

# PARK HEIGHTS CHURCH OF CHRIST

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*Thus Saith the Lord*

## Young Potentiality

By Jeff Sweeten

"You've got such great potential." There is a lot of encouragement in seeing the best in someone and, no flattery intended, conveying an expectation for something greater. Now, the cynic in me wants to read this as a smack-down, implying that you've got it but you ain't doing much with it. However, it is usually intended as a pick-me-up for someone who may be facing struggles or just needs a good word. So, one might suppose that this common colloquialism would lead to a brighter day.

However... what does "potential" mean? Merriam-Webster says: "existing in possibility; capable of development into actuality" or "something that can develop or become actual." Stating the fact that one has potential does not make the potential a fact. This is where the cynic might be right. Misunderstanding this fact could develop into disappointment or discouragement in the recipient of such a well-intended comment if the subject of such praise believes the potential is presently possessed. This may especially be applicable to youth, who are ready to see their potential as a reality much more readily than those of use wearing the scars of life, the product of having weathered the disappointments of reality. And, the now-me ends up hating the used-to-be-me because that potential passed away somewhere along the way.

God's encouragement more reality-based. "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come and the years draw near, when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). There are facts of life (and death, Hebrews 9:27) that can only be ignored at our own peril: we are temporary (James 4:14), we are on the clock (Matthew 24:42) and we're burning daylight (John 9:4).

Young people innately have great potential; no one would reasonably deny this. However, the failure to which many young people succumb and accept in our current culture is directly proportional to the confusion between potentiality and reality. Just because one has potential, and is told so in no uncertain terms, does not mean they will reach it if the critical elements of attaining said potential are absent. God says, when you forget me, you're doomed.

Now, the first response to this truth might be to point fingers at our young people and say: "You need to get with it, kid." But, wait! Young people do not attain the wisdom of God by osmosis, slipping a Bible under their pillow at night and awaking a bastion of wisdom. That's not how it works. Godly wisdom, potential becoming real, is taught. God's comprehensive formula for teaching is: "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). Maybe, when we point at our young people, we should take heed to the three fingers pointing back at us; and talk about God!

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