again. What has been done will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, look, this is something new.

It was here already long ago. It was here before our time. One generation follows another. And yet the same mistakes are made over and over.

We say we want to learn from history, lest we forget, as we say on Anzac Day. And yet, we forget and we do it again. In part, that could be because we are so keen to throw away the old and the memory of mistakes that come with it.

[11:55] But we also have this naive trust, don't we? That in the new, somehow, this time, it's going to be different. This time, we're going to really solve the problem.

And yet, for all our naive optimism, I don't think the real problem actually lies with the new in itself, nor with our failure to learn from the past.

Rather, the reason why we can't create a better world is us. That's right. We are the problem.

Because even if the new things are good things, somehow, somehow, we come along and manage to stuff it up.

So take technology again as an example. The internet and social media, they're not bad in and of themselves. But look what we've done with it. Nowadays, we're so connected, we're over-connected.

We're constantly scrolling through other people's Facebook pages or LinkedIn profiles. And what? We then suffer from anxiety and envy. Where in the past, we would have to come to someone to actually hurt them verbally, face-to-face.

[13:09] Now we can do it through a myriad of social platforms, can't we? And what we say actually stays there forever to keep hurting and doing damage. Or the vile images that we post, they spread like wildfire.

And so the new hasn't led to better. Not because the new is bad, but because human nature hasn't changed.

We may be more sophisticated in hiding our sins, but deep down, we're still fallen and corrupted. Selfish and self-centered.

And again, the Bible gives us a good description of this in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. He tells the Christians in chapter 2, you don't have to turn to it, I've got it on the slide.

He says, As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

[14:12] All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

You notice why there Paul says we're so helpless? It's because we're dead in sin. We're simply following blindly the ways of this world, mindlessly gratifying the cravings of our flesh, its desires and thoughts.

At the heart of it all is pride and self-seeking. Because we only think to do what satisfies us. It's about our comfort, our rights, our ego, our feelings.

And it expresses itself with phrases like, I deserve better. Or, I've been offended. And when we all collectively think and live like that, well, that's why there's no hope for a better world.

Now, you may think then that the Bible's solution is for us to just try harder or better, right? But actually, it's not. Rather, what the Bible tells us to do is to repent and put our trust in God.
[15 : 33] Because when you read the Bible carefully, what you see is that God had a plan from the very beginning, both to bring us and the world to perfection. But it's not something that we are, the plan is not something about what we must do for ourselves, but about something to do with what He'll do for us.

And so that brings me to our final bullet point tonight and to our second reading. So here in chapter 1 of verse 18 of Peter's letter, his first letter, he says this, for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through Him, you believe in God who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him.

And so your faith and hope are in God. Do you see how Peter talks about the empty way of life? It echoes what the writer of Ecclesiastes says, and Paul as well, that we're all trapped in this futile rut of human existence without God, following the ways of this world, satisfying our cravings and desires, or mimicking those of others.

Now let me ask you, is that how your life feels right now? This treadmill, this chasing of promises of happiness that never delivers.

[17 : 13] Well, Peter says that God has come to redeem us from it. That is, to free us by buying us out of slavery to it. How has this been done?

Well, Peter says, not with gold or silver or cash or Bitcoin, but by the precious blood of Jesus. The only way you and I can be freed from sin and its penalty is for Jesus, His Son, to die on the cross for our behalf.

Because we're not simply physically dead. No, we're spiritually dead. Our sins prevent us from having a new life, true life, with God.

But Peter says, now this is possible. In fact, it's been secured in Christ. This plan that God has is now guaranteed to succeed because Jesus has died and risen from the dead.

And notice, too, that Peter says that this plan was conceived from the very beginning, before creation. Jesus was chosen before the world began, even though He only entered into it and is revealed in the last times.

[18 : 26] And so, from the very beginning, God had a plan and He has stayed on track throughout. He has kept to this trajectory.

He has stayed on trend. And His call now is for us to get on to this trend, to put our trust in Him and His plan.

How do we do that? Well, Peter has already said that we are to believe in God through Jesus. To, as he says, put our faith and hope in God. And when we do that, Peter goes on to say in verse 23, we are born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.

To be born again is to have new life, a life which is destined for perfection in a perfect world. It's not a perishable seed, referring not to plant seed, but human seed or progeny.

but it comes from trust and believing in God's word. The living and enduring word, Peter says. Now, here's the amazing thing.

[19 : 36] Throughout my talk tonight, I've hopefully made some insightful observations about human trends and human nature of new things we've seen in recent times. And yet, at each juncture, I've been able to show how the Bible already had something to say about it.

Fancy that. This old and ancient text is actually still relevant for our times. But more than that, this ancient text is able to speak authoritatively about it, to cut through all the confusion with clarity.

And yet, you know, we find many people today that scout the Bible, don't they? Just because it's old. Well, old doesn't mean it's irrelevant or outdated.

In fact, think about this. All truth is old because, by definition, it's unchanging. And so, if you've been influenced to think like that and you haven't really read the Bible because of that, then please, do yourself a favor.

Read it and judge for yourself. Well, Peter calls the word God's living and enduring word. Living because it speaks to us today and enduring because it will keep speaking.

[20 : 59] It will outlast each of us in our lifetime. And every trend that comes along the way, that too, it will outlast. Peter goes on to say, all people are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was preached to you. So, Elon Musk and his Tesla battery will soon wither away.

Zuckerberg and Facebook will crumble one day. In fact, I think we've already seen signs of that happening, haven't we? But God's word will endure forever.

And so, my friends, the question is, and you heard me asking last week which authority you were trusting in. Well, this week, I'm asking you which trend are you going to follow tonight?

And it seems like you have two choices. You can follow the trends of the world and trust yourself to be savvy enough to jump onto the right one and to jump onto the next one at the right time when it comes.

[22 : 11] Or you can follow the trend or plan that God has laid out in his word. This trend or plan is mapped out a bit like what I've shown you on the next slide.

It starts with Jesus being chosen before the world, then creation, then the fall of Adam and Eve, then Abraham being chosen so that Jesus might come through him or his people.

Then Jesus dies and rises from the dead and through him, and we're in this stage now, God gives new and perfect life to all who put their trust in him. And one day, Jesus will return to usher in a perfect world.

Now, if you want to find out more about this plan, what the Bible calls the plan of salvation or the good news or the gospel of Jesus, then please come along to the upcoming course which we are running, Christianity Explored.

We're going to start it on Sunday, the 22nd of July at 3 p.m., right here in this place. Later on, Renee, who's the leader of the course, she'll come up to give you a bit more information about it.

[23 : 19] Now, have you ever tried to paint sidelines on a soccer field? Probably not. Here's a picture of someone who tried and has not been very successful.

Now, why is that? It's because the person that was doing it was simply looking down and using just the immediate section that he's done or she's done as the reference.

And friends, that's exactly what happens when we trust in trends and trendsetters. There's nothing permanent or fixed to guide us. All we have is the new for today.

And trends often just react to the here and now. But when we look to God's plan, what we have is a fixed and permanent point in eternity.

And it's unchanging and as we walk and live, we walk straight towards it without being distracted by the here and now and going to and fro, not knowing what we're doing.

[24 : 27] Now, we often hear, don't we, that investment managers will often advertise their past performance, you know, 20 plus annual returns for the last 10 years, something like that.

And it's always clear that they're trying to sell their credentials. But then, what do they always say at the end? They always make this disclaimer, don't they? Past performance is no guarantee of future performance.

Well, friends, when we look at God's word in the Bible and when we match it against his past performance in history, what he says to us is this, my past performance is an absolute guarantee of future performance.

Look at what I've done in my son Jesus and his sacrifice for you. You can put your trust in my plan and invest fully in this trend because I will guarantee its future performance.

Friends, that is God's clad iron guarantee for you tonight. And you can follow his trend or his plan.