

Don't Get Distracted

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Preacher: Ken Moser

[0 : 00] If you could have a Bible handy, that would be handy. And if you could put a pencil, pen, piece of paper, or your thumb in page 199 in the New Testament, that would be handy as well.

I'm going to say a prayer for us all. Father, we do thank you for this glorious morning. We thank you for this beautiful day. We thank you for the chance to gather together as your people, to hear, to sing, to encourage.

Give us clear minds and ears as we listen. Help me to speak truthfully and in a way that glorifies your name and lifts us up.

And we pray this, Jesus, in your fantastic name. Amen. Two weeks ago was a momentous day in my life.

It was my one-year anniversary of moving to Vancouver and this great church. Seems like a year and two weeks ago, actually. Now, evidently, there is a movement when you move to a new city.

[1 : 09] Many of you have lived in a new city, so you know what I'm talking about. There's a movement of joy and just fantastic, wow, we've done the right thing, to confusion, to shock and dismay, and then back to normalcy.

I'm not quite sure where Julie and I are yet on that scale, but we are somewhere. It has been an excellent year, and I want to talk to you briefly about what's happened in the youth ministry and with the youth in this church.

Now, before I do that, I actually want to talk to you about gelato. Now, I know that most of you probably did not wake up this morning thinking about gelato. I would doubt if any of you had gelato for breakfast.

But I went to dinner with some parishioners here, and afterward they said, listen, let's go out and get gelato. There's a gelato shop just around the corner, and they pride themselves on 208 flavors of gelato.

And so we went into this shop, many of you may have been there, I won't name it for legal reasons. And the experience is overwhelming, because I think most of us, when we go into an ice cream shop or a gelato shop, we know what we want.

[2 : 24] We want, you know, lime, or we want chocolate. But the whole thing is completely overwhelming. Now, I went in to get chocolate.

I wanted the chocolatiest chocolate that they could give me. Well, if you go into the store and you want to get a chocolate gelato, here are your options.

Chocolate cashew. Chocolate English toffee. Mocha Sambuca. Almond mocha. Chocolate sorbetto. Chocolate ginger. Chocolate Grand Marnier. Chocolate coconut.

Chocolate basil. Chocolate mint. Chocolate Oreo. Chocolate raspberry truffle. Chocolate fudge. Chocolate chili. Chocolate chocolate chip.

Chocolate cookie dough. Chocolate macadamia. Chocolate fudge brownie. Chocolate almond. Chocolate pistachio. Chocolate back forest cake. Chocolate zesty orange. Toblerone. And chocolate.

[3 : 24] Chocolate chocolate. Chocolate chocolate. Chocolate chocolate. Chocolate chocolate. Now, I think there's about 23 different brands of chocolate. So I walk into this chocolate shop wanting to pursue the humble chocolate gelato or the chocolatiest chocolate of gelatos.

And I am swamped with choice after choice after choice after choice. And instead of this choice freeing me, I was enslaved. And my wife, well, she just goes to the lime or the watermelon.

She orders it. Bang. Neil and Celeste, who I was with, they know exactly what they want. They get their gelato. They're half finished, and I'm still on number 17. Gosh, do I want the chocolate chocolate chip or the chocolate cookie dough?

I like almonds. Do I get almond mocha or chalk almond? Gosh, do I get the chocolate fudge or the fudge brownie or the cookie dough? What do I do? This choice has not freed me, but it's done the opposite.

Now, we live in a world, and those of you who've lived a few years know exactly what I'm talking about. We live in a world that has never afforded so many choices.

[4 : 35] When I was a kid, and my dad said, do you want to go out for ice cream? We were talking chocolate, strawberry, or vanilla.

And now we're not talking the 1890s here. We're talking the 60s and 70s. To the young people, there's no difference in those two things.

But you know what I'm saying. Suddenly, Baskin's and Robbins' 31 flavors came to town, and our doors were blown off. Thirty-one flavors?

Now there's 208 flavors. There used to be five channels on the TV. Now there's 299 channels on the TV. Choices, choices, choices.

Choices, choices. Some of us will remember when traveling was a really big deal. Traveling to Europe or Australia, South America. That was, you saved up long and hard, and you were one of the few people who got that opportunity.

[5 : 34] Everybody travels. It's commonplace. It's commonplace. We live in a world unlike the history so far. There are so many options and so many choices.

Now you put that in the life of a young person. Think about your daughter, your son, your granddaughter, your grandniece, whoever is young in your life.

A teen. And you put that in their life. And ask this question. Is their life better because of all these choices?

Is the world that they are growing up in markedly more positive than the world that you and I grew up in? And it's my contention very, very strongly that it isn't.

And in the same way that I was handcuffed by all the gelato choices, many of our young people have so many options.

[6 : 43] And it's not improved their life. The whole new housing market where you build a huge house, no backyard.

You want to give a young person their own TV room. You want to give them their total space. Their own TV. Does that make their life better for a young person?

In my old neighborhood, it clearly did not when that happened. Sport in the life of a young person used to be about pleasure. Used to be about friendship.

Used to be about teamwork. Now it's all about advancement. What you can put on your resume.

Can you compete harder and get to a better level? What can you put on your CV?

The one word that characterizes the life of a young person is not freedom and unfetteredness and joy and just being free to ride a bike or to kick a ball.

[7 : 48] That's not the phrase used to describe the young people. In this church and outside, there are two words that I think sum up where young people are at.

The first one is, they're busy. They're busy. And you ask a young person who's learned to mimic an older person. Hey, how are you?

Quite often the answer you'll get is the answer we give one another. I'm so busy. I walked up to a young person a while ago and I said, Hey, how are you? And he said, I'm so busy.

I said, but you're five years old. How can a five-year-old be busy? You play with blocks.

I mean, come on. True story. Where has he heard that from? They're confused.

[8 : 48] Now, young people are always confused. It kind of goes with the territory. But I think they are deeply confused. Their life is so jam-packed.

And they have no clarity. No clarity. They are entertainment-rich and spirit-poor. And lurking below the surface.

Not for all. And we could talk about how many, what kind of statistic. But lurking below the surface is this deep pain and confusion. You may be aware of the rise of cutting as an option for young people, especially girls, but not just females.

Where they cut themselves. Now, I don't think it's a problem here in this church, but it is a problem in Canada. The rise of a certain type of sexual promiscuity.

Unlike any that we've experienced. It's not that it's more widespread. Although you might be able to argue that it is. It's that it's completely devoid of any regret, remorse.

[9 : 58] It is a total callousness when it happens. You are meat. And I am meat. And it makes no difference.

Now, we live in a world where the mantra is, life is better when you can have what you want. And you can make a lot of choices. And do we?

What do we say about that? What do we say to our young people? I want to work hard so you have more choices, so you cannot make any decisions.

Well, maybe what we say is not important. Obviously, the question is, what does God say to young people? Does he say anything to young people? Or is the Bible only written to kind of non-youth? And believe it or not, there's a number of people who say that. They say, no, there's not much in the Bible that speaks to young people. Now, if you've got your Bible, I want you to open it to 199. 2 Timothy, chapter 2.

[11 : 02] The Bible reading was all about being like a farmer and a soldier and an athlete, being focused on pursuing Christ. And as Paul continues this theme, he gives a whopper of a verse for our young people.

And I want you to drop your eyes down to verse 22 of chapter 2. We're at 2 Timothy 2, 22. Quite easy to remember. Paul says, Here's a verse, in my opinion, directly aimed at the young. Young people. Flee, shun, turn, and pursue, go after. What are the characteristics of a St. John's youth to be?

Busy? Intelligent? Athletic? Advancing? Achieving? No. No.

Now, if those things come naturally, and if those things can fit in, okay? But what is the characteristic of our young people here at this church? They are to be young people who turn their backs, who shun, and who flee, and who pursue.

[12 : 41] Now, that word flee, or shun, is a word that's used a whole bunch of times in the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament. It means run away. It means flee from the wrath to come.

Same word. It means to turn your back and get away from danger. That's the meaning of that word. And Paul says, Do not face spiritual danger.

Do not face things that will enslave you or cause you to sin. You turn your back and you run for your lives. Every man for himself. Run!

That's what Paul is saying. Run. Flee those things that wrap you up as a young person.

The passions. The desires. The impulses. In the context of this book, it's about arguing. It's about maybe fighting.

[13 : 43] In other parts of the New Testament, it's sexual things. It's all the things that we are either going through or have gone through as a young person that can wrap us up and confuse us.

And Paul says, Keep your head. Turn your back. And pursue. Look at the next thing in the verse. He says, Get rid of those things. Run. And you want to run for righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Now again, this word, to pursue, is a word that's used a number of times in the Bible and in the New Testament. And it means to chase, to hunt, to press on.

When Paul says, I press on toward the prize, he's using that word. It's a dogged determination. It would be the same type of word as when you say, The police are in hot pursuit.

[14 : 44] It's that kind of word. It's watching those video shows which you guys don't watch because you're too smart, but I watch where you see the police chasing the car in California. It's that kind of thing.

Pursue. Chase. Now it's interesting. What are young people to be marked by? What does God say here?

Now, in our wildest thinking, most of us would say a young person can't be marked by this. How can a 14-year-old be marked by righteousness, faith, love, and peace?

They're just confused children. Maybe after they get their driver's license. Maybe once they grow up a little bit, they can do those things. And Paul says, Nope. Search after innocence.

It's righteousness. You search and strive for being pure before God. Doing His will. Do you know how hard that is for a 16-year-old boy in today's culture?

[15 : 56] It is hard for a 66-year-old man in today's culture. But a 16-year-old boy to strive after purity and innocence before God, they have rarely in our history had it this tough, if ever, because the world is so desperately trying to tie them up and entangle them.

Paul says, Young person, be marked by faith, trusting in God, remaining steadfast and faithful to Him. Be marked by your love for one another.

When, young people, you get together, you be marked by a love, an agape for each other. That's what you're characterized by. Not competition. Not smacking each other. Not using each other. Which, by the way, is the way many youth ministries are run in this city. You go to a youth ministry in this neighborhood, and you will see non-agape. You will see agape with a red circle and a slash through it, because the activities are designed to compete and to hurt and to win. And Paul says, Young person, live a life of peace, of being tranquil before your God and one another, of being characterized by the great peace that has come to us through Jesus' death.

[17 : 21] That's what marks your life. As John Stott says, they are to be marked by a ruthless rejection, a ruthless rejection, of what puts us in spiritual danger, combined at the same time with the relentless pursuit of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that a great way to think of a young person? Ruthlessly rejecting anything that puts them in danger, and relentlessly pursuing Jesus. Now, the world we live in is a tangler. It has always been good at tangling up the young. The young have sung about it, written poetry about it. But we have to be very clear, as a spiritual community here in Shaughnessy, we have to be crystal clear that we are in dangerous, dangerous times.

Thoroughly dangerous. Our community we live in is cash rich, but spiritually bankrupt. This world that we live in is entertainment rich and Christ poor.

And we must recognize that. We have choices. So many choices. Where do they get us?

[18 : 48] When I look at my life, my life is characterized by two things. God's grace, bad choices. God's grace, bad choices.

Except for coming here a year, two weeks ago. It was a good choice. Good choice. We as a community must be helping our young people to shine and pursue.

Shine and pursue. The young people in this church have so much on. You fill in the list. Ballet, bowling, basketball, skiing, rugby, soccer, leadership development, study.

The list never ends. It never ends. And you know what that list does? It does not produce stronger Christians.

It produces young people who can dance. Who can put a ball through a hoop. Who can go down a snowy mountain fast.

[20 : 00] Who can answer questions. That's what that does. And we as a spiritual community must be ruthless in our rejection of anything that entangles.

of anything that takes a young person away from fellowship with Jesus Christ. Now I'm learning that the solution to most problems is middle ground.

Balance. That's what I'm learning often is the solution for a lot of conflicts in this country. And I want to say that's not the case here.

There is no middle ground. Paul does not say reject evil and kind of pursue.

Look that way, look that way, do the splits. there is no middle ground. Now the solution is not to keep our kids away from things that will, that they want to do.

[21 : 12] If a young person wants to learn ballet, that can be a really good thing. If a young man wants or a young woman wants to play basketball, that can be a good thing. Study. It's a necessary part of our life and growing up.

But the question is perspective. And the question is, does that keep them away? And ultimately, ultimately, the question is, when they look back, standing before the King of Glory, how are they going to look?

When they look back, are they going to say, I spent so much time dancing, playing hockey, studying, and so little time with the King?

Now life is not about advancement, it's not about achievement, it's not about getting more stuff, it's about pursuing Jesus. Now I think we know that. Now look at the last bit of this verse.

It's actually quite a, quite a sting in the tail. Paul says, shun these things, pursue these things, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.

[22 : 32] You see, our young people are to be doing this together. Together. They are to be doing this as a group. Their youth community is to be a community that pursues Jesus and shuns evil.

Our young people need to be surrounded by people who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. It means adults and young people in my reading.

Now the last year has been a good one. We made some painful decisions, decisions that caused some people here anguish. I realize that. What we did was we got rid of a number of the options that were on in the life of young people because to me it was just a spiritual more choices.

The kids could go to this or to this or to that or to that. And we decided to trim that and form two youth groups. A junior youth group and a senior youth group in addition to an 18 plus group called Ecclesia which was started before.

Our goal was to urge these people on. to say whether you are 11 or 22 you need to learn to turn your back on evil.

[23 : 54] Whatever that means for you as an 11 year old. Computer games where people are ripping people's heads off and reaching into their chest and grabbing their heart. That's probably what it means for an 11 and 12 and 13 year old.

To shun those things and to pursue Jesus. And you need to do that together. Now that was a painful choice for this church and I appreciate the support of the trustees and the ministry team in making it.

Many of you have prayed and I want to say that God has been astoundingly merciful. There are nine Bible studies that have started with 50 young people in these Bible studies for the youth. And that's not university. That's just high school age group. New young people are coming. It is truly an exciting time. We had our retreat as you saw for the junior youth.

It's a great time. It's a lot of fun. But it was just an excellent spiritual adventure together. Senior retreat is on this coming weekend by the way.

[25 : 01] If you could send up a prayer that would be excellent. We have one young man whose mother called me. She actually emailed me and then we spoke on the phone. And she said I'll try not to name him but I always do in the story.

I always goof. She said my son's got a little bit of a problem. He just wants to know are there any times that Bible studies are not going to be on because of a camp or that kind of thing.

And I said well there's actually a couple coming up. And she said that's good. That's good. He's decided to skip his hockey matches to go to Bible study. Now this is a 14 year old man young man who skips a Friday night hockey match to go to a Bible study.

Now I'm astounded by that. Is he a super Christian? Has he got an extra dose of the Holy Spirit? He's just a typical keen Christian young man.

I said to him on Friday dude I'm really impressed by this. I said do you want us to talk about changing the day of Bible study? I mean this is this is excellent what you're doing. And he said nah nah nah I love coming to Bible study.

[26 : 10] I love it. Oh thank you. Thank you Jesus. Now my friends I can't let you off the hook just because you are not a young person.

You see in today's culture they're redefining young. Do you know now that young is no longer an age but a mindset. my guess is when we all push we all want to be considered young so for the next 30 seconds let's do that.

Where are you at with this verse? Where are you at? I would be surprised if if in God's thinking in Paul's thinking just thinking those under 25 or those under 28 or those under 40 the rest of you do whatever you want.

Clearly that's not the case. I think we all know that. Are our choices enslaving us? Have we made bad choices the last 5-10 years?

Do we need to repent and say I need to I need to untangle myself of all these different options and choices and pursuits that I have been wasting my time with and I need to clarify my vision and refocus on righteousness and on faith and on love and on peace.

[27 : 45] Have I been pursuing what I ought to be fleeing and fleeing from what I ought to be pursuing? Now if that is us let's take this time this service this hour to repent and to change.

It's something that I have to do all the time. Now when I think about a young man I think about Thomas Wright you don't know Thomas Wright but I was walking around St.

Helen's Bishopgate in London. Many of you have probably been to that church. They give you a little book and you walk around and you do a little tour of the building. It's quite an excellent building. And there's a little brass inscription and it's a it's a momentum to Thomas.

Listen carefully to what it says. In certain hope of rising again Thomas Wright lies at rest.

A young but mature man unmarried but engaged in years young in wisdom old celibate from the world betrothed to Christ examined himself straightway looking eagerly for his Jesus he arrived in heaven early in seasonable but hasty immortality.

[29 : 11] let's bow our heads have a moment of silence and then I'll pray for us. the■■■ here.

pseudony el Lord Jesus, we do ask in your astonishing mercy to renew our hearts, help us to shun youthful passions that can enslave.

We do pray this for the young people in this church. We pray this for the children in meeting in the hall. We pray this for the junior youth group, the senior youth group, and the ecclesia group.

We pray for ourselves, Lord. Help us to pursue righteousness and faith and love and peace. We do pray that you would help us to do this together.

We pray this in your mighty name. Amen.