

Love the Youth Around Us

Luke 6:35, 36. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Most of us would never imagine that we see children as our enemies. We honestly believe it is our calling to love children and regard them. Would any of us turn aside from a beautiful baby whose very face glows with life and helplessness? No! Would we turn down the request of a four year old looking up with honest eyes and asking us to lift them up so they can get their shoes off the high shelf? We are taken by the likeableness of so many children. They refresh our spirits. A rabbi thousands of years ago said one of life's pleasures was to hold a little child. How nurturing it is!

Yet children grow up and as they do they develop more their own style and their own lives. It is part of the continued natural progress towards independence. For the person who has been finding fulfillment in their innocence and need for help, it can become very annoying. They can become almost like enemies, hard to have around, never satisfied, wanting to call the shots yet not being responsible for their end of the bargain. By time they get in those teenage years, they can be seen as obnoxious, almost like an enemy. The parent might find little reward, little satisfaction in the silence, the lack of gratitude, the resistance, the lack of regard for parental needs.

This passage gives us a clue as to how we Christian parents and Christian adults might choose to relate to young people. We don't have to be victims of their insensitivity, their seeming disinterest in us, their need to "do it themselves". Victims grumble, victims complain, victims suffer. One nasty look from an enemy can ruin our week. One cutting remark from a teenager can be taken very personally in a way which gets in there real deep and really hurts. Thousands of parents have seen their child raising years as years of misery and grief. Those years were way too hard, far too wounding, and left an indelible scar on the soul.

Jesus knew how people reacted to indifference, to enmity, to being used and being manipulated. He saw the anger in people's eyes when an adversary took advantage of them, when an enemy had no seeming thought for the welfare or life of themselves. He realized the natural response was one of hurt, of hatred, of revenge, of holding a grudge. And in the case of our own children, we can become bitter and frustrated over our children not seeing our needs or failing to have any motivation to regard what the parent wants.

He suggests a very proactive approach. Love your enemy--your child; pray for those who persecute you--the kids around you: and do good to those who spitefully use you--again, perhaps a child in their own thoughts and dreams. We do not have to be doormats, walked on, worn out and finally thrown out. But that does not mean we are to attack, control and demean the "in their own world" youth around us.

Living in the vision that God loves these "rascals" and God is kind and generous even to the ungrateful and apathetic, we too have that option. We can listen to, love, enjoy and regard the adolescent, the obnoxious, the acting out child around us. We can pray for and create a new approach which honors the child and respects our own boundaries. We can choose to love.

Jesus, open the floodgates of your love into our hearts and keep us from making setbacks personal. Amen.