

Sermon for Sunday, October 22, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"TWIG-BENDING FOR THE COMING WORLD"

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

Was it Shakespeare who said, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree"? The Bible puts it this way, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." So, this morning I want to talk about twig-bending for the coming world. There is a reason for this. As we look out on our world today, we see a lot of developing attitudes that cause us serious concern. For example, take the area of sexual permissiveness. The other day a friend told me of a nephew who called up to say he was in the area with his girl friend. In the course of the conversation it developed they were staying at a local motel together. "If you come to my house," she said, "you'll stay in separate rooms." "I know," he replied, "that's why we are here instead." Well, this is not an unusual practice among young people today. But the damage being done to human lives is incredible. According to statistics, half of the marriages today will end in divorce. That is a dreadful wreckage. The price being paid in broken lives and broken homes and one-parent children is terribly high.

Part of the problem has been the development of the concept of human freedom. The idea of human freedom as it developed out of the Protestant Reformation was the concept of freedom under God where freedom was to be used responsibly under God and towards one's fellow man. But, as the idea of God has been more and more ruled out in our modern society; and as more and more man has abandoned any sense of a Superior Being to whom he has responsibility, the whole concept of human freedom has changed. Now freedom means the license to do as one pleases, to satisfy every whim and fancy. We have seen this idea of freedom find expression in movies that are more and more pornographic, in literature that is steadily degenerating, and in other media where sin as freedom has begun to distort our thinking.

As a consequence, some new expressions have come into our language such as "do your own thing", "hang loose", "let it all hang out". People today are saying, "if it feels good, do it." And what has happened is this: many young people--and many of the older generations as well--have moved from responsible freedom to individual license. We are making ourselves and the gratification of our own wants and wishes and whims the primary goal of life.

But if man is born to enjoy life, why does he die? And since our bodies are doomed to death, surely there must be some higher purpose to life than personal gratification. Surely there must be some earnest duty, some experience of moral growth so that one finishes life's journey a better human being than when he started it.

History has already conclusively demonstrated that when the goal of a society or a culture or a nation becomes self-gratification, that society or culture or nation self-destructs. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in speaking to this subject, says that civilization has reached a major turn in history equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

But the question is this: how do we begin to change the modern definitions of human life and human society? How do we recapture for our world the idea of a Supreme Being who is above man and to whom man is responsible in the exercise of his freedom? Well, the answer is simple enough. We recapture it in two ways.

First, we recapture it by a recommitment of ourselves to God as he is revealed in the Bible, and to Jesus whom God sent into the world. The fact is, there will be no significant changes in the moral structure of our world until there is a spiritual renewal in our lives. Second, we must begin to live out in our homes, in our private lives, those commitments. What happens in your home and mine will determine the future course of our world. There, in the home, the lives of our children and youth are being shaped and moulded. And the job we do in bending the twig will determine the shape of the tree; the training we do today will determine the character of the next generation when it is old.

You know, we have a lot of weddings here at Central. We do our best to help these young people prepare for marriage. For one thing, we have developed a series of video programs on Preparation for Marriage. And incidentally, for those of you who are already married, I suspect they would be helpful and useful to you. If you would like to see them, call David Klotz, our Director of Media, and he will set up a schedule for you to see them.

But another thing I do personally is to give a test to the young people getting married. It is designed to give us a sort of personality projection pattern not only of the young person, but of his family as well. You see, the environment out of which a person comes has a great deal to do with who and what a person is. For one thing our environment gives us what is called a "life stance". Each of you this morning has a life stance out of which you operate. From that stance you make decisions, exercise value judgments, and act and react in the way you do. For example, what your family thought of other people, 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 and learned the value that your parents place on things.

So, when couples get married, I give this test so we can know what the life stance of each is, how they differ from one another. Because of their differences, they will be carrying certain unconscious expectations about their new home into their marriage. If those expectations are different, conflict results. For example, if a boy has certain expectations of the role of the wife, and his new wife has a different background or expectation of herself in that role, conflict will result. Or again, suppose a girl has learned that the wife gets her way in the home by nagging or crying and she carries this expectation into her marriage, she will manipulate the home to revolve around her emotional whims. Her expectations of how to get her way can be disastrous.

Now, the reason I have explained this is because I want to make the point that what we are looking for in these tests is the sort of shaping and moulding that has gone on in a home that will influence the life of a young person. Environment is extremely important. It creates a life stance and it creates certain emotional attitudes about life, about the world, about others, about God. And the question I want to ask in the light of this is, what sort of environment are we creating for our families and are they good or bad? Like it or not, the home you have created and the one I have created, shapes and molds the personality pattern of our children. So, will who and what you are in the home produce the kind of children you want? Is the way you are bending the twig going to produce the sort of tree you hope for?

This brings me back to our text for this morning. St. Paul is writing to a young man named Timothy who is a pastor. Apparently things are not going well for Timothy and Paul is concerned. Timothy must have written Paul about his problems and his letter must have been stained with his tears because Paul writes back, "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 help him. And what does he have? He has a life stance to fall back on. St. Paul writes, "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 life stances based on God. When a family is not giving of its resources to support the church, when their church attendance is careless and spasmodic, when other things take precedence over Christian duty, such actions are created which give the children no adequate religious commitments and when the pressures of life come, they have no resources to fall back on.

People today wonder what is wrong with so many of our youth--why they take drugs, smoke pot and rebel against authority. They wonder why they seem so radical and get involved in various cults and eastern religions. I believe in reality they are searching desperately for something that will give meaning to their lives, that will give inner power, that will give some dignity and purpose to life.

So, how are you bending the twigs at your house? You see, you are determining the quality of the next generation of trees. What sort of life stance are we giving our children, what internal resources, what spiritual grounding, are we providing?

Let me conclude with a word to those who may feel their life stance does not give them the resources for living that they need. Can your life stance be changed or altered? For a long time I was not sure of the answer to that question. While I had a degree in counseling, over the years I became somewhat disillusioned with it because people didn't get healed the way I hoped they would. Yes, people were helped. Broken marriages could be stuck back together and crippled personalities could be made functional again, but I did not see the sort of healing I longed for. Now, I thank God for psychiatry and psychology and counseling. When people are emotionally ill, we desperately need these disciplines. But what most of us need is a miracle, a changed and transformed life stance, a redeemed personality pattern.

Today, I see my own role as being that of pointing people to Jesus who is the true healer. And while pastoral counseling helps people see the nature of their problems and needs, ultimately only Jesus can give us power for healing. Over the years, as people come into a personal relationship with Jesus, I see marriages truly healed, broken human relationships truly made well, and crippled human personalities truly made whole. And while being a Christian does not protect you from emotional problems, I doubt if there is real healing apart from him.

Well, how does one get his life stance changed? St. Paul tells us plainly in our Scripture for today when he writes to Timothy, "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 means simply to open your heart to Jesus, turn the seat of your will, your ego, over to Him, and let his power work its miracle in your life. He can give you that power, love and self-control that will change your life.

Yes, how are you bending your twigs? Dr. 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, in spite 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. The young man replied, "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 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."

What are you and I giving for our children? How are we bending our twigs? One day God himself said on the cross, "I don't mind dying--let my children live." My life stance and yours can be transformed and our personalities healed when Jesus is in our hearts. Then, it may be, that faith will dwell in our children also.

So, how are you bending the twig at your house? You see, you are determining the quality of the next generation of Israel. What sort of life stance are you giving our children, what spiritual resources, what spiritual grounding, are we providing?

Let us conclude with a word to those who may feel their life stance does not give them the resources for living that they need. Can your life stance be changed or altered? For a long time I was not sure of the answer to that question. While I had a career in counseling, over the years I became somewhat disillusioned with it because people didn't get healed and why I hoped they would. For people were helped. Looking back, I realize that I did not see the sort of healer I looked for. Now, I think that the psychology and psychotherapy and counseling. When people are emotionally ill, we desperately need these disciplines. But what sort of ground is a minister, a changed and transformed life stance, a renewed personal life stance.

Today, I see the role as being that of pointing people to Jesus and to the true healer. And while pastoral counseling helps people see the nature of their problems and needs, ultimately only Jesus can give us power for healing. Over the years, as people have had a personal relationship with Jesus, I see people truly healed, broken hearts truly made well, and crippled bodies personalized truly made whole. And while being a Christian does not prevent you from emotional problems, I think it does lead to a real healing apart from him.

Well, how does one get the life stance changed? Let Paul tell us plainly in our scriptures for today when he writes to Timothy, "I beseech you to rebuke the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands. For God will not give us a spirit of cowardice but a spirit of power and love and self-discipline." That means simply to open your heart to Jesus, turn towards him, and give your eye over to him, and let his power work his miracle in your life. He can give you that power, love and self-control that will change your life.

Yes, how are you bending your twig? Dr. Stefan Stanley, in one of his books, tells the story of a young man he knew. He was a first-born child, strong, athletic and in college became a well-known athlete. Yet, in spite of his athletic exploits in the athletic field, he was known for his kindness, gentleness and willingness in relationship to women. Dr. Stanley asked him one day how he could be so tough,