

SIGNS ON THE ROAD OF LIFE

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My message today is entitled “Signs on the Road of Life.” I take that metaphor because in our society the sixteenth birthday is something very special. It marks in some ways the coming of age. And the getting of a driver’s license has become somewhat equivalent to on a secular level on a religious level of Bar Mitzvah or Confirmation. The American teenager like no other teenager in the world is car conscious. On this Sunday when I talk to teens I use the metaphors from the road. The road of life. Something about paying attention to the signs that are on that road.

The first sign for all of us is the fact on the road of life there is no U Turn. There is no going back. You may not and you certainly did not ask to come into this world but once here you’re here and you’re not going back to non-existence. Now there will never be a time on earth or in heaven or eternity where you will not be in existence. There is no U-turn. You can’t go back to non-existence and you can’t even regress physically. I can’t go back to that curly headed five year old boy that I was or the 120-pound freshman in college. Nobody in this room can go back.

Whether your family life has been from your point of view good or bad that’s the way it is and you can’t go back and change what’s already happened. If your family life has been separated by divorce or death you can’t go back and recreate the family as it was before those things happened. And you can’t go back on who you are as a person whether you like your looks or not. And a lot of us have had problems with our looks. Like the teenage boy who asked when he looked in a mirror, “Was God paying attention when I was assembled?” Or the other teenager who thought he was very handsome and got up in the morning and looked in the mirror, “I wonder how the other six wonders of the world are doing this morning.” No going back to somebody who was more cute or more handsome. We are who we are.

If you’ve been involved in things that have been harmful to you there is no way to go back and recapture the innocence that you had before those things happened. Some in the audience may have already crossed over into sexual immorality or drugs or cultic experience. You wish you could go back but that all has happened. There is no going back.

The only thing that you can change about the past is your perception of it. There are four options that you have in regard to the past.

One option is to get stuck on the past. To become fixated on it and begin living with blame in your life. Just saying that happened and it’s a terrible thing that it happened and the rest of your life or maybe even right now you’re just reliving the fact that maybe you didn’t have everything you wanted in childhood or your family life wasn’t all that you wanted it to have been. Maybe you were abused. Others in this audience may have had dark things happen in their background and there’s really nothing that can be done. Don’t get stuck or fixated and relieving and making it the business of your life just to keep living in that moment when whatever happened.

Another thing though that people can do on the positive side is instead of getting stuck on the past you can accept the past. Accept what it is that has happened. It may be even something physical like for me the great struggle of my teenage years was learning to accept my freckles

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and my eyeglasses. Why didn't the Lord heal me? Why did he heal my sister so that she didn't have to wear eyeglasses? Why didn't he heal me? Because she needed it more than I did.

Now they have something they didn't have when I was a youngster – contact lenses. Marvelous. Don't need to be healed any more!

I had to get on with accepting what had been handed to me and make the best of it.

Something need to be forgiven. We need to either extend forgiveness or we needed to be forgiven. That's another way of dealing with the past. Looking at things that have been done to us that instead of getting fixed on them, and maybe they were the kinds of things we just can't accept because they were morally wrong. Terrible. Bad. We need to look at those who wounded us and remember the Lord's words to us about forgiving. Perhaps we ourselves need to ask for forgiveness so that we can move on.

The fourth thing we can do about the past is re-image the past. Joseph did this. At the age of 17 he was cruelly sold into slavery by his brothers. He didn't get stuck and fixated on that moment. Nor did he simply accept it. He practiced forgiveness and he re-imaged it. He said, God must have a purpose for it. And sure enough thirteen years after he was 17 years of age he met his brothers again. He said to them, "God meant it for good." Joseph wouldn't have the chance to ever live his life in his homeland of Canaan. He would spend his life in Egypt. There was no U-Turn. But he took what had happened to him and said if it has occurred there must be a positive way that God can use this in my life. We can through God's help transform anything that's bad in our life into something God can use for his glory.

So this is certainly one road sign we need to pay attention to – no U-Turn.

Another sign we all recognize is the Stop sign. I put with this the One Way sign. They are both somewhat restrictive signs. If you disobey these signs you're going to get into smash. You get in a one way, do not enter sign on the freeway and you know what's coming. Your car is going to get messed up and somebody else's is too. You go through a stop sign and chances are you'll get killed. Or severely damaged.

There are restrictive signs on the road of life because the road of life does have its restrictions. Maybe one of the critical issues in contemporary society today is whether there are any real restrictions or where they're all self imposed. This is the conflict between the Christian way and the humanistic way. Humanistic ways say all the restrictive signs are signs that you create. There are no absolute moral truths that are from outside us that is from God. They're all from within. Four major tenants of the humanistic philosophy. Naturalistic cosmology. That's the way the humanist looks at life. The cosmos, the universe has originated not from the creative act of a God but we must explain its origin in natural terms. Ruling out the supernatural.

Reminds me of the Russian cosmonaut who when he first went up, he sent back the message that he'd been up in space, and he didn't see God. An American astronaut said if he'd stepped outside his spacecraft without his space suit he'd have met God.

Naturalistic cosmology rules out God. That leads to an evolutionary humanity. We're products of nature. No individual survival beyond death. We're part of a race that has evolved.

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Therefore the rules have been created as the race has evolved rather than from outside intervention or source.

Rationalistic epistemology. Epistemology means how you get knowledge, your theory of knowledge. Whether you get your knowledge from experience or you get it intuitively or you get it rationally or you get it by revelation. Rationalistic epistemology says we are what we are because we've thought about things and we've come to our definitions because of rules that seem good to us. Rather. Again, God speaking to us from the outside.

Elvis Presley's song that he made so popular is the epitome of this kind of thinking. "I'll do it my way."

That then leads to situational ethics where all ethics and morals are grounded in man's experience and not anchored in absolutes within the nature of God.

As Christians we come along and say, But there are moral absolutes. There are stop signs and there are one way do not enter signs. If you violate these signs somebody's going to get hurt and you're going to get hurt. Of course, the humanistic philosophy says, something is right as long as it doesn't hurt anybody. And then we make up our minds as to what's right and wrong, thinking that we have the good judgment to know what is and what is not going to hurt somebody.

If you listen to the stop signs that God gives us you won't hurt anybody and you won't hurt yourself. If you stop when it says to stop you won't get hurt. If you do not enter when it says, One way, Do not enter, when it says that you'll not hurt yourself and you won't hurt someone else.

What are these stop signs? Don't take the name of the Lord in vain. Do not lie. Do not steal. Do not commit adultery. Do not murder (and that includes murdering yourself on drugs or alcohol or whatever). Stop signs. The restrictive signs of life. They're there and we do well to know that they're there and listen to them.

Another sign on the road of life is a Caution sign. There are things in our Christian experience that are not definite don'ts. But they're "This is a questionable area. Slow down." You may need to stop. Use your judgment at this point. Let the Holy Spirit be your guide.

Attitudes can signal to us that we need to be cautious. Look at your life and see if there's a lot of anger and resentment. That's a sure caution sign. Slow down and look at what's happening in you, what's happening to you. Maybe depression of which there's a great deal among teenagers as well as people in all areas of the population is also kind of a caution sign. Something's happening. There's unresolved conflict and anger that is present there in some way. Anger against God or self or people in family or somewhere anger. What do you do with this anger? It's a caution sign. Begin to find someone you can trust to talk with. Go to the person directly that maybe is the source of your anger, the reason why you're anger. To pray it through. To find a release for that anger rather than simply sitting on it and letting it eat away in your being like acid would eat away in a plastic jar.

There are cautions, which the Holy Spirit gives us. Cautions in our conversation. Cautions about the jokes we listen to or tell. Cautions in regard to the music that we select. Cautions in

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regard to theater attendance and television viewing and reading material. Cautions in dating relationships. There are some Stop signs in all of these. But there are also many Caution signs. Slow down, don't simply accept things because other people are. They maybe harmful. You may need to stop.

One of the sure areas of caution especially in the teen years, but I think this effects all of us to a great extent is what is called peer pressure. The pressure of what your friends are doing. How many times do parents hear, "But everybody's doing it!"? And it's really tough to stand out when everybody is doing it.

A psychologist did a study taking groups of teenagers, ten at a time, into a classroom in a controlled experiment. She had nine of those teenagers clued in to do something that would force a decision on the part of the tenth teenager who was the guinea pig in the experiment. They ran thousands of teenagers through this experience in order to get a valid profile of what a teenage audience could be expected to do. The experiment was simple. The psychologist had three cards. One of them had Line A, which was the longest line. The second card had Line B which was the next longest line. The third card had Line C which was the shortest line. The doctor would explain that they were going to do a visual perception test for the teenagers. She would take her marker and point to Line A, Line b, Line C and she wanted them to respond by raising their hands as to which was the longest line. They all could see that A was the longest. But she started with Line B. And the kids that were plants in the group would raise their hands. So the tenth kid looked around and saw nine hands up in the air and even though he or she knew that A was the longest, because nine other hands were up, three out of every four teenagers that were the tenth teenager raised their hand that Line B was longest. Three out of four teenagers couldn't resist peer pressure on what's the longest line.

We have tremendous pressures. Those pressures need to be weighed and evaluated. They're a Caution. When you're pressured into doing something, which is against God, against what you stand for in your own private heart, listen to them.

Daniel and the three Hebrew children stood up to peer pressure. Peer pressure can derail you.

Another sign on the road of life is the Yield sign. There are times we need to give way. If we don't give way, again, we're going to get hurt and other people are going to get hurt. Yield to the authority of your parents. Yield to the authority of the school. Yield to civil or governmental authority. Yield to the authority of the body of Christ and the church. Most important of all yield to the authority of Jesus Christ as it is revealed to us in the scripture. When you yield to true authority you are laying the right foundations in your life. When you walk with the authority of the Lord in your life you will make right decisions on the road of life.

Some other signs on the road of life are signs that say Exit or perhaps a sign that simply denotes that there is a Crossroad ahead. You're been sailing along and now suddenly you have to make a decision. Whether or not you're going to turn off and get on another road. The teenage years are probably the greatest decisions that impact you the longest in life are made. Where will you exit to go to collect or perhaps to go to work or to the military? Among the many people crossing your life will you marry one of them and who? What profession will you enter? How do you make these kind of decisions? Exit signs. Cross road signs.

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It seems to me there are just three helpful little ways to make those kind of decisions. One is to listen to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. There's a still small voice of God that talks to us when we are praying or studying the word or in worship with God's people. He begins to impress us in certain ways to make us soft and pliable to direction from God. We need to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit when we're in prayer and worship and Bible study.

We need to listen to the counsel of others who love us and know us and they oftentimes can give us good counsel and insight about our choices. Especially that applies to who we're marrying, what we're doing with our life. Don't ignore the counsel of parents and persons who are able to see things from a longer point of view.

Third, we ought to be listening to the counsel of the Lord, and listening to the counsel of others, we certainly ought to listen to what's in our own heart. If the Lord says to us he's going not give us the desires of our hearts then we want to know what those desires are, so that we can desire them.

There are also speed limit signs. Teenagers and older people have a rough time with speed limit signs but they're there. What this simply is saying is on the road of life is don't go at break-neck speed. Some people live their life all in the future. When I get to be 18, when I get to be 21, when I get married, when I have a job, when I have a house, when I'm retired. Live life now, the part of it you're living now. College will come soon enough. So may marriage. Twenty-one will come soon enough if the Lord tarries. So will 31 and so will 65. Take time to smell the roses. Be where you are today. Don't think of your involvement in the body of Christ, the church, as something in the future. "Someday I'll be a member of the church... someday I'll be involved in the church." Now. You are the church *now*. You are involved now. God calls you to leadership now. Enjoy where you're at.

There's one sign you'll never see on the road of life. And you'll never see it on a highway. But it's the sign that really governs all activities on the road. It's strange that you don't see it. You never see it. Unfortunately people never see this sign in the Christian life because they get their mind on all the restricted signs. The One way, Do not Enter, Stop, the No U-turn, Stop, Cautions, Intersection ahead. They see all those signs and say, The Christian life all the time is telling me what I can't do. You'll never see this sign on a physical highway and yet it determines all the traffic on the road and how it goes. And you'll never see this sign perhaps in some bodies of Christ but it ought to be seen because it's the fundamental sign of the Christian life. It's simply "Go!" Nobody has to tell you to go. The signs are there to tell you how to modify your going. But all means *go*. The restrictive signs aren't going to help you if you're setting still. What good is a stop sign if you're already stopped? Go for life.

Restrictive signs only help the person that's going. How do you go? Four little steps for how to go.

One, be sure you're on the right road. Jesus calls us to follow him. He says this to the first disciples, Follow me. And they follow him. There's one way and it's his way. Make sure you're on his road.

Secondly, make sure you have the right destination. The destination of our life is to be with the Lord. And it's to live for his glory and pleasure right here in this life. Our destination ought to be to live for his pleasure.

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Third, don't compare yourself to other models on the road. So you're not a Porsche. Maybe you're a Bug. Maybe you're a 65 Bug. The Porsche is built to go the same speed as you and at the most twice your speed. Don't worry about it. Be what you are. Because if you're not what you are you're going to look at other models on the road and you're going to have one of two thoughts. You've either going to have a model that's better than theirs and if you know that that's going to lead to pride. If you have a model that you think isn't as good as somebody else's model you're going to get depressed and you won't enjoy the road. Enjoy whatever model he's put you in.

Be who God's called you to be. I'm convinced that the more we become like Jesus Christ the more truly we'll become ourselves.

Fourth, live with a vision. If you could be or do anything in life what would you be? Go for it. Why not go for it? Why listen to people who say, "You'll never be able to do that!" Go for it. And if you never get there you'll sure get a lot further down the road of life than if you'd never had the vision in the first place. Live with some dreams, some visions in your life.

I was such a shy kid I had a difficult time getting up before a group. I was the typical kind of teenager who was very embarrassed about the way they looked and stuttered when they spoke and shaking knees, turning red in the face and hardly could get up before a class at school let alone in front of a group at church. When I told Dad I wanted to go to college to prepare for the ministry he said fine but I should go to an accredited liberal arts college so I could get a bona fide degree so if I later failed in the ministry I would have sometime to fall back on for employment. He was probably wondering if his shy boy would ever be able to get up and talk to a group. And I wondered that myself.

I can remember when I was 15 and 16 years of age that my home church Central Assembly of God in Springfield, Missouri was then involved in a great construction program. They were building their 2300 seat sanctuary. I would go down to that construction site when my paper route was over in the evening, when all the workmen were off the site and there was nobody around. I'd go into that shell of a building where just the steel beams were up and the floor. I'd go out on the place where I imagined someday the platform to be and see the place filled with people listening to me preach. I would proceed to preach to all those imaginary people. For a moment of time this shy kid who had a vivid imagination who couldn't get up before a group at school was preaching to 2300 people. That helped me a great deal to get on with what God had called me to do in life. Because somewhere along the line there was a vision and a dream and I was beginning to move in that direction.

Go for it. Be enthusiastic. You know what enthusiasm means? It comes from the Greek. In Theos. In God. That's all enthusiasm means – in God. Go for it. Be in God.

That's the fundamental sign on the road of life. Go for it. And if you'll go for it then the other signs will be interpretive and will help you avoid crashes.

Our gracious Father, we thank you for these moments we've had together while the Holy Spirit has talked with our hearts. And Lord, I'm convinced that each one of these signs interest us at various moment in our life. There may be some here today who are having trouble with the first sign, No U Turn. Because they would like to go back and really redo

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some things and have some things done differently. But there's no way to do it Lord. There's no way to unscramble an egg. So Lord, help us to not get stuck in those moments when we want to go back but to accept, to forgive, and to re-image. There are others, Lord, who may have run some stop signs and run some One Way signs. They're in need of restoration that only you can do on them today. Do that, Lord. Help us in the times in which we live with our personal choices to be very cautious and to stay yielded to the Spirit of God. Help all within the church family today who are the point of making decisions in their life which is going to govern their life for years to come. Give us your guidance. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not to your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways and he will direct your paths." Thank you for that. Help all of us to go. There's one sign that is not up here today that describes someone in this sanctuary today. That's someone who recognizes this word when I speak it and it's the word "crash." Sometimes on the road of life there are big wrecks. Bad crashes. Lord, there is someone here this morning who feels that way about life. Doesn't feel like going. Doesn't feel that this message even pertains to them because they have been through a crash. It's all they can do to even come to church today. They feel like, What's the use of living? I've crashed. But Lord, there's counsel you have for the person who's been in a crash. That is any one who is aware of a crash is alive. If you were not alive you would not be aware of the crash. But if you've crashed and you know you've crashed you're now standing outside the crash and you are alive. And the Lord calls you to go on ahead on the road of life. He'll give you guidance on a day by day basis. He'll help you to go, and to go again. He'll put new things in your life and he'll help you to go and leave the crash behind. Go with the assurance that the crash is not the end. It's a bad thing to happen to you on the road but you are alive. And God calls you now to live. He doesn't call you to death. The crash could have been death. But he calls you to live. So go live in his name. Thank you, Lord, for your presence. In Christ's name. Amen.