

## **Where Are We? Mile Markers On The Journey of Life**

Today we are honoring our graduates and tonight we will be specifically honoring our high school graduates with a special service. The gym will be decorated with all of their accomplishments and you can visit and enjoy a time of fellowship after the service tonight.

Last Sunday morning during worship I felt the Lord speak a word into my heart for this message today. I sat down during worship and began to write down a few thoughts. Sarah leaned over and asked if I was changing my sermon? I told her it was for next Sunday. I felt this was a word from the Lord for someone today. While it can be applied to the high school and college graduates, it can be applied to all of us today.

Have you ever been driving on the turnpike, talking to someone on the cell phone and they ask “where are you?” You’ve been talking and driving and you really haven’t been paying much attention. Have I passed the mid-way toll booth yet? And then you see the mile marker – that short, slender little green sign that lets you know what mile you’ve just passed on the highway. By the way, it’s really helpful if you run out of gas or your car breaks down to be able to tell someone what mile marker you’re at.

Last Sunday morning I wrote down the phrase mile markers. You see, I think all of us need to be aware of the mile markers on the journey of our life. In order to do that there are some questions we need to ask. We can ask these same questions at all of the seasons of our life, although there may be something of a different focus at the various seasons of our life. I want to talk to folks in three very broad and general seasons of life this morning – the young, the middle aged and the senior adults (also known as the senior discount crowd of which I am now apparently apart).

There are a variety of mile markers along the journey of our life. Moments, events, rites of passage. Certainly in our culture high school graduation provides for us a mile marker. It is a rite of passage as we step into a more independent role, perhaps being out on our own for the first time, heading off to college or joining the work force. It provides an opportunity for us to stop and take a look at where we are on the journey of life.

For the young adults, graduating from college provides another of these mile markers on the journey of life. Whether it is a bachelors or masters or doctorate, college graduation gives us an opportunity to pause and take a look at where we are on the journey. For the younger folks,

marriage, the birth of a child, the beginning or ending of a relationship, all of these can be mile markers that provide us with an opportunity to ask some important questions. So here we go.

You don't have to ask "where am I?" because the mile marker tells you that. I'm graduating from high school, or college or ending a relationship or getting engaged or married or starting a family. I know where I am. The first question you need to ask and answer is **"How did I get here?"** The next question is **"Why am I here?"** And the third question is **"What next?"**

Turn with me to 2 Timothy as we examine the answers to the questions for those in the younger season of life. Paul was writing to the young leader Timothy. He referred to Timothy as his dear son in the Lord. There was a real fatherly love from Paul to Timothy. Notice what he says to Timothy. **"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands... So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. "** 2 Timothy 1:5-9

Paul reminds Timothy of how he got there. He didn't make this happen on his own. Paul sent Timothy to pastor a church but it wasn't all about Timothy and his experience and expertise. Timothy was a novice, but Paul points out the faith that was in Timothy's grandmother and his mother. "Timothy, you're where you are because someone believed in you and poured something into your life and cared about you. Recognize the journey you've been on and realize you didn't get here alone."

You that are under 35. Ask yourself, "How did I get here?" The simple answer is others. For those graduating this month, whether high school or college, you know how you got here. Someone helped you. A teacher helped you, inspired you, encouraged you, patiently taught you. Your parents got you to this place. They got you up, fed you, dressed you, took you to school. They bugged you about doing your homework, set rules about not doing other things until your homework was done. Somebody believed in you and admonished you and disciplined you and corrected you and cared enough about you to see that you graduated.

The answer to the question “How did I get here?” is “Others”. The response to the question is “Gratitude”. You should be thankful and grateful. You should tell your parents “thanks for all you did and for putting up with me and my attitude.” Tell your teachers, your counselor, your principle, your coach, your youth pastors, “thanks for helping me and believing in me” - let them know you are grateful.

The next question to ask at the mile marker is “**Why am I here?**” Paul had an answer for Timothy when he reminded him of the gift of God that had been imparted to him by the laying on of hands. Paul referred not only to the gift of God but also to the calling of God and God’s own purpose and grace at work in Timothy.

Why are you here at this mile marker? Whether it is graduation or marriage or starting a family, or whether it was something that seems earth shattering and has left you shaken and wondering, the answer is going to be found in the gift and call and purpose of God that is to be revealed in your life. Why are you here? Because God has a plan for your life and he needs a person like you with your gifts and abilities for his service. You are here so you can do as Paul told Timothy and fan into flame the gift of God that is within you. My word to you at this early stage and season of your life would be the same - fan into flame the gifting and the calling and the purpose of God for your life. In school, in your career, in your marriage, as a newly wed or as a new parent, fan into flame the gift and purpose of God in your life. Discover all he has equipped you with and all he is calling you to. Why are you here? You’re here to live for Jesus and to influence others by your godly life. Live out your purpose by living every day with him.

The third question is “**What next?**” The answer to the question “What next?” is I don’t know. It will be a process of discovery as you find out all God has for you, but the response to the question is surrender. I don’t know what will be next for you, but the only way to respond as you move into the unknown of the “what next” is surrender. “Here I am Lord, and I belong to you. I’m yours so take me where you desire and use me as you please.”

You are in a season of discovery and building. You are building a life, a future, a career, a family, so you have to decide how you are going to build. Look back at those faithful folks and those Christ-like values that were poured into your life and determine right now that you are going to build your life, your future, your family, your career, your marriage, upon those same godly principles and values. Decide that you are going to walk in surrender, in obedience and in

faithfulness to the God who saved you and gifted you and called you according to his purpose. Then you can take the “what next” step with peace and with the assurance that wherever he leads, it will be in God’s perfect timing and in his perfect will.

How about the middle-aged folks? If the young group was under 35 then I guess the next bunch - middle aged could be 35 to 65. You know 75 is the new 65. 80 is the new 70. 90 - well, 90 is still pretty old. The middle age has the same three questions. You know where you are because the mile marker tells you. Married, kids graduating, empty nest, established career or suddenly searching for a job at 61. Retiring, rethinking, you know where you are but you really are wondering how in the world you got here. **“How did I get here?”**

The answer? For some of you the answer will be “I haven’t got a clue in this world how I got here.” For some of you the answer will be, “I worked the plan I put together in college and made it all happen.” For others the answer will be “dumb luck”, for others, “bad luck” or “no luck at all.” While I told the younger folks to look back with gratitude for the parents and teachers that brought them to their mile marker, for some of you in middle age, it’s not gratitude that you are thinking of when you look at your situation. I may not know the answer, but the response for some of you to the question of How I got here will be not gratitude but forgiveness. By the time you reach this stage and season of life, forgiveness is a necessary response. You’ve had enough bumps in the road that forgiveness needs to be added to the response of gratitude.

Some of you are thinking “I never in my wildest dreams thought I would end up here, in this mess, in this divorce, in this situation with my family, my job, my kids, foreclosure, battling this addiction, feeling trapped in this circumstance.” The response needs to be forgiveness. Some of you need to ask God for it and some of you need to offer and extend it to others. It’s time to stop blaming and just release it and let it go.

How did you get here? And remember that second question was **“Why am I here?”** It’s kind of like the first question isn’t it, but it digs a little deeper. Why am I here - at this place and this point in my life? You may be at a good place and if so, thank God for it. But if you aren’t where you intended to be, your choices might have had something to do with it. Turn with me to 2 Samuel 11 and let me remind you of a familiar story in the life of King David.

The bible says, **“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and**

**besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.” 2 Samuel 11:1**

David should have been with his troops, leading them into battle. Instead, he remained in Jerusalem. He wasn't where he should have been and consequently, he ended up being where he shouldn't have been. This chapter tells of David seeing Bathsheba and sending for her. He commits adultery and gets her pregnant even though he knew she was the wife of one of his soldiers who was off in battle. He makes sure her husband Uriah is killed in battle and then marries Bathsheba. The child she bore died and the prophet Nathan rebukes David, exposing his sinfulness and telling him that because of his choices, his actions, the Lord says, **“Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.” 2 Samuel 12:10**

David buries his son and lives with the guilt. He must have wondered how did I get here when everything was going so well? Go a little deeper and ask why did I get here? Is there a reason why you ended up here? Maybe it was like David, a result of the consequences of your sins, your wrong choices, your rebellion against God and his word. I realize I'm focusing upon the negative side of this. Some of you are living a faithful life for Christ and you are enjoying the blessings of the Lord. When you ask how and why you got here, you can testify that you guarded your heart and made sure you remained surrendered and obedient to Christ and the word of God. It is the key to living and experiencing the abundant life Jesus promised. That's how and why you got here. Thank God that you can look back and see God's hand leading you and guiding you.

However, for those of you who are looking at your life and with your head in your hands you are thinking “how in the world did I get here? Why did I make those choices and end up like this?” I've got some really good news. **Why did you get here? Ultimately, the answer is - because God is faithful and merciful.** You see, in spite of all of the wrong choices and all of the trouble and all of the past, all of the journey of your life, for what ever reasons you can list out, ultimately and finally it brought you here - to this very moment on a Sunday morning in Carbondale Assembly of God's sanctuary, listening to this sermon. All those choices and events brought you to this mile marker called hope and grace and salvation. It brought you here to this place so you could respond in faith. You can open your heart to Christ today and ask him to forgive you and save you and he will do that. You can surrender your life to him and you will

never be the same. It wasn't the best way, it wasn't the easiest journey, but Why did you get here? So you could find Jesus to be the savior and Lord of your life. It's God's grace at work.

**“What next?”** Surrender to Christ and receive him as Savior and Lord and start this exciting new journey. Where next? Wherever he leads. On to the next mile marker with the confident assurance that he will never leave you nor forsake you. He will go with you all the way.

What next? You that are middle aged - you are starting to look around, planning for the future, wondering if you've really made any difference with your life, wondering how you will finish. Will I finish strong? Will I make a contribution or leave a lasting legacy of some kind?

As you think about this mile marker, as you look around at your life and where you are, guard your heart. Don't be like David and make foolish choices that will keep you from finishing strong. Guard your heart and as you look around - look for new opportunities to serve God and to serve others. How well you know that life is passing so quickly, only what's done for Christ and for others will really last or amount to anything. Make your life and your time count by giving your all to Christ and his kingdom. Whatever is next, make serving Jesus and serving others a central part of your life and your plans for the future.

What about the senior citizens? The senior discount crowd? The older folks. You reach some mile markers of significance yourself as you grow older. Maybe it's a birthday, maybe it's some physical challenges, perhaps it's a loss of independence, maybe it's the loss of a companion or close friend. The same questions apply to you. **“How did I get here?”** The answer is, You got here by faith and God's grace. To borrow and paraphrase the words from John Newton's great hymn, “Nothing else could carry you safe thus far and nothing else will lead you home.”

Like the younger folks, you could say you got here because of the help and encouragement of so many others and that would be true. And like the middle aged folks, you might look back and think life didn't exactly turn out as you expected, but at this point in the journey, above everything and everyone else, we have to point to his grace. It was his grace that saved you. It is his grace that kept you, that sustained you, that carried you through the tough times, the long days and the longer nights. It was his grace that kept you pointed in the right direction, that kept you from giving up. It was his grace that comforted you and strengthened you when you had to say goodbye to that loved one. You are here because of his grace.

**“Why am I here?”** You better than anyone else can recognize that you are here because God had and has a plan for you and your life. You see, the Psalmist said that **“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Psalm 139:16.** I got to this place because God ordained the length of my days and through his forgiveness and his mercy and his grace and his favor I have lived my life. I can wake up every morning with the assurance that my needs will be met and my life protected and preserved until we get to the end of that book and he calls me to that heavenly home that he has been preparing for me.

Why am I here? Because of God’s grace and his purpose. The bible says **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:8-10.**

Why are you here? Because you were created for this journey as part of God’s great workmanship. He carefully crafted you and he has been refining you all along the way. He hasn’t done that so you can sit on a shelf, he has done that so you can continue to be effective. Although age may place some restrictions or limitations on you, you still have a God ordained purpose to live out. Keep serving him, keep submitting to his plans and his purpose for your life.

And that third question: **“What next?”** Like the youth and the middle aged, I can’t say for sure what is next, but I can say that our response should be to fix our eyes on Jesus and keep looking to him as we head for the finish line. The writer of Hebrews said, **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...” Hebrews 12:1-2**

What next? I don’t know, but let’s keep faithfully running the race so we can finish strong. Whatever he has for us we can trust him because he causes all things to work together for our good because we love him and are called according to his purpose.

What next? If Jesus tarries, for some of us we will be going to heaven sooner than later. And that shouldn’t alarm us. Jesus said, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for**

**you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” John 14:1-3**

What is next for us is beyond anything we can imagine. Eye has not seen and ear has not heard what the Lord has prepared for us. So to the question of what is next, I don't know but the response for us older folks ought to be anticipation! We aren't dreading the end, we are anticipating the beginning! Jesus is preparing a place for us and when he is ready and when we've completed the race, he will take us to be with him in that heavenly home where all is peace and where our joy is full and complete.

What next? For all of us, young, middle aged and senior adults – stay surrendered to Jesus, stay true to him. Guard your heart, make your decisions in keeping with the word of God and remain faithful to serving him and one of these days, we will hear him say well done, good and faithful servant, enter in to the joys of the Lord.

I don't know what mile marker you might be at today, but I believe there is someone here today that you are wondering, how did I get here? Things have not turned out as you expected or as you had hoped, but you realize now, all of this has brought you to this place, to a place and a time in your life when you recognize your need of a Savior. You need Jesus to forgive your sins and to give you a new life, a new start, a new hope. I want to invite you to make that choice today. How you got here is not as important as where you go from here and you need to make that choice to go forward with Jesus and to know that when you die, you are going to heaven.

Open your heart to him. The bible says if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and he will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Just tell him you are sorry for all the sins and all the wrong and ask him to forgive you and save you and he will do it. He will give you a new heart and a new start if you will only ask in faith. The choice is yours today.