

THE CYCLES OF LIFE

Prov 30:11-14

1

11 There is a kind of *man* who curses his father, And does not bless his mother. 12 There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, Yet is not washed from his filthiness. 13 There is a kind — oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised *in arrogance*. 14 There is a kind of *man* whose teeth are *like* swords, And his jaw teeth *like* knives, To devour the afflicted from the earth, And the needy from among men.

I read this passage and wonder about what Solomon is describing. Is this a proverbial type of person or is he talking about someone he knows. Well, I would like to say that the answer is obvious and that he is speaking proverbially, but, let's face it, we probably all know people that fit this description, unfortunately. Self-serving, arrogant, unloving, worldly, quite a description for someone, isn't it? Hopefully it's not the person we see in the mirror every morning.

The question then becomes, how can we avoid becoming that person? That's what Solomon is trying to teach. Note what he says in...

Prov 30:5

2

5 Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

By focusing on the wisdom of God found in the instruction of His word and by faithful obedience to that instruction, only then can we hope to keep from becoming self serving and arrogant in our lives.

One of the things that Karen and I have talked about are the dynamics of the cycles of life that we have seen and experienced through the years. Our discussion about this stems from a statement that was made that observed that so many of the young people that had grown up together, that we knew and grew up with, at one of the congregations in Fresno had quit, some of those had obeyed and fallen away some had never obeyed and just quit attending. I heard a statistic once that said about 80% of the young people growing up in the Church today fall away. I am not comfortable with that number, my experience tells me that its probably closer to the 20% number, your experience is probably even different than that, either way, it is way too high. Now, I understand that there always seems to be some that are too stubborn or self-serving, too like the person Solomon described, to accept God, but to lose some 8 to 10 young people to Satan and the world, all from the same group seems a little odd. What happened? Was it peer pressure, lack of parental guidance, lack of congregational involvement, lack of sound teaching in the classroom or from the pulpit, what? Solomon says in...

Prov. 22:6

3

6 Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

What does that mean? If it is to be understood as an absolute, then the failure when someone falls away or does not obey becomes the teacher's, whether that is their parents or someone at the congregation. I don't believe that to be the case. Every individual makes their own choice to fear the Lord or to hate wisdom.

Ezek 18:20

4

20 "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

We all are responsible for our own actions, our own belief or disbelief. That is plain. But we must also understand that children's decisions will most assuredly be influenced by their parents,

their friends, their teachers, whether in school or the Bible study situation. What they see and hear from all these contributing sources affects how they view God, Christ, their Word, even Christianity, as a whole. That cannot be avoided. What the goal is, is that the influence from God, through whatever source there might be, is greater, more convincing, than the influence coming from the world, read Satan there. We want our teaching, our examples, our love, to overcome the allure of the temptations that Satan places in front of everyone. God will be the shield of anyone who comes to Him in faithful obedience. That is what we saw in the passage we looked at in **Prov. 30:5**.

Solomon speaks of this again in...

Prov. 1:28-33

5

28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me, **29** Because they hated knowledge, And did not choose the fear of the LORD. **30** "They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof. **31** "So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, And be satiated with their own devices. **32** "For the waywardness of the naive shall kill them, And the complacency of fools shall destroy them. **33** "But he who listens to me shall live securely, And shall be at ease from the dread of evil."

We all are responsible for what we do. There is no blame to be put on anyone else, period. But there are influences that affect the decisions we make. We all need to strive to be the kind of influence that is good and not harmful or evil. That said, it still doesn't explain **Prov. 22...**

6

"Raise your children up in the way of the Lord"

I don't claim to understand the nuances and differences between absolute truths and proverbial truths. I do know that all truth is God's whether it absolute or not. Isn't the point of Jesus' statement in...

John 14:6

7

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

I think what Solomon is saying in Prov. 22 is that when we teach and live the Word of God and train our children to do that then the chances of our influence being greater than that of the world increase exponentially. But if our children see in us or those in the Church hypocrisy, dissension, lack of effort in living faithfully, then the influence of the Word can get overwhelmed by the influence of the world.

This brings us to our focus for this evening. For just a few minutes we want to look at the life cycles of the Christian. **8** There are lots of ways to look at this, but we are going to break it down by age groups. Remember that these things are proverbial truths, generalizations, as opposed to absolutes.

The age groups we'll look at are...

9

- 1) 2 – 7 years old
- 2) 8 – 16 years old
- 3) 17 – 25 years old
- 4) 25 – 45 years old
- 5) 46 an older

As we look at these groups, we will try to examine them with two views in mind..

- 10** A) What is the typical reaction of this age group to teaching?
B) What might be the best approach to teaching this group?

There is little that is more rewarding than to work with 2 – 7 year old children. While there are always exceptions, for the most part, these children are excited to go to class, love to hear the stories and learn about God, Jesus, Noah, Jonah, Daniel, and all those wonderful figures from God's Word that teach us about faith and failure, effort and apathy, love and hate. They love the activities and the singing. This group has little to pull it away from God except, and please hear this, for those who have the most influence on them, their parents, their grandparents, and other relatives, their teachers, all those they come to love and trust. They pick up on things that are said, and are little sponges when it comes to attitudes and emotions. They mimic and copy what they see and hear. They make no choice to attend or not to attend services. That onus is on the parents. If the parent is excited about going to services, the child picks up on that.

What this group needs, is to be constantly reminded of the stories they are learning, to have the life lessons from those stories reinforced in their lives. They need to know that the Good Samaritan is a wonderful example of caring, sharing, and doing what God wants, and they need to see that in those they are around. The greatest danger in this group is that those that make the decisions for them will make the wrong ones. See what Jesus says concerning children in...

Matt 19:13-15

11

13 Then *some* children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. **14** But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Mark 9:37

12

37 "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

Mark 9:42

13

42 "And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea."

Our next two groups may be the most challenging. These are the areas that seem the most difficult to keep focused.

The 8 – 16 year olds are being barraged by peer pressure to follow the ways of the world. They are being taken captive by video games that in many cases just are not appropriate with the things they depict and show. The justification is that...

14

"It is just a game"

The danger is that the more exposed children are to the temptations of the world, the more likely they are to begin to be influenced by them. There are those who attribute the rise in children bringing guns to school and shooting other students to the influence of the video games they play that promote violence and disrespect for others, authority, and the world.

The television programs of today focus on the so called politically correct issues of the world. They offer the norm of family life as being disrespect for parental authority. They present the degradation of society's morals as being the new wave of acceptance, and if you don't, you are ostracized, shunned and put down. The erosion of the family unit is way it is, because we are a society of free thinkers entitled to the good things of life, because we exist as an individual and we really don't need anyone else. The movies, advertisements, and almost every media influence that these children are exposed to tout the wonderful life that can had by partaking of the lures of this life.

The biggest advantage is that this group is, or should be, still under the control of their parents. Parents, at this age it is a major mistake to allow this group to make the type of decisions that can be life altering, without being involve. Now, understand, that this will be cause for problems. This age group wants to test their abilities and they seem to have an inherent desire to rebel against authority, especially that of their parents. These young people need to be reminded of the stories and the applications that they were taught when younger. My thinking is that a way needs to be found to help this group plug in, if you will, to Christianity. What can be found to help this group feel the importance, the need to pursue God and a life of righteousness? It is critical that this group feels that the life of a Christian is a viable alternative to the attractions of the world and a life of foolishness. We need to find ways that will help this group join the work of the Lord in the local congregation instead of walking away from it.

1 Tim 4:11-12

15

12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

Paul's comment to Timothy is to not allow others to despise or ignore his youth. Paul says, don't despise youth. Embrace it, honor it, use its energy, cultivate its zeal, guide it into righteous. This can only be done by making God's truth relevant in their lives. The challenge for all of us is to figure out how to do that.

The 17 – 25 year olds face much the same deterrents in this life. The difficulty is that, at this point, the influence of their parents is waning rapidly. The time when a parent could dictate to a child that they will attend services has either come to an end or is just about to. Do you see how important it is to get them plugged in before this happens. The more that people are involved, the more difficult it becomes to just quit. But this is a time when lives are expanding, marriages are occurring, children being born. The distractions of the world are tremendous during this growth, the dangers of being pulled away more intense. The responsibility of having small children can become overwhelming. Staying up with them, chasing them, the additional work that they require can be wearing, to the point that it gets easy to just say, you know I'll just stay home on Wednesday or Sunday night. I really wanted to go, but the baby was asleep and I just hated to wake him up. It is at this time that the foundations that were taught in the earlier years, hopefully take hold.

We need to be as encouraging and helpful as we can at this stage, building on the foundations of their youth and praising, and encouraging them as they teach their own children and start the cycle again.

Isa 40:31

16

31 Yet those who wait, (*or put their hope in*) for the Lord Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.

Do you want to know how to overcome the influences of the world? Isaiah tells us,

The 25 – 45 age group, can be either the most dangerous or possibly, the most rewarding. There is nothing like watching your children grow and begin to experience life for themselves. The wonder of the world is exciting and the intensity of a faith in God is a beautiful thing to watch grow. But the dangers are unlimited at this point. The excuses become easy. The kids are involved in sports, and we are trying to teach them the value of commitment so we will allow them to skip services so they can play in a tournament. We are going on vacation, but we will get back to attending when we come home. What is being taught to our children, that religion is only important when it is convenient? Are we teaching them that our commitment to God is less than any commitment we might have here on earth? What foundation do we give our children with our decisions? What message do we send when we allow them to dress like everyone else even when it is inappropriate, to play video games that are nothing but trash, or to skip services for other things?

This is a time when the very structure of the foundation of the faith that our lives are built on is tested at every step, at every decision. That is what I meant when I said it can be the most dangerous or the most rewarding. This is a time when we are challenged to grow or we choose to stumble. This is a time for putting God first in all things and for letting our children and those we love have an influence on it.

1 Tim 4:16

17

16 persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

The last age group, 46 and over, is very special. This is the most difficult age group to convert. They are pretty well set in their ways and convinced of the beliefs that they have come to accept as true. Not impossible, but definitely difficult. But this is also the group that is the leadership of the congregation. This is the group where Deacons and Elders are drawn from. Typically they are the most knowledgeable, though the younger ones tend to argue that, and generally the wisest, because of their greater experience. But with great power comes great responsibility. This is the group that needs to step up as leaders, and not just the Deacons or Elders. They are the ones who become the anchors of a local congregation. They may not have the physical strength anymore to do what they once did, but they still have the zeal and enthusiasm to serve God anyway they can. God instructs us to respect and honor them. This has always been. Note...

Lev 19:32

18

32 'You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord.

Under the Old Law, God decreed that the aged were to be honored and the principle is carried over into the New.

Matt 15:4

19

4 "For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.'

Christ quotes from the Old Testament in His discussion with the Pharisees and the scribes. Those that are older are to be respected and honored. And seriously, what great examples to all of us when those that are older attend in the face of advancing age and infirmities. That can also be their greatest challenge, when the body begins to wear out, Satan uses the opportunity to attack ones faith and conviction. It can awful easy to begin to use the aches and pains to justify not going.

We all need to appreciate their faithfulness, honor their life long effort, use their knowledge and wisdom, and listen at their feet to their instruction.

Where are you in these cycles? In the final analysis, whatever group we are in, when we put our faith in God, allow His word to be our shield and guide, and commit to Him as opposed to the world, we can be successful in helping all we come into contact with to see God manifested and we show our children, families, friends, and the world how to live a righteous life, rather than showing them excuses not to.

The cycle of life begins at birth. The cycle of our spiritual life begins at our spiritual birth.

1 Peter 1:3

20

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,