

2nd Opinion: A pair of sixtysomethings offer advice to young people

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We've reached our early 60s—and, yes, younger folks, life goes by fast. We've experienced productive and regionally diverse careers and ministries. We're thankful God prepared us for every new step taken, including a few we never saw coming.

In light of autumn's season of life and the pensiveness it brings, we'd like to share some of the lessons the Lord has seen fit to teach us over the years—some extremely agonizing and some, in the long run, turning to joy.

For what they're worth:

- God does, in fact, grant us an ongoing vision of what he wants us to do and be, but he doesn't coerce us to follow his promptings. It's best to understand he speaks to us through his word and less than wise to become overly dependent on some "voice," unless it's conscience. Think in terms, then, of cutting back on your tech-time and using more of your discretionary moments to dig deeply into God's word. Trust us, life is better lived for him if we do this faithfully. Otherwise, we may deceive ourselves into thinking we're doing all right.

- God's preparing-of-the-way inevitably involves our built-in humanness—uncertainty, difficulty, pride, laziness, emotional and physical pain, and the occasional off-road diversion, or two, or three. With so many detours along the way, some caused by us, others appointed providentially, we must ask for God's wisdom to discern which to avoid further personal chagrin or confusion.

Don't run away

- Even when career doors open, we may feel unworthy or be fearful of entering. We should take to heart the fact he'll provide for us the ways and means to prevail. Don't run the other way like Jonah! Yes, God can tailor-make storms just for us to situate us firmly within his will. So far, neither of us has been vomited from the belly of a great fish. Metaphorically speaking, however, yes, we have!
- We'll definitely fail sometimes, even as fresh career inroads unfold by his grace on the heels of it all, and these failings can be crushingly humiliating. Our self-righteousness is but a foolish phantasm. It's his grace at work, but it certainly doesn't feel like it sometimes.
- In the course of these sanctifying measures, God still moves us toward the vision originally given, all the while performing small-like miracles, if you will, that assure us we're called to this very task. Emmanuel is faithful to be present.
- Peering into these miracles, we'll discover he cares about his own purposes far more than we do, laying on us just the right amount of guilt needed to realize this fact and repent. Perhaps breaking us for his name's sake.

Some will turn

- Some who are close, even dear, will turn against you, whether family, friends, colleagues or church members. When it happens, remember God is painstakingly exacting true humility from you. Granted, associates see our weaknesses more clearly than we do, but, unfortunately, some will exploit this for their own misguided purposes and our eventual harm. Only God is avenger.
- Forgiveness, then, is easy to accept but hard to dole out, yet we must

forgive anyway to begin enjoying some bit of peace in matters. We've both decided "Mercy" should be our wives' middle name, no question. Husbands, don't claim you've never been a jerk! Mutually forgive and forgive again.

□ To achieve "greatness" for God, if that's your ambition, you'll have to work very hard at it. But he still demands we put our spouses and children first, prior to all our attainments, so-called.

Ambassadors for Christ

□ We're not called to make our lives increasingly cozy and comfortable. Rather, we're ambassadors for Christ, accompanied by whatever level of self-denial God deems we embrace personally. Our first-world problems are trifling in comparison to those of others elsewhere, our "insufficient" incomes notwithstanding. Just look at what's happening in the world!

□ God continues to use imperfect people. We could provide a list umpteen pages long of great leaders, biblical and historical, whom the Lord has used mightily in the face of their foibles. When it comes to everyday folks like us, though, our weaknesses and scars may be ordained simply as recurring reminders we can't go it alone. God's whole "thorn in the flesh" gambit.

□ As a noted pastor has said, "Be sure to get your 'but' out of the way!": "Lord, I'd serve you here, but..." "I'd serve you there, but..." Even Bob Dylan gets it right, "You're gonna have to serve somebody!" Who you're serving, then, is the bottom-line—either self, Satan or sovereign Lord.

□ Lastly, if we truly know Jesus, we must learn to live "positionally" and not "conditionally." Our decreed position in Christ is one of possessing all his perfections, not just mere forgiveness of sins, important as that is. On the divine books, the Father sees his born-again children as sinless because of what Jesus Christ has done for them on the cross. This should become our daily focus. If we focus solely on our condition and forget about all we are

and have in him, our Christian lives will be characterized by shallowness, defeat and regret, if only because of our remaining sin, periodically erupting, as you know, in acts of defiance. Living positionally with the Spirit's help can overcome this circumstance.

God's better at planning

Many other hard lessons could be shared. Several times through the years, we've each closed our office doors and quietly begged God for help, and the timing of his answers was rarely what we expected. Nevertheless, we've discovered time and again he is real, he truly cares and he's better at planning our lives and bestowing our achievements than we could ever hope for if left to ourselves.

To sum up, if God should give you clear vision and direction for some aspiring career, then by all means march forward with enthusiasm and discretion. Truth be told, however, you'll undergo many a trial and tribulation. None of us is exempt from forces opposing our efforts. But one day, the Lord will bring to mind what he's done for you amidst the journey and despite detractors who'll manage to crop up somehow throughout your early, middle and even waning years.

Come to find out, we each have kept a running list over time of what God has done to, for and through us. It serves to remind us of people and groups for whom we can pray, and reviewing it during our "pity me!" moments helps bolster faith like nothing else, short of God's word.

We hope these mutual thoughts of ours are both challenging and edifying.

"I will follow a wise and blameless course, whatever may befall me. I will go about my house in purity of heart" (Psalm 101:2).

Hal Ostrander is online professor of religion and philosophy at Wayland Baptist University. Kevin Fields has been headmaster and high school

English teacher at private Christian schools across North Texas.