

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Faith. Family. Fusion.

Young Adults

(Genesis 22)

Study #3

Introduction: Words - and their baggage...

Chuck Sneesby is one of my heroes.

If you don't know him, you'll meet him shortly. He and his wife, Stacie, and their two children, Benjamin and Charis, will be with us at Northwest on March 14. We'll listen as they bring a report of their work in India where they serve the Lord.

Our church has partnered with Chuck for well over twenty years, beginning when he was a single man serving in the Philippines with an organization known as YWAM (Youth with a Mission).

I've always respected Chuck for his love for the Lord, for his risk-taking ways and for his boldness for Christ.

A few years ago, he was in town for a visit. During this visit, there was a small gathering. At this gathering Chuck was explaining that in many parts of India Christianity has a pretty bad reputation.

It is so bad that he will not refer to himself as a Christian. In fact, he told us that when asked, he would sometimes tell people, "*No. I am not a Christian.*"

Yes. I was shocked. Here we were supporting Chuck as He served Christ in India as a representative of our church - and he was denying that he was a Christian.

But Chuck quickly put me at ease when he went on to explain that whenever he said, "*I am not a Christian*" he would follow up with a clear confession that he loves and trusts Jesus and seeks to follow Jesus.

The problem was with the word "Christian." When someone identifies himself in India as a "Christian" it carries with it so much cultural baggage that it does more harm than good. It's better to not use the term. Chuck and Stacie's ministry is richer and deeper and more effective in India without the title "Christian."

Lots of words are like that. Because of different life experiences, different people may think very different thoughts than when they hear the same words - father, tattoo, piercing, motorcycle, church, liberal, conservative, police, etc...

Another of those baggage-laden words is "teenager." The word explicitly refers to someone who is between the ages of thirteen and nineteen. But most of us probably think something more than "a person between the ages of thirteen and nineteen" when we hear the word "teen."

Depending on your own experience, you may hear the word "teen" and think responsible-maturing-young person-nearing adulthood OR you may think video gaming-tattooed and pierced-lazy-antisocial music loving-rebel.

Baggage makes "teenager" a problematic word.

Because of the problem with the word Kathy and I chose not to use it at home. "Teen" was a four letter word during the season that we had 13-19 years old under our roof. We chose to bypass the teen years and began referring to our kids around the time that they turned thirteen as "young adults."

It made sense to us. After all, that is what a thirteen year old guy or gal is.

No longer a child, except for life experience, he is a young man and she is a young woman.

Sure, their bodies are developing as are their minds. But even young teens are just a few short steps away from the responsibilities and privileges of the adult world.

It is imperative that these young adults be shepherded well. The care and guidance given to the “teens” of today determines the society of tomorrow.

So, this morning we are going to think about building faith at home, specifically when there are people living in that home who are between the ages of thirteen and nineteen.

I may slip a few times and refer to people in this age group as teens. But what I mean to say is that thirteen to nineteen year olds are young adults, deserving of our fullest attention and our greatest investment.

My plan this morning is to speak from my own experience (what other experience could I possibly speak from?) and from Scripture about how young adults, parents and other adults in the church might approach each other, God, and life to the greatest benefit.

The first comment I will make is that there is something particularly wonderful about being peculiar. Or, at least that is what the Apostle Peter tells us.

The Glory of Peculiarity (1 Peter 2; Romans 12)

[1 Peter 2:9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (or, as the King James puts it “a PECULIAR PEOPLE”), ***so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light***

To Old Testament Jews

This New Testament verse is an Old Testament quote. In the Old Testament, the Jews were told to stand out like from the surrounding nations like sore thumbs. They were to be different, peculiar.

They were to be holy, morally pure, worshipping only the one, true God, even while the nations all around them worshiped other gods and were grossly immoral.

To the Jews of Peter's Day

When Peter quoted these words to Christians in the first century, he was saying something a little bit different.

The early Christians were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus. The temptation they faced was that of slipping back into old “Jewish” ways. They were being tempted to stop following Christ.

Peter says, “*Don't fall for that temptation! Keep standing firm for Jesus despite the pressures you might face to conform. Be distinctly Christian.*”

Now, we who read the verse today are neither Jews surrounded by idolaters nor Christians facing immediate loss of life for our faith in Jesus.

So how do we apply Peter's words today? And what relevance do his words have to our theme about being or raising young adults?

To Us, Today...

The pressures teens face

Well, today's young adults, like Peter's audience, face enormous pressures to conform. The logic runs, “*Everybody's doing it, so it must be right.*” (or, “*One hundred thousand lemmings can't be wrong.*”)

There are sexual behaviors, purchasing standards, vocabularies, styles of dress and more that are simply an accepted part of teen culture. Some of these accepted styles are fine. Some are not.

And young adults who hear Peter's words are to race to break out of the accepted modes of living if those standards violate what God's Word commands. They are to embrace peculiarity.

Break out of the mold!

There is a certain glory in peculiarity/individuality. Like the great poster from www.despair.com puts it, “Always remember that you are unique. Just like everybody else.”

More than anything else, living for Jesus Christ puts a young adult on the track to true uniqueness and genuine authenticity. Everybody wants to stand out from the crowd. How can you stand out from the crowd? Embrace the glory of a Jesus-first peculiarity! Be weird!

The passionate pursuit of weirdness is one of the areas where parents and teens can link arms and stand strong. Just agree to be a weird family. And parents, you lead the way!

Parents, equip your young adults!

Parents make the decision to lead a distinctly Christian home. Parents, you are equipped and empowered by the Word of God to run your home the way you believe God would have you run it.

Don't shy away from setting standards for your home that are different from other homes. Decide what will best honor the Lord, and make it your aim, as a family, to honor those standards.

Decide what TV programs will and will not get watched at your home. Where will the computer be set up? Who will have access to the Internet? Where can people surf? What filters will be installed? Will you or will you not allow your teen to have the data package on his iPhone? What games will be allowed? When will dating begin?

You decide!

And young adults, be peculiar by embracing maturity.

Young adults - embrace maturity!

I have often remarked to Ben and Melissa that their daughter, my granddaughter, Sadie, is hopelessly immature. But then, she's eighteen months old. Nobody expects her to be mature. She's a toddler.

But if you are thirteen years old or older, it is time to begin embracing maturity. It is exciting to all of us who are cheering you on when we see you taking steps to maturity.

And there are some very mature decisions being made around here by young adults/teens these days.

This Spring Break there will be thousands of High School students in San Antonio hitting the malls, the beaches and the couch. Some from Northwest will be driving to New Orleans to make a difference for Jesus in the lives of people who have been hit hard by life.

This summer, hundreds of thousands of High Schoolers will perfect skills in video gaming. Thousands from across the nation - including many from our church - will gather in Columbus, Ohio to learn how to make a difference in the world for Jesus at **CHALLENGE 2010**.

I don't need to remind you that High Schoolers began the ministry of Bread and Water here at our church. Imagine what other ministries might get launched from the fertile minds and great hearts and vast energy for God that resides within our church's young adults.

It is peculiar to be fifteen years old and growing in maturity. But it is also glorious, God-honoring, and satisfying to be on that track.

Those of us who have passed through the teen years are cheering you on and are praying for you!

When parenting teens, it is particularly pertinent to remember the power of peculiarity. It is also critical to acknowledge the power of community.

The Cruciality of Community (Ephesians 4; 1 Samuel)

One Anothers in the Family of God

A few of the "one anothers"

The Bible lists all kinds of ways we Christians are to **BE** with one another.

We are to love one another, bear with and forgive each other, encourage, rebuke and pray for one another. The list of "one anothers" goes on and on giving us helpful, edifying ways to relate to each other.

In the church, we look for ways to put these "one anothers" to work.

Applying the “one anothers”

Every week, one-anothering takes place in Adult Bible Fellowships (aka Sunday School classes for adults), and youth and children’s Sunday School classes.

Mid-week Care Groups give wonderful opportunities for adults to “one another” each other.

And the Old and New Testaments are filled with examples of people who “one anothers” each other. Sometimes that “one anothering” took the form of mentoring.

One Anothers throughout the Family of God

Outside the family mentoring in the Bible

Among the more famous examples of this would be Moses, who trained and taught and mentored the younger Joshua, equipping Joshua to lead the people of God into the Promised Land.

Then there was Elisha, who was brought along by the older prophet, Elijah.

And the New Testament tells us of a young man named John Mark, a kid with great potential who suffered a terrible failure.¹

Enter his uncle, Barnabas. Barnabas sponsored John Mark, one-anothered him, trained and disciplined him. John Mark eventually became one of the bright lights of early Christianity, authoring the Gospel we know as “Mark.”

And notice.

- Moses was not Joshua’s father.
- Elijah was not a parent of Elisha.
- John Mark was related to Barnabas, but wasn’t his kid.
- Priscilla and Aquila weren’t Apollos’ family.
- Paul wasn’t Timothy’s dad.

But the development of the next generation of the church’s leaders highlights the truth of what our current Secretary of State said quite a few years ago. *“It takes a village to raise a child.”*

Outside the family mentoring today

I want to make the case today that parents of teens would do well to release their kids to the influence of other good adults. Let other adults you trust “one another” your young adult.

Parents, you are the first and most influential and the primary disciplers of your children. That is the way it ought to be. But you need not be the only ones. In fact, as they mature into their young adult years, it is best if we are NOT their only influencers.

You will do your teen a world of good if you will champion the idea that other adults can and should “one another” them.

Consider putting your teen in a context where he or she is mentored by another adult you respect in an area where you see your teen is lacking.

Consider putting your teen in contact with an adult who could mentor him or her in a life skill or on career path where your teen is already showing interest.

The influence of other adults was invaluable for our two sons and for our daughter. Some of those influencers were in this church and some were outside. Some were older than we were; others were younger adults.

Other adults made investments in our children that we were not equipped to make.

I want to encourage you to look around you today. You will see wise, mature adults who can partner with you in helping your teen march toward maturity. Approach them. Ask for their assistance. It could be one of the best moves you make as a parent.

Releasing your teens to the influence of others is a wise way to expose your teen to skill sets you don’t have, wholesome perspectives they need to be exposed to, and wisdom you don’t possess.

¹ See Acts 13-14. Then see how valuable he became as a Christian minister in 2 Timothy 4.

Another gift to give your teens, besides community and peculiarity, is the gift of transcendence.

To see the giving of this gift in living color, we'll return to the Old Testament and see another incident in the life of Abraham.

The Gift of Transcendence (Genesis 22)

Abraham and Isaac

Abraham's obedience to God

[Genesis 22:1] Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [2] He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." [3] So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

You may know the rest of the story.

Abraham and Isaac walked three days to Mount Moriah. When they arrived they left the servants behind and trudged up the mountain together.

Abraham carried the knife for the sacrifice while a trusting Isaac carried the wood. When Isaac asked his dad, ***"Where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?"***, Abraham faithfully replied, ***"God will provide."***

They reached the place for the sacrifice. Abraham arranged the wood on the altar he had built, tied up his son with rope and laid Isaac out on top of the wood.

It was only when he raised the knife to slay his son that God stopped him - ***"Abraham! Abraham!"*** The Lord provided a ram for the sacrifice. Isaac was spared, but only after Abraham proved just how far he would go to obey God.

Some of you may be tempted to go to a place I'm not intending when it comes to applying Genesis 22 to dealing with your teenager.

It's not what you think.

Isaac's "take-away"

What I want us to consider is the impact on the teen-aged Isaac of what happened on Mount Moriah.

There is no question that he would have realized in that event,

"Wow - there is something/Someone (God!) that means more to my dad than I do. I know my parents waited twenty five years for my birth. They've told me hundreds of times how much they wanted me, how much they love me. But today, I know that I play second fiddle to Almighty God."

So, in addition to proving to God how far he would go to faithfully obey, Abraham gave to his son the gift of transcendence.

You and Your Teen

The damage done by child- or teen-olatry

This is one of the most important gifts a mother or a father can give to their child of any age.

In fact, parents do damage when they commit the sin of child- or teen-olatry. That is the sin of making a child the center of a home. It is the sin of making a child the most important thing in life.

Clearly, when that happens, there is damage to the parent's own spiritual life. But damage is also done to the child. No child is able to bear the weight of being the object of his or her parent's worship.

Healthy family life: putting God first

Like Abraham, you can do your young adult a great service by communicating in clear terms that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Make Jesus the undisputed Lord and the unmistakable center of your home. Make it clear that if they are not going to live for Jesus, you are still going to live for Jesus.²

When you can clearly let your kid know that your first allegiance is to the Lord, you take the first step toward a truly healthy home, a home where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns.

So, give to your teenager the gift of transcendence. And lest I be misunderstood, love your young adult desperately!

The Supremacy of Love (1 John)

The Most Important Thing in Life - Love

There need never be any doubt as to what is the most important thing in life. Jesus made it clear.

[John 13:34] “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. [35] “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

For the Christian, nothing is more central to living well than to living lovingly. Love binds us together with others, it reflects Jesus' way, it is the unmistakable fruit of the Spirit, and, as Peter assures us, *[1 Peter 4:8]...love covers a multitude of sins.*³

And that which is most important in life is also most important in parenting.

² Once, when Jesus was addressing large crowds, He turned and said to them, *[Luke 14:26] “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*

³ *[Proverbs 10:12] Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.*

The Most Important Thing in Parenting - Love

This is not to contradict what I just said about loving God first. It is to say that there must be no question in your children's mind - toddler, child, young adult, or out on their own - that you love them.

- You love them when they obey you and you love them when they disobey you.
- You love them when they are lovely and when they are unlovely.
- You love them when they are soft and cuddly and you love them when they are prickly.
- You love them when you are enjoying a day at the park and you love them WHEN you are disciplining them.

Parents, you may fight with your teen. But you must not ever stop fighting for your teen's heart. Keep talking. Keep the lines of communication open.

And it goes both ways. No matter how difficult it gets, how arrogant they may seem, how clueless they appear, never give up on your parents, teens!

Parents, never give up on your teens.

Even if it comes to the point of taking extreme action, even if you have to erect boundaries, always pray for them. Take them to Jesus. If there is estrangement, let them know the path they can travel to return.

Your teen must know that you love him/her desperately.

So far this morning we've seen the glory of peculiarity, the cruciality of community, the beautiful gift of transcendence, and the supremacy of the gift of love.

One final thought before we conclude. Parents who are nurturing and shepherding teens must embrace the stubborn reality of mystery when it comes to their children.

Not that there aren't some things in life that are certain.

The Stubbornness of Mystery ()

Things that are Certain

Math and science

Math is certain. Two plus two is four.

Nine times nine is 81. The sum of the numbers that make up any multiple of nine will always equal nine. When you mix up two digits in any number, the sum of the digits of the difference between the number and the mixed up number always equals nine.

The speed of light is always (approximately) 186,000 miles per second. The second law of thermodynamics is always true, that things in a closed system tend toward equilibrium.

And there are other certain things.

God's faithfulness

***[Lamentations 3:22] The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail.
[23] They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.***

God is faithful to keep His Word. You can take that to the bank - a place that is famously less reliable than God.

My ability to walk and please God

And it is certain that no one and nothing can keep me from faithfulness to God. I can choose faithfulness.

You have sovereignty over your own obedience to God. No one can make you sin, nor can anyone derail you from faithfulness to God.

However, as I've said more times than you've probably wanted to hear, I have very little control over much of what is most important to me in life. There are many things in life that are not at all certain.

Things that are NOT Certain

Various things

The weather is not certain.

Last Sunday after church, Kathy and I had a Valentine's Day picnic at Government Canyon State Natural Area. You remember the weather and what a beautiful day it was. She brought along some really tasty food. We took a great hike and saw some nice scenery.

Right about the time we got back to the parking lot to drive home, we noticed that black clouds were building in the distance. We got in our car to head back home - and within five minutes everything changed.

In the twenty minutes it took to get home, the temperature dropped 23 degrees, from a balmy 71 to a chilly 48, with winds whipping and a cold rain. Of course, I took all the credit for the timing of our departure, to which Kathy responded with a Sarah-like, "M'Lord" and I with an Abrahamic, "You are a beautiful woman."

The weather is uncertain. Lots of other things are unpredictable and uncertain. Your car's reliability is not certain and neither is the fruitfulness of my home garden.

You could add lots of things to a list of things which are not certain. Included in that list would be the spiritual life or the behavior of other people, including our children.

The spiritual life of our teens

No parent is perfect. All parents, even those who try their best, make mistakes. And parental mistakes should be owned and confessed to God. Apologies should be made to children by fathers and mothers for their mistakes.

But no parent is all-powerful. There is no question that parents play a vital role in their teen's moral and spiritual development and general maturity - but in the end, all a parent can do is sow seeds.

Teens make decisions about how they will live, what their priorities will be, where they will invest their energies, not parents.

No parent can script an outcome for his or her child. Nor would any parent really want to! And no teenager wants to think that he/she is simply the outcome of a parent's good parenting skills.

Your spiritual vitality is a function of choices you make to follow Jesus. And the same is true for your teen.

So, parents, embrace the truth of what Paul says in Philippians, chapter 2.

[Philip. 2:13]...it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

You are not the Holy Spirit. You cannot guarantee your child's spiritual outcome. God is involved and your teen's free will is involved.

You can do everything you can think of and parent with great skill and have your child walk away from Jesus. Or you could try to raise your child to be a committed Satanist and they might end up being godly.

We seek to be faithful parents and leave the results to God.

And I will say this to the young adults here today. When I was about seventeen years old, a man I greatly respected told me, "*Dave, what you want to be in five years, start being today.*"

Young men and women, do you want to be wise? Start learning and meditating on Proverbs now.

Young adults, do you want to be a man of sterling character, a woman of virtue? Start today on that quest.

Do you want to be a world changer for Jesus? There is no better time to start grabbing the world by the tail and making a difference for Him than today.