

Sermon for Sunday, May 9, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
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"A HOUSE OR A HOME AND A HUMAN BEING"

II Timothy 1:1-7, 3:14-17

Text: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure dwells in you."

II Timothy 1:5

Today is Mother's Day. It is not a Christian or religious occasion and therefore is not a proper subject for a sermon. Almost any female is a candidate for motherhood and while her sex makes her eligible biologically, it does not necessarily equip her psychologically, emotionally or maternally to be a mother in the deepest sense of the word. As a matter of fact, sometimes in counseling when we encounter the serious emotional damage wrought on some human personality by an inept or inadequate mother, we wonder if there ought not be some regulations governing who can and who cannot be a mother! However, it is appropriate on an occasion such as this to talk about the Christian home because the Bible has a great deal to say about that.

It is that time of year when young couples start coming in to talk about getting married. In spring the blood begins to rise along with the sap. As the poet put it, "In spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." Most of these young couples love each other and they think their love will overcome all of their difficulties and differences. Unfortunately, that isn't true because at least one out of four marriages is ending in divorce. Love is great and there is no real substitute for it, but married life is twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks in the year and it can get awfully regular. Love, without some other qualities, is not likely to endure in that atmosphere.

So, one of the things we try to do is to help young couples understand who they are and what they are like as well as what their mate is going to be like. We try to pinpoint some of the problem areas that they are going to have and at least warn them in advance of what sorts of difficulties they will likely encounter in married life. To do this, we give them two tests, one called a Sex Knowledge Inventory and the other called a Marriage Prediction Schedule.

You see, the sort of environment out of which a person comes has a great deal to do with who and what a person is. One thing our environment does for us is to give us what we call a "life stance." Each of you has such a life stance this morning. It is out of this life stance that you operate--out of which you make decisions, value judgments, and which cause you to act and react in the particular way that you do. For example, what your family thought of other people and how they treated others has to a large extent determined how you feel about others. Or again, the role that money plays in your life grows out of your life stance that was shaped and formed when you were a child in your family and were learning the value your parents put on money. Again, what you think about education and the value of it comes from your life stance.

So, when couples want to get married, we give them these two tests. We want to know what their life stance is and how one differs from another. We want to know what the home environment of each was like that causes them to carry certain unconscious expectations about their new home into marriage. For example, if a girl comes from a home where finances have been handled jointly by the parents and where many financial decisions have been made at family councils, and she marries a boy who comes from a home where the father has made all the money decisions and doled out an allowance for the wife to get by on, then they are carrying into marriage two

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different expectations about money that will conflict. Or suppose again that a girl comes from a father-dominant home and the boy from a mother-dominant home, they are carrying unconscious expectations of each other into marriage that neither is really qualified to fill and it will lead to trouble. Or suppose again that a girl comes from a home where the mother is high-strung, throws temper tantrums, cries to get her way, and makes the home revolve around her emotional whims. This environment has unconscious influence on the girl and she will go into marriage with certain expectations about how to get her way that may prove disastrous.

In this same test we try to get a picture of the personality pattern of the mother and father as well as the prospective bride and groom. We want to know what kind of a home each has come from, what sort of personality characteristics each see in self and in the mate-to-be. Then we can put these two pictures side by side and have a reasonable knowledge of what sorts of conflicts the couple will have in marriage.

In the test we give on sex we are after two pieces of information. We want to know, of course, what sex information each has--that is, how adequate is their knowledge about sex. But the second thing we are after--and the more important of the two--is what are their emotional attitudes towards sex. And here the home has a great deal to do with shaping and determining attitudes about sex. Is it something nasty and dirty? Is it something that a woman is not expected to enjoy but must please her husband? Does the man consider it something that is his right and privilege? Is it something bad and evil? These are things we need to know because a person's attitudes are all-important in determining what sort of sex relationship this marriage will have. And while sex may not be everything in marriage, at least in the early years it is way ahead of whatever comes second! For example, if a man has bad attitudes about sex, he may abuse his wife as a thing rather than treating her as a person.

Now, the reason that I have gone to some length to talk about this is because I want to make the point that what we are looking for is what impact a home has had in shaping and molding the personality characteristics of a person. Environment is very important. It creates a life stance and it creates certain unconscious expectations and emotional attitudes in people. The question I want to ask those who are parents or who expect to be parents is this: what sort of environment are you creating or do you expect to create for your children? What sort of influences are you creating and are they good or bad. Like it or not, the home you have created--or will create--shapes and molds the personality pattern of your children. Will who and what you are produce the kind of children that you want to have?

This brings me back to our text for this morning. St. Paul is writing a young man named Timothy who is a pastor. Apparently things are not going well for this young pastor. Paul is concerned about him. He writes that he is constantly in prayer about Timothy. And Timothy must have written Paul about his problems and his letter must have been stained with his tears because Paul writes, "As I remember your tears, I long night and day to see you..." So, here is a young man with great responsibility, under great pressure. Yet, he has something going for him. He has something working for him when he is under the gun that is going to pay dividends. And what does he have? He has a life stance to fall back on, to operate from that will help him. St. Paul writes to him, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure dwells in you." He had a personality pattern that was shaped by an environment of faith.

Do you know what one of my greatest concerns today is? It is the fact that

our homes are not creating adequate religious life stances. When a family is not contributing to the church, when mother and daddy are not regular or even active in church school, when they are careless about church attendance, when they let other things take precedence over Christian responsibility, such actions are creating unconscious attitudes in the children. Life stances are being created which give the children no adequate religious commitments and so when life gets under the gun they will have no resources to fall back on. People today are wondering what is the matter with the youth--why are they taking drugs, why are they so rebellious, why are they revolting on campus, why are they taking radical political positions? It is so often because their life stances have a vacuum in them. It is because in this complex world that makes incredible demands on them they do not have the internal resources to fall back on and they are desperately searching for something to give meaning and inner power to their life stances. They are, in my opinion, searching for the reality of God. So, on Mother's Day, when we are thinking about mother and about home and about all of those intimate relationships that mean the most to us, we need to ask ourselves, "what sort of home am I providing--or will I provide--for my children. What sort of life stance am I giving them. What internal resources am I providing them that they can fall back on in time of stress, in time of need, when life is under the gun?"

Let me conclude with a word to those who feel that the life stance they have is not the best, nor what they want, nor what they need. You can change your life stance--or, to put it more properly, your life stance can be altered. You don't have to be stuck with who and what you are. For a long time I was not sure of this. After seminary, I got a Master's degree in counseling and over the years of my ministry I have done a great deal of counseling. But I became disillusioned with it because people were rarely healed. They were helped, yes. Broken marriages could be stuck back together and crippled personalities could be given a crutch, but I saw little real lasting healing of emotional problems. I no longer have any illusions that counseling is the great cure-all for human needs. It can help--it can patch us up and perhaps get us going again, but what we really need is a miracle, what we really need is a changed, transformed life stance, a redeemed personality pattern.

I no longer see my task as counselor as that of trying to heal people of their personality malformations and emotional defects. We still use counseling to help people see the nature of their problems and the nature of their need, but we try to point them to Jesus who is the true healer. I can't change a personality and neither can anyone else--but Jesus can. And I have seen marriages truly healed, broken human relationships truly made well, crippled human personalities truly made whole--and Jesus is the only one who can really do that.

And how does this happen? How does one get his life stance changed and transformed? By turning the ego, the seat of the human will over to Jesus. Jesus is not some dead figure of the distant past, but through his Holy Spirit he is present in the world today, working in our world today. Jesus wants to work in every human heart and every human life and he is waiting this morning for each of us to invite him in to take control of our lives. As St. Paul wrote to young Timothy, "Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control." That spirit of power and of love and of self-control--that changed life stance is for you and for me today.

Calvin Stanley, in one of his books, tells the story of a young man he knew. He was broad-shouldered, strong, graceful and in college became a well-known athlete.

Yet, inspite of his physical exploits on the athletic fields, he was known for his kindness, gentleness and refinement in relationship to women. Dr. Stanley asked him one day how he could be so rough and tough in athletics and yet so gentle at other times, especially towards the fairer sex. This is what he told Dr. Stanley: "I never like to refer to this, but my father told me that when I was being born, mother's case was most serious. The doctor told him he could not save us both and that father would have to decide quickly which it would be. Father said he stood there absolutely speechless, unprepared for such a decision and not knowing what to say. Mother, who had heard what was being said, told the doctor immediately, 'I don't mind dying--you must let my child live.' So, my mother gave her life for me."

God said one day, "I don't mind dying--let my children live." Your life stance can be transformed and your personality healed if you will let the Jesus who died for you now live his life through you.