

“Can I Change My Point Of Reference”

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Ephesians 3:8-12,20-21

Today we are talking about our point of reference? What is a point of reference? You could say that our point of reference is the place where we stand from which we see the world in a particular way.

College is an experience that changes your point of reference. Think of your life before and then after you have been to college. When you go away to college you go through the fire of mind-bending education, the sometimes heart-wrenching social experiments of dating, sometimes living on your own for the first time in your life, and stretching out of your comfort zone in a multitude of ways.

After this college experience, you view yourself, the world, and possibilities differently.

Securing a life-sustaining job all of a sudden seems possible. Perhaps traveling to different parts of the world that you never knew existed before is now possible. A different kind of relationship with a significant other now feels like a

viable option. After college, you see for the first time how you can make a difference in at least a slice of the world.

College moves us to a different place and changes our point of reference.

So many other experiences we have can shift our point of reference for our lives, like learning a new language, taking a trip to a very poor country, getting married, having children, the diagnosis of cancer, or losing a parent.

Sometimes it is physically where you go or where you stand that makes a difference. Think about a little dog that sees the world from six inches off the ground. How does that set in place what the world looks like and what is possible?

When I think of a point of reference, I think of “Dead Poet Society,” the movie starring Robin Williams released exactly 30 years ago today on June 2nd, 1989. The movie is set at an elite boarding school called Welton academy in 1959. Robin Williams plays John Keating, an unorthodox new English teacher at the school.

Keating teaches poetry as a medium to suck the marrow out of life and truly live. *Carpe diem*, the

latin phrase for “seize the day,” is his marching anthem for his students to take action now to live a full life.

Some of Keating’s unconventional methods include ripping out the introduction to their poetry book that describes the mathematical formula for understanding poetry. He also invites his students to create a new funky walk to explore different ways to think and move in the world. He wants his students to feel poetry and truly experience life.

One of my favorite scenes is when Keating is trying to get his students to change their point of reference by having them take turns standing on top of his desk to see their classroom (and perhaps their whole lives) from a new point of view.

The school held tight reigns on doing things a particular way based on their tradition and the way it had always been done, so Keating’s methods are too risky for them and after a series of events Keating is ousted from the school. But he makes one last sweep through the classroom to collect his things and half of his class honors him by standing up on their desks and saluting him by shouting “O Captain! My Captain!” before

he walks out. Such a powerful scene!

What might alter our point of reference?

A man named Paul had something to say about our point of reference in the first century.

Paul was a man who dedicated his life to grow new communities of people who lived according to a message of God’s radical grace for all people. He did this in the generation after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

But that’s not the beginning of Paul’s story. He started as part of the most strict Jewish religious group, called the Pharisees.

As a young man, Paul rose quickly up the ranks. He even was given responsibility by the High Priest, which was a prestigious thing.

When new communities of people began rising up who followed Jesus’ teaching, the Pharisees became concerned feeling their tradition and power threatened.

So they solicited Paul’s help, because he was identified as a tenacious go getter. He was commissioned by the High Priest to help eliminate the followers of Jesus.

He did this with vigor and zeal, until one day when Jesus spoke to him in a vision and altered his point of reference in life. He realized that he had been going in the wrong direction and needed to change course.

He remained a Jew, but after his encounter with Jesus he began a ten-year process to disassemble and rebuild his whole understanding of the story of Jewish faith going all the way back to the first book in their scriptures.

Everything he knew took on fresh meaning through a new lens and a new point of reference.

Rather than waiting for God to do something to bring hope for the people (which was what the Pharisees were doing) Paul understood that God had already done something radical and life altering.

Paul looked out at what God was building for the future and it was far more wonderful than he could have ever imagined. He knew that the rest of his life could be used to share that vision with the world, and that is exactly what Paul did.

What was Paul's new vision? Over time, he became laser focused on sharing about Jesus with people who were not Jewish. This was

radical because in Jewish circles, God's love was only for the Jews.

Paul kept pointing to the new world that God was building and encouraged people to change the point of reference for their life and join the effort to build this new reality.

He took this new vision all around the Mediterranean basin building communities of people, and teaching them how to change their point of reference and place Jesus at the center.

Paul started growing one of these communities in a city called Ephesus in western Asia Minor on the coast of the Aegean Sea, then he left to start other communities. But he wrote to them to help them grow. We have one of those letters.

READ EPHESIANS 3:8-12,20-21

God has also given us as a congregation a new big vision for the future. Our laser-focused target is about creating space and a path for millennial families with kids to experience and grow in the amazing reality of God's love and generosity.

I have spoken with people who are less than enthusiastic about ministry with millennials. They

recognize that they have left the church, have no interest in what we are doing, and unless millennials change, acclimate, and adjust to the way the church has been in the past, they will probably never be back in the church.

People told Paul a similar story back in the first century, but perhaps even more forcefully. They said that non-Jews were part of a different culture and different world and don't belong in God's family. They told Paul to stay away from them at all costs.

But God had other plans for Paul, and a new world opened up where non-Jews found their place in God's family. God has other plans for us too!

There is a new direction that God is leading us — a new reality in our future, and I would say in our present — and this will require something of us!

Grasping this new point of reference and building a new reality will require courage that is focused in a fresh way as God's Spirit leads.

It will require us to engage graciously with people who are different from us.

It will require us to think bigger than we have in the past.

It will require that we get curious about others and curious about how God is leading us in new directions.

Doing this kind of work also requires that we get out of our own way. This endeavor is not about us getting what we want, but living for the sake of others.

With our eyes fixed on this new vision, our point of reference is completely altered, and with the power of the Holy Spirit guiding us, we can live inside that new world and build a different reality right now!