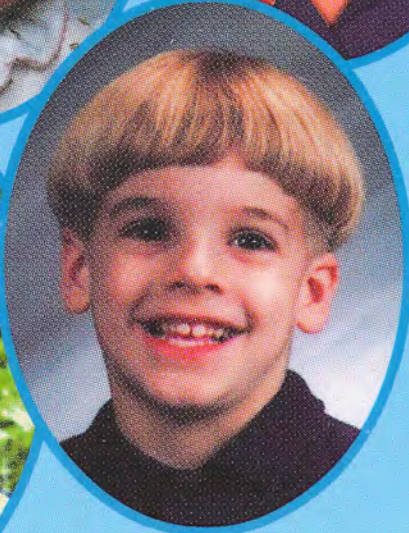
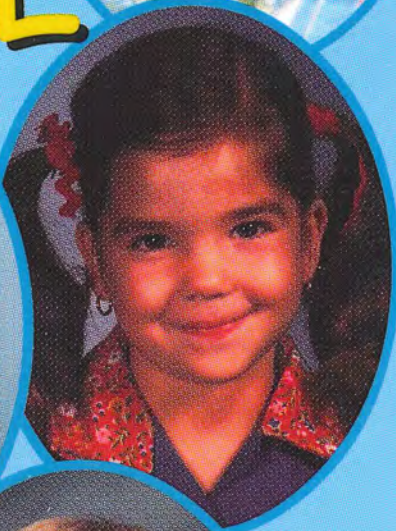


"LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME"



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SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

FEBRUARY 1 – BLESSED ARE THE CHILDREN

FEBRUARY 8 – MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE

FEBRUARY 15 – REMEMBER THY CREATOR

FEBRUARY 22 – WHY DO WE WORSHIP GOD?

"BLESSED ARE THE CHILDREN"
Psalm 127:1-5

One of the very first questions submitted in that revival I mentioned awhile ago was from an elementary school child. It reveals the maturity of some of our children in thoughts about faith. It made me wonder if all this baby talk to them, fables about animals and birds talking, and the puppet shows under the guise of church education programs, aren't offensive to some of these youngsters. The question was simply, "Everything had to have a beginning. When did God begin?" This child wants to hear, not about what will make him happy, but about God. She doesn't question the existence of God, but wants to know more about Him.

Children, it is true that all material, all earthly things --things related to the earth or the physical world and composed of matter --had to have a beginning. But the very first verse of your Bible says, "In the beginning God..." see God was already there in the beginning. Well, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." So, before the beginning of anything physical, before the first atom of matter, God already was. God is Spirit. And the Bible speaks of Him as the "eternal God" (Deuteronomy 33:27) or eternal Spirit, which means that He had no beginning. He always has been and is the source from which everything else springs, both spiritual and material. That's almost too much for the most mature of our little minds, because of the limitations put on us by our physical nature. The Bible speaks again of God's "eternal nature" in Romans 1:20, which means that by His very nature He always was and always will be. From your studies in science, you have learned that the material world around us is running down and will someday end. But since God is the "eternal God," just as He had no beginning, He will have no end; He will not cease to be at the end of the world. He always will be.

In that first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," there is another very inspiring thought. Perhaps you've gone camping with your dads, or maybe you've been to church camp. Out there in the woods at night, far away from the lights and the noise of the city, you look up at the sky and peer into the thousands of billions of miles of space with all those stars in their marvelous formations. And you wonder how much more is out there that you can't see! You lie there and wonder how did God make all this? Well, the Bible tells us that, too. It doesn't go into great detail, but it does say this: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." What a great passage that is! Imagine if you can! Nothing existed, not even an atom of all that you see while lying there in your sleeping bag. None of it. Then suddenly! God gave the word and it was there! He commanded, and this beautiful earth and all the other planets and stars and moons and suns and galaxies stood fast! You've been told about a "big bang," well, you can imagine it must have been a big bang, alright. The next time someone brings up this big bang idea again, you just ask him if he knows Who or what caused that big bang. You can tell him you do; it's in Psalm 33:6-9.

That's a statement of the great --the unlimited power of God! "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host...He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast." Is that too wondrous for your mind to picture? It is for mine. In Genesis 17:1 God said to Abraham, "I am God Almighty" --meaning not only that He is all-powerful, but He has integrity. Do you know what integrity is? It's character. It's being the real thing. God is all powerful, alright, He is also honest and absolutely trustworthy. He's real or genuine. In Abraham's case that

meant a lot, because God was making a mighty big promise to him when He said that. Abraham just had to believe in Him. And God assures him, he can. "I have the power and the integrity to keep my promises," He is saying. And that's what it means to us, too, my young friends. You can count on what God says in His word! God can and He always does keep His promises. According to Psalm 115:5, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases."

Oh! You have heard the word "awesome," haven't you? Do you know what it really means? Probably not, because it doesn't mean the way people use it nowadays. It means something which inspires awe, which the dictionary defines as "a mixed feeling of reverence, fear and wonder, caused by something majestic, sublime, sacred, etc." Well, this majestic and sublime and sacred nature of the Eternal God is truly awesome. At the very thought of our Eternal God, with whom there is no beginning and no end, who so powerfully spoke the worlds into existence, you and I are inspired to fall down before Him in respectful worship! and fear! and wonder! Oh! What an awesome God He is! In a world that holds nothing sacred, God and our relationship to Him are the very height of sacred things.

Say now, that lofty thought brings up another equally so. Since it's said in the Bible that God made man in His own likeness and His own image, and we know that spirit has no physical body with arms and legs and eyes and ears, etc, you and I bear some of God's spiritual and eternal likeness. The Bible says in Hebrews 12:9: "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers [fathers of our flesh --margin] to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of [our--margin] spirits and live?" So, it's true what we read in Acts 17:28-29, "We are the offspring [the children] of God." That's why Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven; Hallowed be Thy name." God is our Father. We are His children. Then, you are not just an animal, are you? You didn't spring from the lower species of animal life. You are not made of the same stuff as our household pets or our farm animals, or the jungle beasts. You and I are different from all the other creatures. That goes for everyone, because we bear the image of God, we're His offspring, and we sing --"Jesus loves the little children, Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world," because they're all His children by creation. So, we treat one another with respect and dignity. We don't abuse one another. We don't rob and steal and assault and kill each other as we do animals and birds and fish, because we are all God's children. What a great thought!

In that same connection, we're not happy and fulfilled living our lives without God, our heavenly Father. Some of you hearing me now, may be living in one-parent families. By sickness or by death or by divorce or for some other reason beyond your control, you may be having to live without your mother in the household. But it's more likely you would be without your father. You miss him, don't you? Of course, you do. There's a void there --an emptiness. Something important is missing in your life, and you sense it. Well, it's that way when we try to live our lives without our heavenly Father, too.

The Psalms are some of the poetry of the Hebrew people. We learn a lot from poetry. The Bible book of Psalms was compiled by David. You may remember David as the shepherd boy who killed Goliath, the wicked giant of the Philistines, with a small stone and a sling-shot. But David was also a kind and compassionate man, too. He became one of the good and great kings of a mighty nation. Oh, he wasn't without sin; no one is. He knew what it was like to live close to God --and what it was like to drift away from God. And he wrote, and chose from the writings of other people, poetry that expressed his feelings about these things.

For example, there's Psalm 42:1 that says, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before

God." We have almost the same thought in the sixty-third Psalm: "O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, In a dry and weary land where there is no water" (vs 1). There are many other such poems, but that's just the way it is, living without God. We were made for Him, and when we are not with Him, things are just not right. Our souls yearn and reach out to Him. In that verse I cited from Hebrews awhile ago, there's still another great thought. "We had earthly fathers [fathers of our flesh] to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of [our] spirits and live?" Yes now, our earthly fathers love us more than anyone. They do. And you must remember that, when someone tries to tell you differently. Your parents love you more than anyone. And because they do, they try to teach their children what is good and what is harmful. They try to steer their children clear of the pitfalls of self-destruction. They did it when we were toddlers and insisted on playing with the fire in the fireplace. They do it when we're adolescents, and when we're teenagers, not because they delight in being kill-joys, but because they love us and they don't want us to self-destruct. We respect them for that. If you don't, you should. That Bible verse says the same is true with the Father of our spirits --our heavenly Father. The world around us says there is no right or wrong, you just do whatever you like. It's your life and you do as you please. The good news about God is that He is our heavenly Father, you don't have to go around guessing or wondering if you did the right thing, or with a load of guilt when you know you did wrong. Listen to your Heavenly Father and obey Him. The Bible says, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, I have no delight in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). I hope you will confess Jesus and be baptized into Him early and give Him all your life faithfully.

Young people, it isn't whether you will believe, but what you will believe. Even the atheist believes. Until only recently atheists said they were unbelievers, but now they admit they do believe; they believe there is no God. And remember, too, that what you believe will determine the kind of life you live. The difference between a world or a life with God or without God is the difference between good and evil.

Recently a person was heard to say, "I believe in God and in Christ, but I don't let it make a fool of me." Well, the apostle Paul did. He said, "We are fools for Christ's sake." It's what the world calls a "fool" that our Lord calls a disciple. So, don't let the unkind remarks of the unconverted discourage you from being "a fool for Christ's sake."

I'm personally impressed with the faith of some of our youth, such as the ones who asked these questions. "Well of course," you say, "they're "church kids. What would you expect?" That admission is enough said. The discussion's ended. There's no longer a point of disagreement. Then, why I ask, does our culture make it so difficult for our youth (or anyone else) to openly practice their religious faith? Recently syndicated columnist Linda Bowles asked the question, "What is to become of us now that established religions are being given the hard choice of denying God, His Word and His Commandments or suffering exile from the mainstream of American life?" (Daily Oklahoman 12-28-97).

"MEANING & PURPOSE IN LIFE"

Ecc. 12:12-13

Evolution is the cornerstone of American education --well actually of our society. Despite the absence of scientific evidence to support it, evolution is just assumed to be a natural fact. From kindergarten through university, whatever the study, whether it's reading or math or literature or, it's neatly wrapped in a theory of naturalistic evolution. There are two essentials to any such theory. One is time; the other is chance. We've been taught that for the universe or the earth or life in its various forms on the earth, or human life to exist in its present state it must have had time, lots of it, billions of years, and it is said that it all came about, not according to any Divine plan or for any Divine purpose, but by a blind, uncaring, mechanical process called "chance." And, it's sometimes assumed that "...If you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (or wicked ...)" and intolerant (Richard Dawkins as quoted by Philip E. Johnson in Darwin On Trial, page 9).

That may be news to some grandparents --even to some parents, but it isn't news to the youth to whom I speak today. You are very conscious of it. It all conflicts with what you are inclined to think. You were not born to think that way. It's contrary to what you hear in Sunday school and sometimes but not often any more, what you hear your preacher say. And not wanting to be called ignorant, stupid, insane, wicked and intolerant, your choice becomes seriously difficult. You reach out for help, just as the teenager who submitted the question that prompted this program, "What is the meaning and purpose of life; Does the Bible say anything about it?"

In my university experience I thoroughly enjoyed the physical sciences --more than anything, I suppose,--unless it was the humanities. I would loved to have had an advanced degree in biology, but my wife Golda and I had made a commitment to be missionaries for the Lord in lands across the sea. We had already set a schedule and I had no time to pursue that kind of degree. These studies tested my faith, and I'm like Elton Trueblood about that. He said, "A faith that has never been tested, is not only not appreciated, it is not even understood" (Philosophy of Religion, page 20). No, the deeper studies into Darwinism and other facets of natural evolution, didn't shake my faith, they confirmed it. I studied my Bible harder than ever to see if what I was hearing could possibly be true. Had the Bible misled me?

You see, having grown up on the farm, I had lived close to the natural world. I had plowed the soil, planted the tiny seed, watched it sprout into new life forms, mature, reproduce --then die. The next year the cycle was repeated. I had seen it in the animal kingdom as well. And it held a fascination for me. Life: what is life? Is there any purpose in all this experience? Or is it all just "vanity of vanities?" Who are we? What are we doing here? Like you, I set out to learn.

As one of the definitions of life, my dictionary says it is "the period between birth and death." Of course the dictionary defines a word according to its common usage. And I suspect if we were to pass out three-by-five cards to any audience anywhere and ask each person to give his own definition of life, that would be it: "The period between birth and death," or some statement its equivalent. That's the humanist's or materialist's definition. But, surely there must be more to your life and mine than that. Don't you think? Are we here on this planet solely for the purpose of existence, merely to occupy space for a time, consume our ration of the world food supply, water, and other essentials to a material life?

Well yes, my young friend, the Bible does have something to say about the meaning of life. In our lesson last week, we learned from the very first verse of the Bible that "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." So our God is eternal, with neither beginning or end. And when He gave the command --spoke the word (Psalm 33:8-9) --that brought the heavens and the earth into existence, He had a purpose. The Bible calls it His "eternal purpose" in Ephesians 3:11. Yes of course, that's what it was. Then there is Divine purpose in the existence of the world. The universe is not the result of an accidental, unanticipated, "big bang" explosion, but the planning of an Almighty God. Chapter one of Genesis tells us a little bit about how God singled out from all the others, Planet Earth for the habitation of living things, fish, fowl, vegetation, animals and creeping things. When He had sufficiently prepared Earth with all the necessities of life and adorned it with spectacular beauty, He created man in His own image, as His own offspring or children (Acts 17:28-29), male and female, and placed him here to live. Man was not merely an incidental part of the creation, he was the crowning reason for it.

David the Psalmist says, "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? Yet Thou has made him a little lower than God (another version says "angels"), And dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, The birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is Thy name in all the earth." There you have it straight from the word of God. God made us for His companionship --His children. He provided all our necessities and charged us with the care of it.

God was not defeated in His plan when man rebelled against Him in the garden. He knew before it happened, that it would happen, and included in His original plan, a way for all of us who will, to come back to Him through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:11). So that even now all who will accept Christ as His Son, may, by being born again, live at peace with God and walk with Him. That original relationship in the garden of Eden has been restored in Jesus Christ.

One practical part or aspect of that purpose is found in Philippians 2:3-4. These Bible verses say to us, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." The rights of the individual are not to be put above the rights of the community --whether the community is your family or the church or the city or the state in which you live. So, We're not put here to live seventy, eighty years (more or less as our individual case may be), to do as we please, to do what we like, but to serve the interest of others and make this world a better place to live. In Matthew 20:26 Jesus said it this way, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave." Princess Diana was probably the world's most popular person at the time of her death, but it was not because she was the Princess --married to the Prince, but because of the humanitarian works she supported.

Another practical part of life's purpose is that it is not in possessions of things and wealth. We're not here to accumulate all we can of worldly things. Jesus said something about that in Luke 12:15. He said, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." Another has said, "Money can buy you a bed, but it can't buy you sleep." In Solomon's search for "what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives," he learned and said: As a man "had come naked from his

mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand...exactly as a man is born, thus will he die" (Ecclesiastes 5:15).

Another thing: Life doesn't consist solely of pleasures. In I Timothy 5:6 the Bible speaks of those who live in pleasure, as being dead while they live. In Solomon's experiment, he also found that the meaning and purpose of life is not in the pleasures of this world. He said, "All that my eyes desired, I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure," --but --all of it was without meaning --"vanity of vanities," he said, "all is vanity."

In Matthew 22:34-46, when He was asked about the greatest commandment of all. Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Yes, that's what life is about. It isn't about money, or success, or pleasure, or power and prestige, but a right relationship with God and our fellowman. The Old Testament prophet Micah says. "He [God] has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

This is not the kind of messages I had planned for the children and young people. It's much more mature. Yes, the meaning and purpose of life is a deep question for youth. But, what better time in life could a person hope to learn the answer. Some have lived seventy or eighty or more years and never known what life is all about --even Christians have done so. Others learned only in the last years of their lives that they were not here by mere chance. How sad. I hope some young person has been convinced of what I've believed and taught from age seventeen, that none of us came into the world because we chose or when we chose, but because God had need of us, that we're here as God's children to live in communion with Him, by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly in obedience to His teaching. We're not to live selfishly but in the interest of the common good.

After King Solomon of Israel had experimented for meaning in position, power, pleasure, wisdom and wealth, he wrote his conclusion in the last two verses of Ecclesiastes. He said, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." It's good to begin an obedient life with God in the youthful years before the heart becomes hardened by the sinfulness of sin, before lifestyles which exclude God have become so hardened that He will always be excluded. I beg of you young people, if you've come to the state of responsibility and accountability before God, don't delay in becoming a Christian. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, turn your life toward Him and be baptized into Him without delay.

"REMEMBER THY CREATOR"

Ecc. 12:13-14

Young people, what I'd like us to do today is to take a quick look at some very basic principles for living life so as to get the very most out of it. So when you're my age or older, you can look as I do with a measure of joy upon a life you've lived uncluttered with regrets but beautifully decorated with precious memories. Then, when it's all finished here, you can go to your heavenly home --there to live with God the Father and all the redeemed of all the ages.

To paraphrase Charles Dickens (*A Tale of Two Cities*), these are the best of days; these are the worst of days for youth. Never has a generation had it as good as yours. Never have young people enjoyed more advantages or more opportunities. And, times were never worse for youth than for you. It is extremely difficult growing up in such a topsy-turvy world as ours, where the rules and expectations are not clearly defined and may change from day to day. Still, a number of recent surveys indicate a desire of today's youthful generation to renounce the deviant, rebellious and lawless lifestyles of the boomers in favor of a return to order and peace. I congratulate you.

If from my experience in life and from the word of God, I had to pick just one word of counsel for you, it would be the words of the text we read a few moments ago, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." That means more than just acknowledging a belief in a Supreme Being, or perhaps giving God a polite nod of the head as you pass along. It means living with Him. There was a man in the Old Testament named Enoch, of whom it was said, he "walked with God and because he did, he is one of only two men who ever lived on the earth who didn't have to die; God just took him (Genesis 5:22-24).

Special grace or favors are given those who follow the path of righteousness laid out by God. His is the best way to live mankind has ever known. That beautiful first Psalm says it well, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Make up your mind to take the high road. You'll never regret it. To do that requires courage. You simply must not let the "ungodly" as that psalm just said, press you into their mold (Rom. 12:2). If you refuse to walk in the way of sinners, or if you will not sit in the seat of the scornful, or stand in the way of sinners, you can live nobly and proudly. But you must choose your associates very carefully. From my experience in prison ministry, I found more people who said they were there because of the wrong crowd than for any other reason. If you run with a group that uses drugs or alcohol, you are in dangerous company. If you are with someone when he breaks the law and goes to jail, you'll go to jail with him --guilty or not. The Bible teaches us to "avoid the very appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:22) and you can easily see why.

There's a bracelet some youth are wearing nowadays that has a mighty message. Surely you've seen them at school. It's the WWJD bracelet --"What Would Jesus Do?" When temptation suddenly pops up in the road ahead, the question, "What Would Jesus Do?" is a tremendous power of resistance! Whether the reminder is on a bracelet around your arm or deeply implanted in your heart,

it's the same. Remember when Jesus was tempted He went to the Scripture. He didn't say to the devil, "Satan, by the power of God I'm casting you out." Instead He said, "Thus it is written..." --or the Bible says. And the devil left Him (Matthew 4:1-11). The Bible is sometimes called "the sword of the Spirit" as in Galatians 6:17, and Jesus wielded it perfectly and on the enemy. Well, the most important thing about life is maintaining that right relationship with God.

And the next most important thing is found in Ephesians 6:1-3, which says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Obey and honor your parents. When I was your age it wasn't unusual to hear someone refer to his father as "my old man." Do you still hear that? I haven't heard that in years, but I'm not always with young people. I just wondered. I hope you don't. I hope that went out with the horse-drawn carriage. Perhaps you've seen and heard your parents tell your baby brother or sister to stay away from the fireplace. "It's hot! Hot!" The baby pays no attention so Mom or Dad has to either permit the baby to be burned or discipline him --not just to take the joy out of life for baby brother, but because they love him and they know what the baby doesn't know. And so it is with you. When they tell you to avoid the evil things some of the other youth are doing, it isn't because they're old-fogies or because they don't trust you, but because they know what you may not know, and they simply can't sit by and see you self-destruct. If you insist on disobeying, they may have to ground you for a week or discipline you some other way. They love you. It's in the family that we receive our first teaching on how to get along with other people.

Did I say, how to get along with other people? Well, that's the third most important lesson we all have to learn to do well in life. There are many verses in the Bible that come to mind. There's Ephesians 5:21 which says, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." Then there's Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (NASV). And, there are others.

"Do nothing through selfishness or empty conceit." Oh say, that's just opposite to what we're taught today isn't it? We're taught that to maintain our self-esteem we must think of ourselves first -- look out for our own interests --do as we please --it's nobody's business what I do. That's a poor attitude with which to go through life. Those who have adopted it, have found life very hard. There are almost six billion people in the world besides me. And if I fight the whole bunch all my life, it's going to be very very one-sided.

In the Bible book of Romans (14:7) God says, " "For none of us liveth to himself..." Y, you'd believe that if you read it in a comic book. It's just good common sense, isn't it? One reason "family" is so important is because that's where we get our first lessons in the importance of living with other people. Yes, what we do and say is important to every member of our family. It is their business what we do. Their name and honor is involved, too. Yes, I do have a responsibility to my school, or team, or church, or town, or nation, or company for which I work. Remember God said, "Do nothing through selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself."

In America each person is free to adopt his own lifestyle; that's true. But if you exercise the liberty to rebel against --reject the traditional mores and values, the rest of the world has the same right to reject you. And they've built places for rebellious people to live apart from the others; they're

called jails or prisons. It isn't smart to rebel against the established norms of the community. As a matter of fact, it's just plain dumb. I read in the newspaper who went to apply for a job

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, chapter 9, there's instruction to fathers who have rebellious sons. A rebellious spirit is so detestable in God's sight that in the Old Testament period He commanded such a son to be executed. While the punishment is not that severe in the Christian age, young people, you must not fall into rebelliousness. It gets you absolutely nowhere.

Learn it now --while you're young: don't go through life angry. King Solomon is said to be the wisest mere man who ever lived. And he wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:9, "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools." I see young people coming and going in the streets and shopping malls wearing a scowl on their faces that would stop a clock. "I'm mad; I don't like it when..." And that's the way the world comes back to them. Sure, things won't always be like you'd like them to be.

Try this little experiment someday; see if it works for you like it has for me. When I've felt kind of down, I've caught myself speaking to someone like at the airport or the supermarket. Like, maybe I said, "Hi," and I barely got a response --sometimes, none at all. "Hmmm," I've thought; "wonder what he's mad about." Then I thought to myself, "well now, your greeting wasn't all that upbeat either, you know. OK, I'll do it over," I've said to myself. The next person I meet I'll say, "Good morning sir! And what a beautiful morning it is. Oh say, I love that sweater you're wearing." You know what: this guy's a friendly chap, he wants to stand and talk here in this cold wind, and tell me where he got his sweater. Yes, the world's going to give back to you in kind just what you give it. Try it with your Mom and Dad when you get up in the morning. "Hi Mom, hi Dad I love you both." Kind of hum a little tune when you say it. They may faint --or want to take your temperature. But, well, try it on the school teacher, too: "Mrs. Blue, you're wearing a new scarf today, aren't you? It's very pretty; I like it." She may think, "I've been wearing this rag for two years." But you watch the change in her attitude when she sees the change in yours. Don't go around mad at the world. Get the chip off your shoulder. Attitude is everything.

We used the first two lessons in this series to children and youth, to establish faith in God. Oh that's so important to life. A person's attitude about God will determine the kind of life he lives more than any other single factor. But faith in God doesn't make any difference unless it's put to practice -- unless we use it to live --unless we obey God's teachings and apply His principles. For the person who says, "I'll do it my way," God's way is too restrictive.

I had only one brother and he's deceased. He had only one child, a daughter Sherri who has only one child a son named Brent, now thirteen years old. They live in Los Angeles. Just the other day Ken Batchelor, Brent's proud father, called to tell me Brent had become a Christian. Yes, he'd been baptized into Jesus the day before. What great news! Children need to wait until they're old enough to understand about Jesus Christ as the Son of God and believe it. They must also have come to the time in life when they're accountable for their behavior. Then they need to repent and be baptized. I have three teenaged grandchildren, Sara, Lana and Joel. All are Christians. (Max and Kristen are no longer teenagers.) I'm dedicating this program Brent and to all my grandchildren, and to all others their ages, in hopes you'll follow their examples --and become Christians --and be Christians as long as you live.

"WHY DO WE WORSHIP GOD?"

"Why do we worship God?" This was a written question. There are several ways it might have been asked audibly. "Why do we worship God?" "Why do we worship God?" "Why do we worship God?" "Why do we worship God?" And, "Why do we worship God?" Any one of these easily provokes more than enough thought for an entire program of this kind. I really can't say which of the emphases the young lady meant.

But we do know that, unlike any and all other creation, man is a worshiper. The anthropologists, archaeologists and psychologists all tell us that it is certain, wherever or whenever man has been found living on the earth, he has been found worshipping. But, we confirm that belief by a simple study of the Bible. That's just the way we are made. It's a part of our very nature. It's as normal for man to worship as it is for fish to swim or birds to fly. From as far back as the second generation of men, Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve worshiped God (Genesis 4:1-15).

However, not all men have worshiped God, the Creator, our heavenly Father. Some have worshiped the sun as did the Egyptians in the Fourth Dynasty; others worship their ancestors or saints or relics or idols and images. When Israel entered the promised land, it was occupied by people who worshiped many gods and Joshua gave them a choice. He said, "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). There arose another generation of them who did choose to worship the gods of the pagans and they lost possession of the promised land.

Isaiah 44:14-17 speaks of the man who hews down a tree, takes part of it and warms himself, bakes bread, and from the rest of it he makes a graven image, falls down and worships it and prays, "Deliver me for thou art my god."

When Paul came to Athens, a city celebrated for its wisdom and rhetoric, he found people worshipping many gods. Any direction he looked there was before his eyes one of the cherished temples of the Athenians to a pagan god or goddess --Apollo, Vulcan, Ares and many others. Perceiving their religious nature, he said to them, "[A]s I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23), and with that He began to preach to them the gospel of the one living and true God.

The apostle Paul spoke of a civilization who had "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." And God gave them up (Romans 1:24). He wrote the church which he had planted in Thessalonica about how when he came there and preached, they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (I Thessalonians 1:9). So, men in underdeveloped and often in the most advanced nations of the world have been worshipers, but not always of God.

Likewise, from the days of Cain, there have been worshipers of God who worshiped Him in ways that were not acceptable. God had no respect (meaning, He did not receive) Cain's worship, and you know the rest of the story. There were other times. There were the ordained priests, the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, who "took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:1-2). What a tragedy in the new congregation of the Lord's people in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, the church in Corinth had profaned the Lord's Supper by making it a gluttonous and drunken feast. Consequently many of them were weak and sickly and some had died. God erected a "caution" or "danger" sign here for all of us who were to come thereafter. He warned, "[H]e that eateth and drinketh unworthily (in an unworthy manner NASV), eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (I Corinthians 11:22-31). The worship of God is not a "play thing," it is not a "toy" with which people are to amuse or to entertain themselves. And God will not bless such things.

Why do we worship God? Well first of all, just as we've been saying, it's because we were created to be worshipers --and we will worship something or someone. What then, is there about worship that is so vitally necessary to our completeness that we just must do it? Why do people gather to worship? What do they do that is so important as to disrupt their personal schedules and plans to do it? To answer that we must define worship.

There are six words --or word families in the original languages of the Bible --which translate into our English words "worship," "worshiped," "worshiping," etc. Each of these sheds a little more light on the subject or adds a little more color to it. The word most commonly used in the Scriptures defines worship as an act of homage or reverence; to make obeisance, to do reverence to or toward --to kiss. Another means to "revere" and emphasizes the feeling of awe and devotion. Another means to bow the knee before. Still another conveys the idea of sacrificial offerings. One even implies a pattern for religious service. Another means "to act piously towards;" still another denotes rendering a religious service or to wait upon.

Now, do you see what worship is? Then from what the Bible says about worship, when people gather for worship that is what they're doing (or supposed to be doing). They're (1) Pouring out their hearts in the presence of the Almighty God. (2) They are doing obeisance (or showing reverence, respect and honor) to the Father of our spirits. (3) They are feeling awe in the presence of the Supreme Ruler of the universe. (4) They are in a sense reverently bowing the knees before Jehovah God. (5) They are humbly offering their lives in sacrificial service to Him. And (6), They are establishing a pattern of life consistent with that spirit. That's why we worship --God. I mean, that's why people persistently worship in cold, bad weather and fair, in times of sickness and in health, when they're rejoicing in success, and when they're in grief or have suffered loss.

I heard two men talking on the radio the other day. One was chiding the other about his non-church going. They were only kidding of course. But, he went occasionally, he said, just to keep the preacher confused. He always sat on the back seat over in the corner where he could sleep and not disturb. Well, whether it's true with him or not, it's true with a lot of people, and it's no wonder they don't go regularly, if that's really the case. Such people wouldn't be worshiping; they'd only be there to be seen or counted or because it's a habit or a duty. But you see, the human soul needs all of what the Bible describes as worship --all that that we just mentioned. We need it as communion with our Heavenly Father. That's why we worship. We need it because we're His children and we love Him. That's why we worship. I love to have my children come to visit me. I long to hear them talking to me about things that are important to them. I would love to be able to sit down with my Dad and talk with him about things that fathers and sons talk about. Is your father still living? Is he living in the house with you? Don't you enjoy just talking with him, going fishing with him, doing things with him. Sure you do! Well, we need that with our Heavenly Father too in worship.

We worship; because we need all that that we talked about as worship, to develop character, and despite all we're hearing to the contrary these days, character is important.

We worship God that way because we need God. Have you ever come upon a sign that said something like, "Caution! Proceed at your own risk?" It kind of gives you an eerie feeling, doesn't it? Maybe it was a swinging bridge across a deep canyon and the sign said, "Danger, cross winds, cross at your own risk." Now --if you must cross to get to your car or your camp ground on the other side, you step just a little more lightly and quickly and you grip the hand rail a might harder than you would've if you hadn't had the sign, right? Because you're on your own. Oh yeah, that's it. Let me tell you something, young people, when you venture out into life without God, you're on your own. You're living dangerously --at your own risk. And that is risky. Ephesians 2:12 says that people living without Christ are without hope --and without God in the world. Oh, I don't want to be without God --not even for just a minute. I'm not exaggerating or boasting. God is my witness. I thank Him every day that He's been with me all the way. I became a Christian at age twelve --almost thirteen --and He's been with me every day. When we were in that giant B-47 coming across the Atlantic from Europe and were told we were being forced to make an emergency landing at JFK airport in New York City, I think 399 of the 400 people aboard went into hysteria. But after it was all over, I marvelled that amid all the confusion, crying and praying, I was able to maintain my composure. I really was surprised at myself. I wasn't that self-conscious at the time. I wasn't alone. You see, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:" for He is with me; His rod and His staff they comfort me. He prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: He anoints my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm 23).

Will you, my young friend? Why not confess Jesus and put Him on in baptism in your youth and dwell in His house forever? I pray you will. And others of you, too. If we may assist you, bless us with the opportunity, will you?

Some time ago I read the story of Major General William F. Dean. He was a prisoner of war in North Korea and was subjected to the inhuman torture and fiendish methods of brainwashing so commonly used by the Communists on their prisoners. Some of General Dean's fellow-prisoners were unable to resist those cruel efforts to extract military information from them, but General Dean was.

He said in order to retain his sanity during those long, difficult years of captivity, he resorted to playing mathematical games, reciting passages of Scripture and to prayer. Then one day he was informed by his captors that a firing squad was standing by ready for his execution. He was given a few minutes to write a letter to his wife. Under those extremely difficult circumstances, General Dean hurriedly penned what he thought would be his last words. He was resigned to the thought that if and when the letter should be delivered and read, he'd be dead.

In only a matter of minutes he'd finished his letter. But, in addition to the words of devotion which he addressed to his wife, Dean wrote one sentence for the guidance of his son. It was short. It said, "Tell Bill the word is integrity."

Faithfulness or loyalty to a code of ethics and morals, not just when it's convenient or suitable, but even when it's difficult or even painful, is basic to the survival of any society or even an individual. General Dean is dead now, been gone long enough that many of us have forgotten him. Perhaps most have never heard of him, but his message still lives: "The word is integrity." The Bible says, "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him" (Proverbs 20:7), and who would doubt that General Dean's son, Bill, was blessed by having a father like that. When old Job was suffering

through all his losses and infirmities, his wife came and said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die! But he said to her, You speak as one of the foolish women" (Job 2:9-10). In his book of Proverbs (11:3) (inspired of God of course) Solomon wrote, "The integrity of the upright shall guide them (that's how they'll know right from wrong): but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." Again in 19:1 he said, "Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool." General Dean was right: "The word is integrity. And young people, that's the word I leave with you to end this series. I pray you've been blessed by them.