

YOUNG FOR GOD

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GOD'S CLAIM ON THE FIRSTBORN

***Exo 13:2** Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.*

In the ancient world, the firstborn child carried the weight of the parent's, and the nation's, expectations. Whatever made Egypt, for example, the great power that it was, was invested into the lives of the firstborn children whose responsibility it was to take the nation to greater heights. Understood in this light, we begin to appreciate God's threat to Pharaoh.

***Exo 4:22** And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:*

***Exo 4:23** And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.*

Why is God so zealous for the firstborn? He said 'it is mine'. God had a plan to establish a family and a nation. By killing the firstborn of Egypt, God was sending a very serious message to Pharaoh: 'Your firstborns will not wield a whip over my children anymore'. Paradoxically, it was Moses, the firstborn of a Hebrew family, who killed an Egyptian. This was a harbinger of the coming intervention of God. God was eager to claim the youth for himself and teach them his ways before the world and the enemy corrupted them. The future of a nation is only as strong as its youth. It was for this reason that the Babylonians captured the best of Judah's youth, took

them to Babylon and sought to indoctrinate them with their religion, sciences and tastes. The ground zero of the battle for the future is the souls of youth.

Dan 1:3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes;

Dan 1:4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

Witness the immense tragedy that follows when the adults sinned against the Almighty! Their children grew up as captives in the land of the sworn enemy. Clearly, Daniel and his companions would have desired to serve their God in Israel, and not lend their strength and gifts to the Babylonians. How could Daniel be happy when his beloved Jerusalem lay in ruins and he served the king who destroyed the holy city?

The doctrine of the firstborn points beautifully to the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that a lamb had entered every house in Israel and its blood on the doorposts was the reason the angel of death passed over, sparing the lives of all in the family. If the blood was absent, the firstborn in the family would die. The lamb which died to save the firstborn is Jesus Christ. This is why God declared that the firstborn of every family is his. However, God decided to take the tribe of Levi instead of the firstborn from every family as his inheritance.

Num 3:13 *Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD.*

Num 3:41 *And thou shalt take the Levites for me (I am the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstlings among the cattle of the children of Israel.*

The above reminds us that Jesus Christ redeemed us from death. He was the lamb that entered every house in Israel and delivered each family from the angel of death. Hence, he has the right to ask for the best that we have – the firstborn. All the young today are the firstborn. In fact, Jesus himself is called the firstborn.

Heb 12:23 *To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.*

In summary, the firstborn represents the future. They carry on their shoulders the seed of the promises of God just as the children of Israel carried the bones of Joseph into the Land of Canaan. God has a special claim on the youth; he redeemed his people as the lamb. By definition, a lamb is young; God gave the best he had for us. Now he expects the youth to give their best to him. There is no sacrifice that can compare to giving one's youth to Jesus because youth is like a clean slate upon which God can write a beautiful story.

Isa 28:9 *Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.*

THE YOUNG CARRYING CHRIST

***Mat 21:2** Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.*

***Mat 21:3** And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.*

Note that the Lord asked for both the donkey and its young. He has no intention of separating the mother from its child, but that both share in the honor which he was about to bestow upon them. This is why we as adult-churchgoers must do our utmost to ensure that our children join us for church. Until then, the donkey and child were someone else's property. Many owners were harsh towards their beasts of burden, and we can only speculate about the kind of fate that awaited them. Their future prospects were about to change dramatically that day. The command to 'loose them, and bring them unto me', came from the mouth of the God who created them. Never before was such honor bestowed upon the lowly donkey.

There is a distinct message here for the young. You have two stark choices facing you in this life: will you serve Jesus or Satan? Youth are often led astray due to their inexperience and haste. These characteristics often led to some kind of bondage, as symbolized by the chord that tied the donkey and its colt. 'Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and

youth are vanity’ (Ecc 11:10). Thankfully, Jesus is never too far away; there is no better friend for the youth than the Lord Jesus Christ. The marvelous words, ‘loose them’, but, more importantly, ‘bring them unto me’ encapsulate Jesus’ mission.

Luk 18:15 And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

Luk 18:16 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Luk 18:17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Every parent wishes the best for their children, and the best decision parents can make is to simply bring their children to the Lord. We cannot know how Jesus desires to use them, just as the disciples had no idea what use he would put the donkey and its child to. But be assured of one thing: they will have eternal rewards for submitting to the will of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Mat 21:7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

Mat 21:8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

I once preached a message entitled ‘Chrstophore’ which means ‘carrier of Christ’ in Latin. Christians bestowed the honorary title of ‘Christophore’ upon ministers of the Gospel drawing on the record in Matthew 21. What an honor for the donkey to carry Christ into Jerusalem! Often donkeys are accustomed to whippings, curses,

shouts and grunts that span the gamut of aggressive repertoires. Now, the mother and child saw people lining the streets smiling, bowing and blessing them with hosannas. Life is so beautiful with Jesus! All you need to do young girl is be a carrier of Jesus. All you need to do young boy is to be a carrier of Jesus.

Certainly, the colt would have preferred to carry Christ and be part of fulfilling a 500-year-old prophecy than to remain in the custody of its former owner. Zechariah had declared:

***Zechariah 9:9** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*

Notice again that Jesus rode upon both the donkey and its child, its colt, fulfilling Zechariah to the letter. The message is reiterated: Christ wants to be the God of father and son; of mother and daughter. Let him ride the entire family to heaven with shouts of hosanna! There are, as was said earlier, no young people who do not carry something or the other: some carry a heavy load of books in the hope of securing a good career and money, while others feel the weight of vanity pressing them down as they live to party. However, there are those young who desire to carry the weight of the Lord and become his servants for eternity! One such young man was the apostle John who was perhaps just seventeen when he became a Christophore. See how richly he has been rewarded! One of the most common names in our contemporary world is John. Furthermore, as the end-time events draw closer, many are reading the Book of

Revelation, as they perceive the every growing relevance of his writings (e.g. 666). Young person, why don't you decide to become a 'Christophore' today!

WISDOM THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

2Timothy 3:15 *And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

A major disadvantage that young people face is lack of experience. Experience is knowing how to respond to various situations thrown up by life, in a sensible way. How often have we heard adults say in a wistful tone, ‘If only I had known back then what I know now!’ We can all agree that wisdom that comes through life experience is a great asset in negotiating the twists and turns of life. It is for this reason that Solomon exhorts the reader to diligently acquire wisdom.

Proverbs 4:7 *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*

So how can a young person gain wisdom without having encountered challenges in life? The good news is that young people can acquire great wisdom by paying careful attention to the Word of God, as Paul reminds his son in the Gospel, Timothy. Jesus is called the ‘everlasting Father’ in the Scriptures (Isaiah 9:6). The advice of a father is motivated by a desire to protect the young from the consequences of bad decisions. So our heavenly Father says:

Proverbs 3:1 *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:*

Proverbs 3:2 *For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.*

Josiah was just eight years old when he became king. It appears that he developed an early habit of reading the Word of God and respecting the ministers of God, such as the high priest and scribes of the Law. There are two reasons we can assume this. The first is his response when the Word of God was found in the Temple and read before him.

2Kings 22:11 *And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.*

2Kings 22:12 *And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying,*

2Kings 22:13 *Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.*

Only a person who deeply loves the Word of God and has an intimate relationship with God can react in such a manner. His father, Amon, was a wicked king, but someone must have instilled a love for the God of David, his great ancestor, in the heart of the child Josiah. Perhaps it was his mother Jedidah; we don't know. The second is the great spiritual reforms that he undertook at the young age of twenty-six. Only an individual who was familiar with and loved the Word of God could embark on such comprehensive reforms that were pleasing in the sight of God. He fought against false religion, kept the Passover and many other acts of righteousness.

2Kings 23:25 *And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.*

The Bible is filled with the life experiences of people who obeyed the Word of God and those who disobeyed. It invites the young person to meditate on these experiences and learn from them. The young person can compensate for lack of experience through the Word of God. The key reason for the success of Josiah was his habit of consulting the Lord (2Kings 22:13). There is always success waiting down the road for the young person who learns to inquire of the Lord in prayer and study of the Word, as did Josiah.

Consider Timothy, Paul's son in the Gospel. He had a mother and grandmother who loved the Lord and passed on their faith to this boy. Paul must have been truly impressed with his character and took him under his wings. See the great honor bestowed upon Timothy! Two books in the Bible are named after him. Even the great apostle Paul does not have a book in the Bible named after him. God truly loves those who love and obey his Word from childhood.

EXPLOITS OF THE YOUNG IN SCRIPTURE

Miriam – saving Moses

Exodus 2:4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

Exodus 2:7 Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?

Miriam was somewhere between 10-12 years old when she watched with anxiety her baby brother's ark being borne by the mighty Nile into the arms of Pharaoh's daughter. Scripture does not tell us that Miriam's parents ordered her to keep an eye on the ark; it would be impossible for a child to follow a tiny ark subject to the powerful and unpredictable currents of the mighty Nile. It appears that while the parents rested in faith, Miriam acted in faith and decided to keep an eye on the fate of her baby brother.

Miriam was clearly mature beyond her years. She did not allow emotion to overwhelm her, but calmly approached Pharaoh's daughter and came up with a bold proposition. 'Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?' (Exodus 2:7). There is an enviable boldness children demonstrate at times; a boldness that we adults seem to have left behind in youth. Not only would baby Moses survive, but Miriam wanted the best of both worlds for her baby brother – the love of his own family, and the love and attention of the royal family. Her

decision to follow her baby brother by faith paid untold dividends: she played a decisive role in the deliverance of Israel way before her brother lifted up his staff and divided the Red Sea by the power of God. No wonder she is called a prophetess in the Bible.

Exodus 15:20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

Miriam, perhaps more than anyone else in Israel, had more reason to celebrate that watershed moment. Let us recall that Pharaoh had determined that every Hebrew male child should be drowned in the Nile.

Exodus 1:22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

God had now turned the tables on Pharaoh. The best men that Egypt had, including Pharaoh, now drowned before her eyes in the Red Sea, while her baby brother, Moses, now eighty years old, was the instrument God used to destroy them. She was the only one who was a witness of the day when her brother was given the prophetic name Moses – drawn out from the water – and, best of all, she played a key role in ensuring that her brother knew his family background and the promises of God.

Hebrews 11:24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

Hebrews 11:25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

We can see in our minds' eye Miriam rocking her baby brother in her arms and telling him, 'I am your real sister, Moses!' As he grew, the family must have shared with him the great story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which he never forgot when he went to his 'other family' – the royals of Egypt.

Miriam was just 10-12 years old when she intervened at perhaps the most crucial crossroads in the history of Israel. She teaches us not to underestimate the role that children can play in fulfilling the plans of God. Her faith saved Israel. Not only was Miriam called a prophetess in the Bible (written by own her brother Moses), but years later, when God protested against Israel, he reminded them of the leaders whom he raised up to deliver them; and Miriam is mentioned in the same breath as Moses and Aaron.

Micah 6:3 *O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.*

Micah 6:4 *For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.*

In the last chapter, we read about the significant influence of Timothy' mother and grandmother on his own faith. What kind of a family produces three tremendous spiritual warriors like Moses, Aaron and Miriam – a prophet and leader, a high priest and a prophetess? The answer is always God-fearing parents! Thank God for the faith of Amram and Jochebed. The faith of parents has a long-term impact on the destiny of nations.

DAVID AND GOLIATH

1Samuel 17:1 Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephesdammim.

While wisdom comes with age, sometimes, it is the young who remind the adults about the lessons of the past. One such lesson of the past is the story of David and Goliath. David was probably around 16 years of age, according to some sources. It was not by accident that the Philistines gathered in Judah. Bethlehem in Judah was the home of David. We read in chapter 16 how God led the prophet Samuel to anoint David as the new king of Israel. Now, the God who chose David began immediately to orchestrate events and lead David from Bethlehem to the throne in Gibeah, where Saul reigned. It was at Bethlehem that the Spirit of God came upon David and he confronted the lion and the bear.

1Samuel 17:35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

Remember this was a fully-grown male lion – ‘I caught him by the beard (mane)’. A male lion can weigh over 250 kilograms. A boy cannot seize such a ferocious creature by the mane and kill it (including a bear) without supernatural enablement. This is key to understanding the source of David’s confidence when he confronted Goliath. He himself states, ‘Thy servant slew both the lion and the

bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God' (I Samuel 17:36). How could David be silent when he knew all this, and Goliath kept defying the armies of Israel not far from where he slew the lion and the bear? The giant, who was about 12 feet tall, would thunder the same defiance every day for forty days before the armies of Israel, paralyzing them with fear.

1Samuel 17:10 And the Philistine said, *I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.*

1Samuel 17:16 And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.

Goliath said, 'Give me a man', but God gave him a boy to mock him. The lesson the boy David teaches us is this: he based his actions on the knowledge of what God did in the past. While the adults forgot the lessons of the past - e.g. how God defeated the giant *anakims* through Joshua and Caleb, the boy David had experiences with the mighty power of God in killing *anakims* from the animal kingdom. In fact, the giant *anakims*, who also struck immense fear into the hearts of the children of Israel in the days of the 12 spies, lived in Hebron, Judah. God, thankfully, raises up great men of faith where giants strike fear into the hearts of his people. Caleb was of the tribe of Judah – a worthy ancestor of David. It was Caleb who destroyed the *anakim* and chased them out of Hebron.

Joshua 15:13 And unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a part among the children of Judah, according to the commandment of the LORD to Joshua, even the city of Arba the father of Anak, which city is Hebron.

Joshua 15:14 And Caleb drove thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak.

The Bible says of Caleb ‘And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it (Numbers 13:30). Although just a boy, David knew that God had given Israel the land, and he was determined not to allow any giant, anakim or Philistine, to threaten them again. While it is not advisable to compare the faith of David and Caleb, I think you will nevertheless agree with me that the scales clearly tip in favor of David because he was a boy and he was entirely alone. The great Caleb had the advantage of witnessing first-hand all the mighty miracles that God wrought through the hands of Moses. Not least, Caleb had the support of Joshua, and the backing of Moses. Furthermore, there was a psychological dimension: Goliath spoke the same words every day for 40 days before the armies of Israel. The anakim did not speak, as far as we know. It was just their size that terrified the 10 spies. Had David appeared the first day, Goliath would not have had 39 more days to blaspheme the God of Israel.

Moreover, while Caleb drove out the anakim, David kept the head and sword of Goliath as a souvenir, as a concrete, tangible witness of the power of faith. He gave the sword of Goliath to the High Priest, Ahimelech, so that all of Israel would see its size and strength and wonder at the power of the God of Israel. It was a sad day, when, because of the cruel jealousy of Saul, David had to ask for the sword of Goliath to use it to protect himself.

***1Samuel 21:9** And the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it*

is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod: if thou wilt take that, take it: for there is no other save that here. And David said, There is none like that; give it me.

So far, we have explored the fact that God raised up a boy to remind the adults about the lessons of the past. Israel forgot about the faith of Caleb in confronting and chasing out the giants, the anakim. Young people, the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of the armies of the living church, can use you to rebuke us adults and remind us of the golden lessons of the past. We ought to consider one more lesson that David teaches us before we conclude: the wisdom of the boy David.

1Samuel 17:38 *And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail.*

1Samuel 17:39 *And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him.*

Three lessons can be drawn out from David's decision not to wear the armor of Saul. Some rabbis have concluded that David was careful not to provoke the jealousy of Saul. Let us say that David had killed Goliath using the armor of Saul. This could potentially raise the question: why didn't Saul use his own armor to kill Goliath? Saul knew what happened at Bethlehem where Samuel anointed David to be the next king. This was a delicate situation and David handled it wisely: he chose to wear the outfit of a shepherd. Saul must have taught, 'This will be the end of David', but God had other plans. By delivering Israel through the attire of a shepherd, God was signaling

to Israel that he is the Shepherd of his flock. This was Psalm 23 in action.

Psalm 23:4 *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

David was now in the valley of Elah, and with wisdom he decided to show Israel that God does not deliver with armies and swords, but humble faith. If he wore the armor of Saul, either the king would be jealous that he did not do the job himself, or, alternatively, he may boast that David could not have accomplished this without his armor. God did not want Saul to have anything to do with this great victory: the Spirit of God had already left him. How can a backslider be honored by God? David teaches us that God will use the young as they are: you do not need to borrow the character, weapons or ideas from any adults – especially those who do not know Jesus or are backsliders. Don't be ashamed of your status in life; it was the outfit of a shepherd, not king which saved Israel that day. We know the pressures on the young to conform to certain standards and images in the world of social media. Young person, do you dare to be yourself? Do not be ashamed of who you are? Be what Jesus makes you.

Zechariah 4:6 *Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.*

STUDY THE WORD OF GOD

2Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The apostle Paul admonished the young Timothy to study to show himself approved unto God. According to tradition, Timothy was just 16 years of age when he became a Christian through Paul's ministry. Notice that Paul wrote, 'show thyself approved unto God', not unto men. Let us use this as the point of departure for this study. Let there be doubt: the Christian who desires to be used by the Lord Jesus Christ must be a diligent student of the Word of God. Why does God put such a high premium on study? To begin with, study demonstrates humility. To study is to acknowledge the need for direction and wisdom from God. It is to recognize that one is inadequate, and must become a student of great men and women who know God. This attitude is encapsulated in the scripture below:

1Kings 3:7 And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

1Kings 3:8 And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

1Kings 3:9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

Solomon was 20 years old when he became king. It is not uncommon for youth at this age to have an unwarranted sense of optimism and confidence in their abilities. Not so for Solomon! He was acutely aware of his shortcomings and lack of experience. The Book of eternal knowledge and wisdom will open its secrets to those who first clothe themselves with humility. How often do adults look back with a mixture of shame and pity on their youth and wistfully think, ‘If only I knew what I know now, I would have saved myself much heartache!’

The blessings of study are manifold! Few think of this, but studying is an antidote to trouble; it is impossible to get into trouble while deeply immersed in study. This is why the apostle Paul commanded the following to members of the church of Thessalonica who fell into the habit of gossip and slothfulness:

***1Thess 4:11** And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;*

Studying develops discipline. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines discipline as ‘training that makes people more willing to obey or more able to control themselves, often in the form of rules, and punishments if these are broken, or the behavior produced by this training’. Hence, developing a habit of studying the Bible will help the young obey God and control themselves – two immensely valuable spiritual virtues. We now understand through advances in neurology that the prefrontal cortex of adolescents – the part that

affects self-control and decision-making – undergoes major changes explaining to some degree why teenagers can be impulsive and get into trouble. According to one study:

*The development and maturation of the prefrontal cortex occurs primarily during adolescence and is fully accomplished at the age of 25 years. The development of the prefrontal cortex is very important for complex behavioral performance, as this region of the brain helps accomplish executive brain functions*¹

Given the above, what better way to discipline the restless nature of children than the study of the Word of God? No wonder David says, ‘Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word’ (Psalm 119: 9). A child who develops the habit of studying the Word of God will reap enormous benefits.

Psalm 119:99 *I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.*

Psalm 119:130 *The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*

Psalm 119:165 *Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*

To summarize, studying the Word of God has enormous benefits for the young. It speaks of a humble heart that acknowledges its need for wisdom, as did Solomon. In addition, it is an effective

¹ Arain, M., Haque, M., Johal, L., Mathur, P., Nel, W., Rais, A., ... & Sharma, S. (2013). Maturation of the adolescent brain. *Neuropsychiatric disease and treatment*, 9, 449.

tool that develops discipline, understanding and makes one wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15).

STUDY WHAT GOD HAS MADE

Dan 1:3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes;

Dan 1:4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

The children of Israel, Daniel and his companions, were actually captives, the enemies of the Babylonians. However, this did not stop the Babylonians from recognizing and appreciating the knowledge and learning they exhibited. From the beginning of time, prudent people have learned to respect the value of knowledge and learning. The Babylonians wished to capitalize on the learning of the Hebrew children and, the Hebrew children in turn experienced a change in their status and prestige due to this.

Knowledge blesses the one who recognizes it and honors it, while at the same time blessing the possessors of knowledge. Furthermore, knowledge is like a world currency; its value is recognized across borders. Daniel and his friends had to leave everything behind by force, but no one could separate them from their love of God and their excellent knowledge. Everything else they left behind.

Why should we study the world around us? Whether one chooses to study humans or nature, God created them both. Hence, to dedicate oneself to the study humans or nature is to desire to know God better. Whatever is in existence has its origin in God; all quest for knowledge is premised in this great understanding. When David looked up at the heavens perhaps while looking after his father's sheep, he was in awe at the majestic sight of the spectrum of stars twinkling in the expanse of God's sky. This consideration led him to say:

Psalms 8:3 *When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;*

Psalms 8:4 *What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

God himself will open the book of nature to the young Christian who fears him and wants to know God through study. Remember that Solomon only asked God for wisdom to lead Israel and judge judiciously between the people of God. However, it pleased God to bestow upon Solomon knowledge both of people and of nature.

1Ki 4:30 *And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.*

1Ki 4:31 *For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.*

1Ki 4:32 *And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.*

1Ki 4:33 *And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.*

1Ki 4:34 *And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.*

God made Solomon both a social scientist, botanist and zoologist. A social scientist because he displayed deep insight into the behavior of humans when he ordered the baby in dispute between the two mothers to be cut in half. In addition, as a botanist and zoologist he spoke expertly on the behavior of trees, plants and animals.

Consider knowledge to be a secret that God reveals to those who love him. ‘The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant’ (Psalm 25:14). If Christian youth understand this, they will excel in any field of study they choose. Let us remember that God took Moses to the house of Pharaoh so he could learn to read, write and study the knowledge of the Egyptians. Moses was perhaps the only Hebrew who could read and write. Later, he wrote the five most famous books of the world – what is referred to as the Law of Moses. We Apostolics love to cite Acts 2:38, and rightly so, but we forget that God took a highly educated man of Syrian-Greek descent, a doctor by the name of Luke, and guided him to write these words. Yes, God values education and will use those who dedicate it to him mightily.

Especially in these last days, as the Lord revealed to Daniel, there has been an explosion in knowledge and learning.

Dan 12:4 *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*

More than ever before, the Christian youth will need the wisdom of Jesus to navigate through this torrent of information.

YOUTH AND PARENTS

Exodus 20:12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

The only one of the Ten Commandments, which comes with a promise attached, is the one about honoring one's father and mother. Consider the sacrifice and dedication of parents. Way before the child is born, parents rejoice and plan. Parents willfully give up much of their freedom in having children. The task of parenting is constant; parents worry about their child/ren throughout their lives. They worry about their safety and their success. For all these reasons and more, the Lord puts a high premium on parenting and gives it divine sanction. It is one of the most noble tasks, and done properly, receives his blessings.

Because parenting is a life-long career, God rewards children who honor their parents with long life. The reward is equivalent to the task. The contrary is also true: a son of Judah was so wicked that God cut him off early. "And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him" (Genesis 38:7). In other words, God demands and expects children to recognize the sacrifice and divine seal upon the task of parenting. Parenting is close to the heart of God; obviously, it was God who envisioned and invented the institution of parenting. Angels have not been given access to this special mission and animals do it to varying degrees of imperfection.

Only humans, created in God's image, have been endowed with the sacred duty of parenting.

Gen 18:17 *And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;*

Gen 18:18 *Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him*

Gen 18:19 *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him*

According to the scriptures above, it was God's foreknowledge and trust in Abraham's parenting abilities that led him to share what was about to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah. Good parenting is rewarded by the Lord. If we dispense of our duties as parents diligently, God will trust as with his secrets. The opposite was true for Eli, the high priest. What a contrast there was between Eli and Hannah. Hannah was so concerned for her son to know the ways of the Lord that she entrusted him in the care of Eli, but, sadly, Eli was not as concerned about his sons' spiritual upbringing. He neglected his duties to his family – his sons in particular. What was the outcome of this neglect? God elected to talk to a child, Samuel. The principle of trust and parenting is reinforced.

1Samuel 3:1 *And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*

1Samuel 3:17 *And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.*

What characteristics is God looking for in ideal parenting? Abraham is one of the foremost examples. He waited patiently for twenty-five years before he received Isaac, then he did not hesitate to take him to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him. This demonstrated clearly to Isaac that God is above all. He knew that God could raise him from the dead. This is the first duty of a parent – honor God in the mission of parenting. Abraham was also very meticulous in giving instructions to Eleazer in regard to finding a bride for his son. Again, he honored God in this vital aspect of parenting.

Gen 24:37 *And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell*

Gen 24:38 *But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son.*

As mentioned earlier, God rewards parents who take the job of bringing up spiritual children seriously. A God-fearing and well-behaved child brings honor to God, parents, society and himself. Solomon states: “The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him” (Proverbs 23:24). Most importantly, a wise parent will pay special attention to what the Lord says about the kind of upbringing he desires.

Mal 2:15 *And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.*

May God come to your house and find godly seed!

THE YOUTH OF CHRIST

Luke 2:41 *Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.*

Luke 2:42 *And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.*

Luke 2:43 *And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.*

Youth can often be a time spent without purpose. The life of the child Jesus teaches us however that a childhood motivated by the will of God is fully possible. Let us explore this awareness in the youth of our Lord Jesus. In the scriptures above, Luke records that the entire family of the Lord would make the difficult journey to Jerusalem for the Passover every year. Jesus was accustomed to the sound of lambs and sheep, among others, accompanying the pilgrims down to Jerusalem from Nazareth every year. The child Jesus knew what no one in Israel knew at the time: that he was the real Lamb of God who alone could wash away the sins of the entire world.

Matthew 1:21 *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

How his heart must have wanted to save his people from their sins already at the age of 12! Luke records ‘the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem’ (Luke 2:43). Jerusalem was the place God chose for the Temple to be built, and anyone who was concerned with repentance and restoration of relations with God, must go to

Jerusalem. In the Book of Exodus, God commanded the children of Israel to examine the lamb for any blemish; the lamb must be perfect. The child Jesus stayed behind in the Temple in Jerusalem to be examined by the scribes and Pharisees. And what was their verdict?

Luke 2:46 *And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.*

Luke 2:47 *And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.*

What lessons can children draw from this? To begin with, God does not despise childhood. Although Jesus never acted before the time appointed, the account of Luke tells us that God can use childhood powerfully. We cannot tell how many more people were blessed by the ministry of the child Jesus, but this account gives us a glimpse into the fruitful childhood of the Lord. Paul admonished the young Timothy:

1Timothy 4:12 *Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

Luke's account of the childhood of Jesus demonstrates how focused the Lord was on his mission. 'And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' (Luke 2:49). While childhood is a time for play and growth, we must be concerned when it is filled with everything except spiritual issues. It is as if, in some instances, modern childhood has been designed to cram every sort of 'fun and frolic' except the Father's business. We have the account of Jesus' childhood so that

children may also follow Jesus. In fact, as a child Jesus corrected Joseph and Mary and said they should have known where he was – in his father’s house. He was not rebellious; he was their God and their teacher.

Luke 2:50 *And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.*

Luke 2:51 *And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.*

In returning to Nazareth and submitting to them, the Lord again teaches children a profound lesson: though he was God, who never ever obeyed anyone prior to coming to earth, he humbled himself and did whatever the adults asked him to do. He was patient. Youth need to know the value of patience. Notice that the Lord was later crucified as a troublemaker with a myriad of accusations hurled at him by the religious establishment. If he really was a rabble-rouser, how is it that he live for 30 years in Nazareth without an incident? The truth is that Jesus took on him the form of a servant and subjected himself to every ordinance of man so he could be the Lamb of God who saved us from our sins.

Phil 2:5 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

Phil 2:6 *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

Phil 2:7 *But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

Phil 2:8 *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

THE THREE HEBREW CHILDREN

Dan 1:6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah:

Dan 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

We cannot talk about youth and the Word of God without considering the tremendous example of Daniel and his Hebrew friends in Babylon. Keep in mind that Babylon was a superpower with every kind of luxury and temptation designed to appeal to the flesh and senses. The world today appears to draw our children from one obsession to another with little spiritual value. Youth seems like a mist spent in the hold of one form of entertainment or the other. This was also the case in Babylon. Food, luxuries and entertainment was high on the agenda. The king had selected Daniel and his friends for a privileged life in his court and he wanted them to look and think like Babylonians.

Dan 1:5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.

Dan 1:7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishaël, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

Clearly, it becomes all the harder to resist when the king of Babylon shares his food with you and gives you Babylonian names. It would have been easier for Daniel and his friends to stay true to their Hebrew heritage had they been alienated and excluded from Babylonian society. Not so! The enemy has many strategies to entice Christian youth to surrender their salvation. He knows that youth love to be included and feel a sense of belonging. Pharaoh did the opposite: he mistreated and alienated the Hebrew slaves whom he oppressed brutally. Now, Satan had almost 900 years to learn his lesson. In Babylon, he chose luxuries and recognition. There was one problem, however. Daniel and his friends had ‘purposed’ in their hearts not to defile themselves with the king’s meat or wine. This is quite amazing given that they were between 11-13 years of age. How do children of such tender age develop so powerful convictions? The answer is through the same God that these children faithfully served all their lives in Babylon.

Dan 2:17 *Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:*

Dan 2:18 *That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*

Dan 2:19 *Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.*

The above practice of the Hebrew children is a window into one reason for their success. They formed a church – a community of believers in exile. Today’s youth are often individualistic; but even when they come together, peer pressure is sometimes exerted towards

negative purposes. The Hebrew children learned very early the value of a spiritual community. God is quick to bless those who obey the command to fellowship and edify each other for Christ's sake.

Heb 10:25 *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

They teach us that fellowship and the gathering of believers is the way to hear from the almighty. All of them were in danger and they needed to pray and fast together to hear from the God who speaks to kings in dreams. Despite the fact that God demonstrated clearly to Nebuchadnezzar that these Hebrew children were his beloved children, and revealed the dream to them, the king quickly forgot this lesson.

Dan 3:19 *Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.*

The above is illustrative: our enemy does not intend to let us rest in peace in our salvation while living below here in Babylon. The anger of the king was Satan's anger. Nevertheless, not only did the Hebrew children stand their ground without wavering, but they also answered with humility – never arrogance. They teach us that we are not wrestling against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12) but against spiritual wickedness in high places. In answering with humility, they showed that they respected authorities, as God commanded, without caving in to their ungodly demands. Young children, dare to be a Daniel! Dare

to stand up against the tide of vanity and frivolity of our times! Look to the example of the Hebrew children!

YOUTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Act 17:21: (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

We have become accustomed to the sight of people glued to screens through which they communicate by speech or text. We seem to live our lives increasingly on such platforms rather than the real world. One writer says this about the phenomenon: ‘Over 60% of the world’s more than 7 billion people will, therefore, be online by 2018’², and, furthermore, ‘more people had cell phones (6 billion) than had access to a flushing toilet (4.5 billion)’. Of particular concern is the way in which children have become a part of this borderless, unregulated world – increasingly recruited at ever-younger ages.

The question is: what does God think about this? I am afraid this new artificial world bears many similarities to Athens, Greece, in the day of the apostle Paul - they ‘spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing’ (Acts 17:21). Luke, who wrote this, would no doubt have said the same thing today after observing our compulsive use of smartphones, tablets, laptops and video game consoles, to name gadgets. What are people mostly talking about? How edifying, from a Christian perspective, are all those texts, blogs, videos, chats etc.? The Lord Jesus actually has something to say about all of this, as he did through his apostles:

Eph 5:4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.
James 3:8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

If James were present in the world today, he would have much more reason to be concerned because the tongue has received a competent assistant – 10 fingers that type away furiously on the keyboard whatever the tongue commands. So next time your tongue starts sending invisible messages to your fingers, which begin to feel the itch to text, let Ephesians 5:4 be the ethical framework guiding your cyber interactions. I am afraid that much of the interactions on the internet are vacuous – a global avalanche of nothingness. A culture of self-indulgence. This of itself is a spiritual problem! Paul was concerned about Christians who were idle and talebearers:

1Timothy 5:13 And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.

Today, in the internet age, there are greater opportunities for spreading rumors without physically going from house to house. The entire world lives in the same big house – the internet, a house with no walls. While there are a myriad of reasons as to why social media and the internet in general pose new, serious dangers to vulnerable children, space constraints allow me to outline just a few:

² Keen, A. (2015). *The Internet is not the answer*. Open Road+ Grove/Atlantic.

- Don't be fooled into thinking that no one can trace your messages and speech. What you put out there is stored somewhere forever³. Identity theft is ubiquitous.
- Research⁴ suggests that the part of the brains responsible for sensible decision-making is not developed before the age of 25 in boys in particular. While adults think with the prefrontal cortex (rational part), teens often use the amygdala (emotional part). This means a greater tendency to behave impulsively and irrationally.
- Given children's immaturity, there is the ever-present danger of falling prey to pedophiles and other seasoned criminals who specialize in luring children through social media.

Finally, it is hard to ignore the fact that the current worldwide constant exchange of information bears parallels with the building of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. It was a common language which united the world. Today, English is fast becoming the new language of today's Babel. The internet, World Wide Web, Google, Facebook etc. have all been pioneered by people whose native tongues are English, which cements the dominance of an already globally unassailable language. Never in the history of the world has one language had such dominance. What is the purpose of the internet? Ultimately, the aim is to keep everyone in the entire world in a

³ Harding, L. (2014). *The Snowden files: The inside story of the world's most wanted man*. Guardian Faber Publishing.

⁴<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentTypeID=1&ContentID=3051> University of Rochester Medical Center. Understanding the Teen Brain.

perpetual conversation. Google is actually a misspelling of the mathematical term *googol*, which basically is 1.0×10^{100} denoting an unusually large number (Keen, 2015, p. 53). Their aim was to find and index of every website available – one website that links us to all other websites on the internet.

Let us consider this through the prism of the philosophers of Athens and the Tower of Babel. The fatal mistake of Athens and Babel was to glorify the conversations of humans with humans – intrahuman exchange of information, if you will. Humans are fallen creatures who, if in constant conversation with each other alone, will infect one another with rebellion against God – precisely what happened at Babel. What is needed is a conversation between God and his creation, humans – a conversation such as the one found in the pages of the Bible. A conversation with Jesus leads to repentance, baptism in Jesus name and the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), while an intrahuman conversation leads to envy, bitterness, hate, self-glorification and, finally, Babel. God and Magog are terms often used in the Bible to refer to a world hostile to Christ. If so, one can wonder to what degree the present technological marvel of the internet will aid the nations in rebelling against Jesus at the end of the Millennium when they gather to dethrone the Lord.

Rev 20:8 *And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*

Young people, do not be addicted to the internet/social media, but be addicted to the Lord Jesus Christ! Use the internet only when necessary and for good, wholesome reasons. Whatever you write or say, remember the Lord is weighing your spirit. Be holy, even online!

IRON SHARPENS IRON: CHOOSING FRIENDS

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Modern civilization was literally forged out of iron; once humans learned to make power tools from iron, jet planes, trains, weapons of war, buildings, kitchen utensils and a host of endless materials were created. Remember: all these metallic creations were beaten into their various shapes from iron. Similarly, few forces can shape the human character more powerfully than friends. We all know the power that friends can wield over us; for better or worse. The wise Solomon compared this power to iron in Proverbs 27:17. Iron is most susceptible to molding and shaping when subjected to great heat. This has parallels with the condition of being young. Children and youth are vulnerable – they look for acceptance and belonging from their friends who play a major role in the development of their characters.

Let us consider an inspiring example of the kind of friendship that is approved of God.

1Sa 20:12 And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee;

1Sa 20:13 The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send

thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father.

David and Jonathan were similar in so many ways. Fearless, skilled warriors and, above all, God-fearing. Jonathan risked his own life by defending and upholding the integrity of David before his father, Saul. Jonathan's love for the God of Israel superseded his father's jealousy of David, and any fear of losing his future throne to David. As a true, spiritual friend, Jonathan knew that God had chosen David as king, and he determined to save his life and facilitate David's ascent to the throne. Every young person should pray to find a friend like Jonathan! He was the iron that God chose to sharpen David.

Young people, God seeks to shape your character in order to prepare you for some future work. You alone have the power to choose your friends. Please consider what kind of friends you select! You cannot select your parents, siblings, teachers and in-laws, to name a few. But you are solely responsible for those you call 'friends'. Let us dwell on this theme for a moment. Consider the worldview of the majority of young people these days. Intense secularism (total indifference to matters of faith) and materialism (finding purpose in the material, physical world alone) has produced a generation of youth who aspire to riches, pleasure and self-glory. Denigrating others, filthy language and similar unedifying behavior become the norm with them. Paul warns us:

1Co 15:32 If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

1Co 15:33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

The NIV Bible states: “Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character”. Young person, you need to align yourself with friends who not only believe in eternal life through Jesus Christ, but are guided by this belief to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. If a young Christian uses obscene language on a regular basis, when his/her parents do not, there is clearly a friend/s behind the scene. As I write, there is a knife epidemic in Britain. Youth who wish to join gangs must prove their ‘worth’ by stabbing strangers in public places. This is the power of iron to shape – for better or worse. The adage is so true: “Show me your friends and I will show you who you are”.

Let us consider another example from the pages of the Bible.

2Ch 18:1 Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab.

2Ch 19:2 And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.

Jehoshaphat was the opposite of Ahab. Read 2 Chronicles 17 and you will find that God blessed and established his reign because he loved and sought the ways of God. On the contrary, Ahab did everything possible to undermine the ways of God in Israel due to which he was under a curse. The Bible states, ‘And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to

anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him’ (I Kings 16:33). Paul asked the Corinthians (2Cor 6:15), ‘And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?’ One day, Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to join him in a war against the Syrian city of Ramothgilead. Jehoshaphat answered ‘I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war’ (2Chr 18:3). His good virtues aside, it is in this statement we perceive as the great weakness of Jehoshaphat – he was a man who prayed about everything (he told Ahab to seek the word of God through a prophet), and yet he did not ask God about his friendship with Ahab. What kind of iron was Ahab to Jehoshaphat?

2Ch 18:29 *And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle; but put thou on thy robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself; and they went to the battle.*

What a contrast to Jonathan who was willing to die in defense of David! This was Ahab’s war and he was abusing his friendship with Jehoshaphat. The Syrians surrounded him thinking he was Ahab and were on the verge of killing him, but God intervened: ‘Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him’ (2 Chr 18:31).

God was displeased with Jehoshaphat. While he saved him from death, he sent the seer, Jehu, to rebuke his friendship with Ahab. Understand that God wishes and will bless those who love and obey him, but God does not want to be put in such situations where the

blessing he extends to you becomes entangled with the curse he has put on the likes of Ahab. The Bible is filled with such miscalculations on the part of the people of God. Abraham and Sara brought Hagar into the blessing of God; Moses tried to deliver his brethren with an Egyptian whip - through the power of Egypt, and God had to raise the international-minded apostle Paul because Peter, James and John struggled to overcome their ethnocentric prejudice against the gentiles.

Young person, follow the example of Jonathan! He sharpened David's character and never abandoned him to death. He chose David over his own father. Follow the example of Jehoshaphat in everything except his choice of friend, Ahab! Ahab sharpened Jehoshaphat in the wrong way which almost cost him his life, had god not intervened. Do not put God in such a terrible dilemma! God's blessings are not to be shared on a constant basis with those who hate him. What kind of iron are you? How are you sharpening other irons? I trust in the same way as Jonathan!

YOUTH AND LOVE

Proverbs 22:6 *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

God expects us as adults with experience to advise the young. Part of this training will necessarily involve the issue of relations with other youth of the opposite sex, however uncomfortable the subject may be. If we teach them and advise them in accordance with the word of God, we will hopefully have equipped them with a godly framework within which they can understand what is happening to them, and, more importantly, how to deal with it.

To begin with, notice that the Bible is silent in regards to children falling in love and, as the colloquial goes, ‘going steady’, as is common in our modern world – especially western culture. Childhood and youth ought to be a time of play, curiosity, discovery, growth and preparation; not a time to fall in love and make serious commitments. Mahatma Gandhi, the ‘Father of India’, was married at the age of 13 to Kasturbai (aged 14), and wrote later in his autobiography:

It is my painful duty to have to record here my marriage at the age of thirteen...I am inclined to pity myself ... I can see no moral argument in support of such a preposterously early marriage.⁵

⁵ Gandhi, M. (2008). *My experiments with truth: An autobiography*. Jaico Publishing House. www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/autobiography/chapter-3.php

This is why we strongly disapprove of cultures where child marriage is common. Childhood, above all, should be a time to develop a strong relationship with Jesus.

Mark 10:14 *But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*

If we send the children away from Jesus, do not be surprised if they end up looking for love elsewhere – perhaps another girl or boy their age. Jesus created and blessed childhood, and he clearly states that adults ought to encourage children to come to him. Understand that children, including teenagers, undergo a process where they experience constant change – physical, hormonal and psychological. As such, how can two children, who do not fully understand who they are, be sure that they have found the ‘love of their lives?’

We live in a part of the world where taking the advice of parents in matters of marriage is seen as ‘old fashioned’ by many. Hence, it raised a few eyebrows when the famous South Korean footballer, Son Heung-min, who plays for the English club, Tottenham, recently said the following, ‘My father says I shouldn’t marry until I retire and I agree’ (The Guardian, 2019)⁶.

Blessed is the youth who keeps his or her eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ first – you will not be disappointed in the affairs of love

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2019/mar/08/son-heung-min-tottenham-spurs-interview-marriage-wait>

and marriage! Consider the story of David in the Bible! While David was still a teenager, Saul hatched plans to manipulate the emotions of David by promising to give him his daughter Merab (I Samuel 18: 17) in marriage. Remember that David was a poor boy from a poor family. He himself declared that to become the king's son-in-law was no small matter. Now, the cruelty of Saul was revealed:

1Samuel 18:19 *But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife.*

This must have been very painful to David, not mention a great insult to his dignity. Was he not good enough for the king's daughter? Thankfully, what Saul did not know was that David was already deeply in love – with God. David had spent his childhood walking, talking, singing, crying and dancing before his God. The Devil was not going to destroy David through false love. Consider his words:

Psalm 42:1 *As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.*

Psalm 42:2 *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*

Psalm 119:97 *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

Later, Michal fell in love with David. We do not read that David fell in love with Michal – his heart was always secure in God. 'And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him' (I Samuel 18:20). Saul wanted once again to exploit the love of Michal to destroy David. Beware, young Christian!

Where there is love that is not approved by God, the Devil will do his best to encourage that love. This may have pleased Saul but it did not please God. Michal loved David, not the God of David! Michal was in love with the fact that David was famous in Israel; she was in love with the power and fame of David – not David really. I say this because had Michal truly loved David, then she would have taken the time to understand who David really was as a person; what made him tick! To love David is to love the God of David! This is why many celebrity marriages end in disappointment and tragedy: they worship the fame and wish to bask in it. Every girl in Israel must have fallen in love with David, but how many loved the God of David? Young Christian, honor Jesus by rejecting the love of Michal!

***Deut 7:3** Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.*

***Deut 7:4** For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.*

In conclusion, childhood and youth ought to be spent cultivating a strong relationship with Jesus, as we learn from the life of David. Love may strike early for some, but this is infatuation or ‘puppy love’ which has shallow roots and tends to dissipate with time. We have seen how the Devil endeavored to destroy David through this kind of love, but his heart was firmly rooted in the love of God. Where emotions are very strong, as in love, Satan sees an opportunity. The Bible teaches us to first ‘love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might’ (Deut 6:5) and

then the task of channeling love in the service of Jesus will become easier.

TOO YOUNG TO BE BORN AGAIN?

***Jer 1:5** Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*

***Jer 1:6** Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.*

***Jer 1:7** But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.*

Jeremiah was seventeen years old when the conversation above took place. The excuse of Jeremiah was, ‘I am too young to be called’. Does this not sound quite similar to the excuses many young people make today? In this chapter, I will raise and answer a few objections that youth either may openly or secretly entertain as a reason/s for not giving their lives to Jesus. The first is, ‘As a child/youth, I do not have the talent, experience or gifts required’

To employ the above as an excuse is to deny the power of God to change and use you mightily for his glory. God told Jeremiah, ‘Say not, I am a child’. As a teenager, Jeremiah looked more at the things he could not do rather than what God could do through him. Note that God had already ‘sanctified’ and ‘ordained’ Jeremiah in the womb (Jere 1:5). Sanctify means to make holy and ordain refers to divine commissioning. Had Jeremiah read the books of Moses, which he surely did, he would have known that an eighty-year-old Moses tried to make the same excuse.

Exo 4:10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

Thus, an eighty-year-old man and a seventeen-year-old teenager both believed that their lack of eloquence was stronger than God's power. Remember God's famous response to Moses: 'And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? (Ex 4:11). Young person, you have no excuse! Jesus has commanded the adults to bring the children to him (Matt 19:14). He is your God and knows perfectly well how to use you for his glory's sake. Will you surrender your life to Jesus today?

Another excuse youth may harbor in their hearts is, 'Look, none of my friends or youth my age are serious about God yet. Perhaps later!' Although this may come as a surprise, it is the same as saying, 'I want to be the master of my own life for some more years'. How long will you serve on the altar of the self? Procrastination is the thief of time! Imagine if Simon rejected the call of Jesus and continued fishing. He would remain an unknown Simon the fisherman from the equally unknown town of Bethsaida. Because he forsook all to follow Jesus, God changed his name to Peter and he is world famous today. Consider that one of the greatest Russian Czars was called Peter the Great (1672-1725) and the city named for him, Petersburg, was the capital of Russia until 1917. Imagine if Simon had said within himself, 'I want to be like others my age. Why should I be different?' Give your life to Jesus today, young person! Let him

shape your destiny for eternity. Are you able to plan your life better than Jesus can?

Jer 29:11 *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*

Young person, please do not wait to surrender your life to Jesus! Time does not wait for anyone and there are many who are old now and regret the years they have wasted. The earlier you decide to surrender your life to Jesus, the more fruit you will produce for his glory and you will reap greater eternal rewards. In addition, the earlier you walk with God, the more intimate your relationship with him will be and, hence, your faith in his power. Where did David get his confidence to fight Goliath?

1Sam 17:33 *And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.*

The reason David had to narrate the story of the bear and lion was to correct Saul. Saul assumed that as a youth, David had no experience about life, but David revealed just two amazing examples of the fruit of his relationship with the almighty God. Goliath may have acquaintance with the weapons of warfare since his youth, but David knew the God of war and peace since his childhood. It was game on!

I received the call to give my life to Jesus when I was fifteen years of age in a boarding school in India. Let me tell you that a

fifteen-year-old can grow terribly hungry in his quest to find the living God. My parents' religion, Islam, did not satisfy this hunger nor answer the profound questions that I had about life. I was left to cry and call upon God to reveal himself to me. One blessed day in September 1986, I saw Jesus in an out-of-body experience while asleep in the school dormitory. Speaking telepathically, Jesus told me that he is the God I was looking for. A mighty ocean of his love overcame me and I had no doubt whatsoever that I was looking at the one God of the universe. This was no passing dream or hallucination. The effect of hallucinating does not last for thirty-three years. I went to sleep a Muslim and I awoke a Christian. So what should you as a young person do in order to give your life to Jesus?

The first order of things should be to believe that God is one (Deut 6:4; Mark 12:29). God is not and never has been a Trinity. This is a false doctrine with origins in Greek philosophy. Paul warns the Colossians not to be taken captive by philosophy (Colossian 2:8). Next, believe that the one God, who is Spirit, has now revealed himself in a body through his own son, Jesus Christ (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1, 14; I Tim 3:16). Jesus is the one God Jehovah, who is now Spirit and flesh. In him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). Jesus makes it clear that it is a sin if we deny that he is the 'I am' (John 8:24).

Once you believe these eternal truths, you need to understand that you have inherited a cursed body from our first parents Adam and Eve (Rom 7:24; I Cor 15:22). The waters of baptism in Jesus name

(not in the titles of Father, Son and Holy Ghost) will remove the body of Adam and Jesus will clothe you with his own heavenly body (Acts 2:38; Gal 3:27). After this Jesus expects you to seek the infilling of the Holy Spirit which will be corroborated with the speaking of unknown tongues. Once accomplished, follow Paul's advice:

***1Tim 6:11** But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.*