

Winning and Holding

by J. Wilbur Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of holding youth in the Church and providing them with a Christian inheritance to prevent drifting.

Scripture: Psalm 119:11, Matthew 28:19, 2 Timothy 3:15, Titus 2:7, James 1:22, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Discipleship", "Youth Ministry"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the invaluable inheritance of Timothy, who from childhood knew the Holy Scriptures, emphasizing the profound influence of a good ancestry in leading children to Christ and preventing them from drifting away. Chapman highlights the urgent need for continued interest in young people, as many are wasting themselves through destructive habits. He stresses the importance of holding onto souls won for Christ, especially during the critical ages of twelve to twenty, to prevent them from drifting and making shipwreck of their lives.

Transcript

"From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Timothy iii. 15. Timothy's inheritance was invaluable. His equipment was superb, and his experience from the day of his birth until the end of his life upon earth, ideal. He had a good grandmother. Evidently she influenced him profoundly. I am quite sure that his parents too must have fulfilled their obligations to their child, and in addition to his own immediate ancestry, he had Paul, the Apostle, who looked upon him as a son in the Gospel, and honoured him by sending him his last message when he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but to all them also that love His appearing. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me" 2 Timothy iv. 7-9.

It is a great loss to any child to be deprived of what Timothy had. We may not all be rich, and we certainly cannot all be great, but we may all be true and faithful as parents, and when a child has such an inheritance he is well started in life. It is because children do not have this that many of them drift. Given a good ancestry it is comparatively easy to draw children to Christ, and even to draw them back when once they have wandered. It is the testimony of rescue mission workers that when they have the privilege of appealing to lost and ruined men in the name of a mother who was saintly and a father who was true to Christ, they have a hold upon an almost irresistible force, to bring the wanderer back to the faith of his

father and the teaching of his mother.

There is the sorest need to-day of a special and continued interest in behalf of our young people. David Starr Jordan is authority for the statement that "one-third of the young men of America are wasting themselves through intemperate habits and accompanying vices," the conditions in other lands are also very serious. The secretary of the College Association of North America has been quoted as saying that there are twelve thousand college men in New York City alone who are down and out through vice. "Talk of the ravages of war. The ravages of war, pestilence and disease combined are as nothing compared with the awful moral ravages wrought in the teen period. The shores are strewn thick with the wasted lives of those who have been wrecked in youth."

"We have been seeking results too far afield and overlooking great opportunities near at hand. If you take a census of a Christian congregation and ask those who were converted before their eighteenth birthday to rise, five-sixths of your congregation will stand. This means that five-sixths of all the people who give themselves to Christ do it on the under side of the eighteenth year. Put beside this the fact that we have more than 12,000,000 children and youth in the Protestant Sunday Schools of America under eighteen years of age and you will see that our great evangelistic opportunity does not lie outside of the Church, but inside, in the Sunday School department. Here we have a vast army, ready and waiting for the Christian call."^[1]

It is one thing to lead souls to Christ, it is quite another thing to hold them when once they have been won. The serious time for drifting is between the ages of twelve and twenty. If we could but safeguard these years we would hold for the Church many who drift out upon the sea of life, make shipwreck of their hopes and break the hearts of those who are interested in them.

"An investigation in the Wesleyan Church of England showed that only ten per cent of the Sunday School were held in active membership in the Church. Ten per cent. were held in a merely nominal relationship. Eighty per cent. were lost entirely. This is a fair statement of the situation in many churches. We have lost multitudes of our youth who might have been saved if they had been properly cared for.

"At the very time the Church loses its grip upon the boys and girls the public school loses its grip also. The exodus begins about the fifth grade, and at the eighth grade fifty per cent. of the scholars have departed. At the twelfth grade, near the middle teens, ninety per cent. of the scholars have gone out from the public schools. Thus these two most powerful forces in the creation of character, the Church and the School, lose their hold upon youth at the same time.

"The home also loses its hold at this period. Up to his middle teens your youth accepts everything on the authority of others, but midway of the critical teen period there comes an awakening. The consciousness of his own personality, his right to make decisions for himself comes to him for the first time. Sometimes spontaneously, sometimes gradually, but always he breaks with authority. He insists upon deciding matters for himself. Parents may counsel, but they cannot determine^[1]."

"A gentleman came to a friend of mine at the close of an address which he had delivered and said to him, 'I was much interested in what you said about the boys we lose. I teach a class of the finished product.' 'Where do you teach?' said I. 'In the State prison' he said. A few years ago seventy-five per cent. of the inmates of the Minnesota State prison were boys who had once been in Sunday School and had been permitted to drift away. The later teen age, sixteen to twenty, is the criminal period. It is an appalling thing that 12,000 children were brought before the courts of New York in 1909, and in the same year more than

15,000 boys and girls suffered arrest in Chicago. Our criminal ranks are added to, at the rate of 300,000 a year, and in the vast majority of cases the criminal course is begun in the teen age. Is it necessary? Is this awful waste--this moral havoc--unavoidable? I believe not. Recently a young man in his teens was convicted of theft in the court of Milwaukee. When the judge asked him if he had anything to say before sentence was pronounced upon him, the young man arose, pale with excitement and said, 'Your honour, my father and mother died when I was three years old. I never had anyone who loved or cared for me. I have been kicked about all my life. Judge, I never would have been a thief if I had had a chance.' This is the pitiful plea of thousands who have been wrecked around us. They were not shepherded and they went astray."

There is a way to hold the majority of those whom we may win to the Saviour. A friend of mine led to Christ a young man who had gone to the very depths of sin and shame. He was a drunkard; he had disgraced his father's name; had broken his wife's heart, and when his little boy died he did not have enough money to bury the child decently; when the mother put the child in the grave the father was wild with drink, and he was buried without his father being present. But my friend won this man to Christ. After he was saved, every day for three weeks he went to sit by his side and talk with him; he guarded him at the critical time; he kept him from growing discouraged; he hindered him from drinking. To-day this man is himself one of the most noted rescue mission workers in the world, and is being used of God to save multitudes of men who like himself had gone down through drink.

It is what we are ourselves that largely counts in the holding of our friends for Christ. Paul wrote to Titus saying, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works ... that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you," which is only another way of saying that a Christian life is an unanswerable argument in favour of Christ. When our lives are right with God; when we keep ourselves unspotted from the world; when we quickly confess our own failure or wrongdoing; when we have a concern not only that others should be saved, but that they might do something for Christ after their salvation, it is comparatively easy to hold them, and to keep from drifting those who have just started along the way.

When my friend S.H. Hadley, the great rescue missionary, was lying in his coffin, a timid knock was heard at the door of the room where the body was resting. When the one who had knocked entered the room it was found that he was a drunkard, he had fallen from a high position to the very depths of despair, and as he stood timidly in the presence of the sorrowing friends of the great man, he said, "I thought I would like to come and look into his face and if I might be permitted to do so I would like to touch his hand. He did his best to win me while he was living and now that he is dead I cannot let his body be placed in the grave without coming here by the side of his casket to yield myself to Christ. All that he has said has followed me and I cannot get away from it."

Timothy knew the Scriptures, and a familiarity with God's Word is one of the best preventives in the case of drifting. One verse of Scripture committed to memory each day would help us to overcome the tempter; would keep us in loving touch with Jesus Christ; would inspire us to higher and holier living; and these suggestions made to those whom we win to Christ would keep them from wandering. It is the man who does not know his Bible who finds himself an easy prey to the wicked one. The ability to pray is also a God-given force which keeps us from drifting. When we read the Bible God talks to us; when we pray we talk to Him. We cannot always speak plainly of our condition to those about us, but we may tell Him what we are and what we wish we might have been. And while it is true that He knows before we speak, it is also true that in the telling we draw nearer to Him, and drawing nearer we absorb a little bit more of His

spirit, and in that spirit we stand.

Service is also one of the surest preventives from wandering. It is when the brain is idle that evil thoughts master it; when the heart is given up to impure imaginations that we find it easy to fall. And it is when we are busy lifting others' burdens; making the way easier for others to travel; comforting those who are in distress; speaking a word of cheer to the cheerless, and above all, when we are seeking to lead others to Christ, that we ourselves grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If these things are true, and we know they are, then it is the duty of every Christian not only to seek to win another to Christ, but by all means to seek to hold him when once he is won, and that which we know holds us will keep others from stumbling.

The suggestions made above are for the young as well as the more mature. Young people will be interested in spiritual things if we have sufficient interest in them ourselves to make them attractive.

If we would show as great interest in helping to keep those whom we may have won for Christ, as we revealed when we were seeking them, fewer of them would drift.

1. Rev Edgar Blake.

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