

## **NOVEMBER 23, 2022, MIDWEEK DEVOTIONAL**

### **CENTERING PRAYER**

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

### **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:**

Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:31-33)

### **BLESSED THOUGHTS: "PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE"**

The worst mistake adults can make is to ignore or belittle the things our youth worry about. Proverbs 22:6 gives us this wise advice: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." Now, I like talking to my grandkids, especially about what they are learning in school, and what their friends like doing and feeling. I often share with them how different a lot of their experiences were in my day, when their Nana and I were their age. I have two twelve-year-old grandchildren, and they know a lot about computers, but neither has ever driven their younger cousins to school in a farm truck, like my wife did at age twelve!

A reality for young people today is that—at any time—one third of them are dealing with an anxiety disorder, which, if left untreated, may have scary consequences up to and including suicide. Their number one fear is that other kids might not think they're "cool." Not fitting in to a safe group is the best definition of hell that I know. Also, will they do well in school? Parental pressure to learn is not a bad thing, until it is! I remember to my horror that the kids most at risk of teen suicide were the "A Students," whose lives were often an unceasing struggle to come out on top, until it all got too much.

There were two "good things" that came out of the Covid pandemic lock down. With fewer cars on the road, air quality in our cities got better. And with kids learning at home on the Internet, for the first time in decades school shootings went down. When I was ten to twelve, we had fire drills once or twice a year. Now a lot of schools have active shooter drills. Third-rate politicians are afraid to ban guns, so they ban books instead. No wonder our young people are so anxious!

School research comes up with several findings. A lot of our kids are more like orchids than dandelions. "They have grown up too delicate to cope with a messy world. As one psychologist described them: children's environments are fast becoming places where they experience sky high expectations, unstable families, and digital neglect from parents who spend too much time on Facebook. Either way, there is danger ahead as a large number of our kids aren't going to be able to cope with what comes next."

Here it is: our kids spend way too much time online, get way too little sleep and exercise (obesity is rampant), and 12% fear for their safety at school. In daily life an awful lot causes our kids a ton of anxiety. No surprise then that 17% of our kids rate their mental health as poor,

12% had serious thoughts of suicide and 7% report low self-esteem. Almost a third report high levels of stress and psychological distress. Both conditions have increased over the past few years.

Time for an effective action plan! I personally don't think we should just focus on "fixing our broken kids!" How about fixing our broken world! Too much screen time? Who buys every kid their own phone? Too little sleep? No exercise? It's sad when a gimpy grandpa like me is the only one to take time to shoot baskets out back with my twelve-year-old. Parents need to turn off their screens and go biking, hiking, and swimming, and then turn in at a reasonable hour. Leaders (parents) lead by example. What we do is so much louder than what we say!

Now this comes from my career in child protective services. My clients suffered the worst forms of abuse and neglect. Being molested at age seven or thirteen is a recipe for trauma. But I didn't fertilize their victim card! I poured all my energy into their resilience! And I knew whereof I spoke. I also suffered from Child Abuse in the 1950's, but I overcame it, and I put a lot of energy into helping my children see themselves as Overcomers rather than as the Overrun Victims.

Our Effective Action Plan comes down to this: "Create fertile and safe, nurturing environments in which children can grow and children may have the resources they need to shake their dependency on therapeutic and pharmacological solutions to life's smaller challenges." [I owe this to Michael Ungar, Ph.D., a family therapist, and researcher at Dalhousie University, and the author of *Change Your World: The Science of Resilience and the True Path to Success.*]

Remember Proverbs 22: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." It is probably harder to "train up" our kids today than it ever was before. I taught adult education parenting classes for several years in churches, prisons, women's shelters, and community centers. I heard those anxious parents loud and clear. Every church needs to offer practical help to the parents in our neighborhoods to help them with their "training up." Why is this so important? The one command God gives more often than any other in the Bible is "fear not." 365 times this order appears (once for every day in the year). A "fixed up world" is called "the Kingdom of God." No child or young person will ever know the bliss of that kingdom if this broken world robs them of their peace. What are you still reading this for? Let's get busy freeing our young people from all that crippling fear!

#### **PRAYER**

We were all born into an often-hurtful world, but we are not born to fear.

At sunrise, no one knows if they'll still be alive at midnight, but we are not here to live in fear. How much it hurts to lose friends or jobs or a safety we took for granted, but we are not created to fear all those hurts.

One day we will breathe our last gasp of air, but death is not to be feared, any more than being born was.

We have a God, through whom we exist, and we always will. Trust in God and fear not. Amen

*—written after a good talk with my Grandson about what he and his friends are anxious about. Thank you, Theo!*

