

Sheep, Vulnerability of Youth

Purpose:

1. Urging us to observe our offspring in terms of how vulnerable our offspring are like sheep to schemes and schemers who will be attacking them.
2. Recognizing that though they be well behaved and talented, given the right circumstances the vulnerability of a young person will be exposed.
3. Satan is smart and devious and finds people who can break down a person.
4. Taking on the challenge of equipping our youth with armor by which they will be ready to defend themselves.

Last time we talked about how successful an extortionist was in getting into the lives of over 1,000 girls in all 50 states and some other countries. He had developed the skill, the knowledge of social media, the deceitful scheme that enabled him to not only contact all these girls from 12-17 but also manipulate them to a point where they finally started to send him nude pictures of themselves. He intruded into their lives in such a clever yet devastating way that it drove some of them to using drugs, ruined their social life and caused some to consider suicide. Perhaps some of them did commit suicide since not all of his victims are known at this time. We also hear extortionists have intruded into the lives of 3,000 boys and 12 have committed suicide. (This is as of the time of this writing at the end of 2022.)

When we hear these stories we are forced to ask ourselves. What is going on here? Our usual way of assessing a young person is with questions like these? Is this a good kid? Does this young person listen to their parents? Do they respect others? How are they doing in school? Do they have some good friends? In other words, we are looking mainly at their behavior, their attitudes, their social lives. Generally, what is our conclusion? Do we regard them as defenseless sheep? Or do we assume many of these teenage girls and boys were bad, confused, lonely, without talent, without friends? So, what is going on here? Perhaps we need to have a different way of seeing these youth? The way that seems most plausible is to ask: In what ways were these teenagers vulnerable? How was it so many of these girls, for instance, fell into this one man's trap? When we ask it this way, we might come up with different answers than we have previously thought?

Discussion Questions: Let us consider how this man may have used different approaches with individual girls. Could he have figured out that something was going on with them that made them vulnerable. What would you say? What about a girl 12-17 that might make her vulnerable even though she might be respected, gifted and wholesome in her family and school?

What about boys? Even though they may have a good reputation, do well in school, are well behaved, possibly skilled in music or sports or drama, etc. are they still susceptible to being taken in by someone? Is it just because boys want to rebel that 68 % of them go to an Internet pornography site at least once a week? Is it just because they want to be nice that they get into a car where they know the driver is half drunk and reckless?

Discussion Question: What do you think makes boys get themselves into situations that they don't need? How are they vulnerable? In what ways are boys likely to be influenced and perhaps controlled by others?

There are many stories in the news or among our friends where we hear about scams and how many adults fall prey to these schemes. We all can think of examples right off the top of our heads. Many of us have thought about these schemes and how to prevent ourselves from falling for them. One major way that we can protect ourselves is paying as much attention about these schemes so we can recognize that something is wrong. We often warn each other of scams we have encountered. Another way to protect ourselves, is to recognize that



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the world is full of schemers and we would be foolish to trust everyone. As parents and grandparents, we know kids can fall prey to schemers as well, but what have we done to protect and prepare them for this reality? Is it enough? Our tendency is to look at one of our children and say to ourselves. This one will never get into big trouble. Perhaps we say, “Nobody will be able to take advantage of him or her”. Or we may think they are too young for now so I don’t need to worry about it now – I’ll worry about it later when they are older.

Let’s see what the bible says about our vulnerability in this world.

Read Matthew 9:35-38: What do weary and scattered people need? What does this teach us about who parents and grandparents are for children? Is it possible that family leaders could be the laborers Jesus is talking about? As a congregation, are we praying for parents, for grandparents and what they bring to their offspring?

Read Ephesians 6:10-12 People of grace have received the free gift of God’s salvation. This is wonderful and real. But there is a cost. That cost comes when we now live as people where this world is not our home, but we are just passing through. That cost, Jesus tells us, is we now find ourselves in a war zone. We have Satan’s attention. Wolves are out there waiting for us. Jesus pictures us as sheep. As sheep we are going to be attacked. Sheep are known as being defenseless animals. And they are good to eat. You get the picture. It is not a pretty one. How can a sheep stand up against a wolf anyway? It is not a fair fight. A Las Vegas bookie would give the sheep no odds at all. It sounds hopeless. Sheep are very helpless.

Discussion Questions: What have you learned here about vulnerability that may cause us to think twice when we assess our children? What adult in their life is most responsible for protecting your child from schemers? Is it the parent/family leadership or is that the responsibility of others such as teachers, pastors, youth leaders etc.?

Without naming anyone among your family, your extended family or people you know, think of one person and ask yourself in what way do I see this person is vulnerable to something or someone?

So, to understand how this battle is going to go, we need to understand the natural vulnerability of our young ones. First of all, they are young and that means they have not experienced a lot of the treachery that is in the world. Secondly, we have no idea how they are going to respond when they are being pressured or cornered by someone. Thirdly, we may not have any idea what is going on in their heads, their thoughts, their fears, their needs, and yes, their secrets.

So the Bible gives us this vivid picture: Wild animals preying on animals with few defenses. So here in a very concise way we have the imagery of two creatures, the reality of two very different animals, the predator and its prey. Jesus, himself, brings out this problem we Christians face. The apostle Peter knows all about this. He thought he was strong and safe. No one could get to him. But then in a certain circumstance he discovered he too was vulnerable, weak enough to deny knowing Jesus at three different times. Later in I Peter 5:8 he tells us “Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.”

Consider these questions: What does all this say to those of us who are as parents and grandparents, those of us who care deeply about our children? How are those we love vulnerable, weak, susceptible to subtle sophisticated evildoers? If that is true, aren’t we the ones that can do something about this? So how are we to identify these wolves or lions?

How are we as Christians being attacked? By whom? For starters we can say anyone who is deceiving others, taking advantage of others, undermining their lives to gain control. When we think about this who comes to mind? Obviously, that’s what child molesters do, what drug dealers do, what Internet pornographers do, what bullies do, what human traffickers do, what scammers do and yes what domestic violators do. Anyone of these people can do major damage to a person’s life. These examples are obviously wolves and lions. What about

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people in our kids' lives who are not so obvious? Surely, there are many more ways we can notice Satan causing havoc, unbelief, strife, wars, etc. Jesus says it plainly in John 10a, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Do you think we need to be aware of people who we allow to have direct influence on our children's lives such as teachers, coaches and youth leaders? What about what is happening in their friend's families and homes that might influence your child. What about social media influencers? There are many people who are helping our children and are good shepherds for our children but there are a few among them who have different agendas for our kids than we do.

So we have a big problem. Jesus pulls no punches. We are faced with the principalities and powers. (Ephesians 6:10-13). They attack in sophisticated and cunning ways.

Here is what we at Adults Saving Kids have come to realize, in our own lives and the lives of others. We need a wake-up call. For most of us, we live in a passive zone. We gamble that nothing too seriously bad will happen to my kids. We don't really get the picture until it is too late. Humpty Dumpty has fallen and now we have the heartrending job of seeking to pick up the pieces. Our denial or avoidance in believing our kids won't face serious consequences in life, is normal. It is the way we human beings deal with a lot of things. Most of us simply don't project into the future and come to terms with situations like our child meeting up with a molester, a sextortionist, social media influencers that are harmful, or an Internet pornographer or teachers and coaches that have a different agenda for our kids than we do. The truth is we are going to save our child and ourselves a lot of pain and misery if we can work at the top of the cliff and get some good preparation done before tragedy strikes.

Discussion Questions: How good are we in today's world at identifying the many wolves that might be among us? Do we realize and talk about the damage they are doing to families? Compare the effort we might put in to prepare our youth for the treachery out there versus the consequences of encountering and being victimized by a wolf. The wreckage left for your child and family to endure. The heartache, the trauma and the years of recovery, if you do not prepare yourself and your children.

Martin Luther preached on Matthew 24:15-28, the 25th Sunday after Trinity. "But how can we keep from being deceived, since some of the deceptions which come our way are very compelling. How can we keep from being misled? To learn such mastery or art requires that we truly be Christians. First of all, we must recognize that the devil is a very crafty and powerful lord and why he is called lord and ruler of the world--and that if our dear Lord and God does not counter and thwart his craftiness, -cleverness, and power, there would be no one on earth wise, strong, and holy enough to withstand and survive against him. That is to say, with his knowledge, smartness, and power the devil far exceeds all human understanding and mental power. If God, therefore, were to withdraw his hand, the devil would quickly contrive an apparition before our eyes and take us in before we know it."

Discussion Questions: When we hear what Luther is saying, do we even realize we have been deceived? According to Luther, what might well be the source of many of the problems we have even if we don't identify it this way? Where might deception be happening even if we don't notice it?

We could be very overwhelmed by all this. However, Jesus is not done saying what he wants to say in Matthew 10:16. He goes on to talk about two other creatures, "so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." In one of his sermons, Dr Martin Luther King Jr says "It is pretty difficult to imagine a single person having, simultaneously, the characteristics of the serpent and the dove, but this is what Jesus expects. We must combine the toughness of the serpent and the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart."

Again, Jesus is speaking volumes in very concise form. First, he says we are to be wise or shrewd as serpents. We might immediately think of the serpent that tricked Eve and Adam. They were not prepared to deal with a

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crafty serpent. The serpent had to be shrewd enough to get a conversation going with Eve. His question which misinterpreted what God had told Adam and Eve was brilliant. He asked, “Did God say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?” How could Eve not talk and defend God at this point? She surely had to tell the serpent that God was very gracious and they could eat of every tree. Only one tree was off limits and if they ate of it, they would die. Now the serpent had the woman talking and probably wondering why God had held back on this one tree. So the serpent could now give its interpretation and promise. “You will not die, for God knows when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” This lie of the serpent was appealing and we know what happened. The point Jesus is making is if you are going to be able to deal with the deceitful set-ups in the world, you are going to have to be as wise and shrewd as that serpent was. No easy challenge!

Secondly, Jesus tells us to also be innocent as doves. How are we to interpret this? Does this mean we are to be naïve, simple-minded and put up the white flag of surrender in every situation? Surely Jesus never did this whenever he encountered people seeking to deceive him, take advantage of him. He stood up to them. This verse is said in a certain context—sheep in the midst of wolves. In other words, Christian disciples are dealing with oppressors, enemies, persecutors, connivers. What does one do? Surely it doesn’t mean to trust the wolves and they will back off. Yet, Jesus tells us we are to bless those who persecute us, pray for them, to love them but with shrewdness. We are not to harm them, but neither are we to let them harm us. Here we get into how to handle situations and people nonviolently as Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King did. We will get into this in later courses.

Closing: This brings us back to Ephesians 6:10-12 but read on through verse 20 which instructs to put on the full armor of God and pray on all occasions and for Gods people. What are some of the tough questions to ask ourselves and pray about when someone is seeking to scam us, defraud us or get our kids in trouble?

Summary:

1. We like sheep don’t necessarily understand how vulnerable we are but wolves and also schemers do understand.
2. Seeing our job as family leaders to prepare our offspring so they are ready for the deceptions, pressures, and assaults they will experience.
3. God in Christ has provided the armor we all need but we all must see what it is and put it on so as to be ready for an attack coming at any time.

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Frederick Douglas

Prayer Ideas in Closing:

1. Grace, courage and discernment in handling evil attacks.
2. Ability to notice when wolves are close.
3. Openness to learn from others who have thought about these things more.
4. Discretion and wisdom in how to help our offspring be prepared for schemers.
5. Pray for those who are planning to take advantage of those we love.



Supplemental reading

Notes: Document I have Naked Pictures of you.

Quote from Walter Wangerin, Jr.

Sorrows shall surely come—but surely, parents, not through us! Haven't we ourselves suffered the same abuses? Even as adults? And weren't they a misery more than we could stand? Isn't that motive enough to stop our tongues and stay our hands when we might wound our children? Do we need more?

Then hear this:

Children do not exist to please us. They are not for us at all. Rather, we exist for them—to protect them now and to prepare them for the future. ... It is we who are given, by God's parental mercy, to the children! And it is we who must give to the children—by lovely laughter, by laughter utterly free, and by the sheer joy from which laughter springs—the lasting memory: You are, you are, you are, my child, a marvelous work of God!

The following short stories are submitted by different people:

1. When my daughter was in elementary school in the 1990's her best friend was having a birthday party when she was about 10. My daughter found out that the theme was going to be having a séance which is a meeting at which people attempt to make contact with the dead, especially through the agency of a medium. I no longer trusted the friend's mother. The next year, she invited my daughter to go with their family on a cruise in which they would pay my daughters travel expenses. I could not in good faith send my daughter with her friend. How could I trust that this other mom would carefully chaperone the girls on a cruise ship? My daughter was very upset but I stood firm because her safety was at stake and nothing was worth my daughters' safety.
2. When my daughter was in junior high, she went to a friend's home for a birthday party. The parents stayed upstairs allowing the children to party in the basement without supervision. The boys convinced many of the girls to give them blow jobs. My daughter called me and insisted I come pick her up NOW!
3. I was raising my grandson after his mom died. When he was 13 and at a classmate's birthday party, his classmates went to the bedrooms in the basement and had sex while the parents were upstairs and not supervising the basement.
4. I always signed up for my kids out of town school trips to chaperone. I did not trust the other parents to properly supervise the kids.

When my daughter was an adult, she recalled to me that during confirmation classes, the pastor taught them that there was not any such thing as hell or that Satan did not exist. This pastor never made this belief clear to us parents. Luckily, we as the parents did teach and talk about our faith at home so my daughter was not convinced of this teaching and today had a deep Christian faith, a Christian husband and raise their kids in the faith.