

“Meeting God in the Stages of Life: Young Adulthood”

This is the third in this series of messages called “Meeting God in the Stages of Life”. Today we will be looking at “Young Adulthood”. Traditionally, the age range given for “young adults” is 18-30 year olds. I’d like to broaden this to refer to those between the ages of 19-35. Let’s give the 30-35 year olds a break and include them in as “young adults”!

40-50 years ago this age group was easier to describe. There was much more uniformity. After high school you would get a job, get married, leave home, and perhaps start a family. Of course, some young men and women stayed single.

Today, it’s a different picture. For one thing, *it’s taking longer to launch children*. More youth out of high school go to college or further their education in some way. There is a longer period when they depend on their parents - at least on their parents’ money! *People are waiting longer to get married – staying single longer. Many young adult couples are living together without being married. And many within the 19-35 age bracket have already been married, and are now separated or divorced. Some are in their second marriage, having to relate to an ex-spouse, perhaps having step-children.* So, there are many more different life situations and life styles within young adulthood today.

Someone has called this period of life “Provisional Adulthood.” I like that. Because at least in the earlier years of young adulthood – people in their 20’s – they are “kind of an adult”, but not really an adult. You may think that’s an insult to 20 somethings, but if you have doubts that many people in their early 20’s aren’t really fully responsible adults, check out college kids on Spring Break!

Often, there is a great amount of anxiety when young adults graduate from high school or college and have to make their way in the adult world. Our daughter Karin graduated from college in the month of December. Within a few months she got a teaching job in Maryland. I recall a phone conversation Nancy and I had with her, where she expressed how hard it was teaching and functioning in the real world! She visited home on Mother’s Day. I said to her, “Aren’t you glad you don’t have to worry about college finals?” Her answer: “I kind of wish I were back there in college!” *So, one of the big tasks of this stage is to transition fully into the adult world.*

As we move to the later stages of this period (say ages 30-35), other things come into play. About the age of 30, we get our first inkling that we are mortal, that we don’t have forever on this earth! Often people are restless during this period. They usually pick on what’s causing them the most problems: If married, they may be asking, “Do I want to stay married to this person? If they are not happy with their job, they may ponder, “Do I want to do this job for the rest of my life?” I myself, when I was 30 years of age, decided to leave parish ministry, and got a job in the trust department of a bank – I was pretty sure I didn’t want to be a pastor the rest of my life.

But on the other hand, for some ***men*** in their 30’s, it’s a time when they begin to settle down. For ***women*** who have married early, hitting 35 can be a kind of “retirement” – the kids are growing up. And if the mom is focused on being a mom to her kids, often she is not sure

who she is and what she wants in life. *So you see, there is a lot of “stuff” going on in these young adult years!*

What does the Bible say that might help people in these young adult years of life? It’s hard to find any Scripture that addresses “young adulthood”. One reason is that in Bible times, the life span was much shorter. People in their early to mid-thirties were closer to the end of their life expectancy. Scripture doesn’t single out stages like “adolescence” or “young adult”. In fact, I’ve read that the concept of “adolescence” was not even identified until after World War I.

Our Scripture lesson today from Titus does give advice to younger men and women (as well as for older men and women). Titus 2:3-5 says this: “Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited.”

In this Scripture it says that older women are to set an example for younger women to do these things: “Love their husbands and children” (vs. 4b); “be self-controlled and pure” (vs. 5); “be busy at home” (vs. 5) – this was a culture where most women stayed in the home; “be kind” (vs. 5) – who can argue with that!; “be subject to their husbands” (vs. 5) – this theme is a whole other sermon! We should remember that this was a patriarchal society. Men were valued more than women. This Scripture says the young women are to be subject to their husbands so the word of God would not be discredited. Things are different today in our culture.

The passage in Titus chapter 2 goes on and there is a word to younger men: “Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled” (Titus 2:6). Be self-controlled. It’s a short list for the men!

While there are hardly any Scriptures that directly address young adults, let’s think how faith and a commitment to Christ can help shape one’s young adult years in positive way. First, some words for single young adults.

Commit yourself to live a life of purity for the Lord. In the advice given to young men and women in Titus 2 that we looked at, women are urged to be *pure*, men are told to exercise *self-control* (this is the *only* directive given to men!). Americans today in their 20’s or early to mid-thirties, have never lived in a culture where traditional moral values have held sway (especially in regards to sexual morality). If you look at TV sitcoms and films that either depict young adults, or are popular with the young adult crowd, having sex out of marriage is the norm, coarse language and profanity are widely accepted. In many ways we are like first century Christians, who lived in an atmosphere of sensuality and self-indulgence. Against that backdrop these first century believers are called to *live a holy life*. For instance, we have these words in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have

already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness.”

In talking with single young adults, many have told me that it’s a “jungle out there” – the first thing many want to do when you date them is get you into bed. It’s not easy to live a pure life in a time like ours. It helps if we have a relationship with God and the Holy Spirit in us, to give us strength. One thing often overlooked: it’s wise to link up with 1 or 2 other people, who can encourage us and hold us accountable to live with moral integrity.

Another consideration for young adults who are unmarried: Accept your singleness and make the most of it. There is a tendency on the part of many single people to almost obsess over finding a mate. Or to kind of feel sorry for yourself if you aren’t dating. This can lead to one’s rushing into some ill-advised relationship out of neediness, or just being miserable because we’re single. It helps if we can accept our singleness, and be at peace with it. In Philippians 4:4 the Apostle Paul wrote: “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” As far as we know, Paul was single when he wrote those words.

If you’re a single young adult, can you be comfortable in your singleness, and realize that there can even be benefits in that? I’m thinking of a woman whose husband died when this lady was fairly young. At one point, a man in her congregation wanted to marry her. But she laughed, and said she liked being able to do what she wants. Actually, that is a healthier perspective than the person *obsessed with and driven to* getting a girl friend or boy friend, or rushing into a relationship. One of the advantages of being single is that one can devote one’s self to the Lord in a way that married person cannot. This reality is highlighted in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34. “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.”

Being a young adult, and single, can also be a time when we can “work on ourselves” – to work at being as emotionally and spiritually healthy as possible. Young adulthood is a time when we should be *breaking away emotionally* from our family of origin to establish our own life – moving from the place where our parents are the center of our life, to developing a network of friendships that in a sense become our “new family”. For those who are separated or divorced and are now *single again*, one of the most important things is to gain self-knowledge and grow as a result of what you experienced. When I talk to people after a marriage breakup, I encourage them not to rush back into a new relationship too quickly, but to take the time to learn from what happened, recognize what you have contributed to the failure of your marriage, and how you need to change.

Since so many important decisions are made in our young adult years, there can be great value in seeking God’s guidance. Choices are made about career, friendships, who we date, where we live, our church involvement, etc. God is interested in our lives and longs to guide us,

so we can know the joy and fulfillment that comes when we are in His will.

Let me say some things about those young adults who are married. It is important for married people (as well as singles) to break away emotionally from their family of origin, and shift their primary loyalty from parents to spouse (and children). You may be thinking, “For heavens’ sake, if I’m married, doesn’t that mean I’ve grown up and moved beyond my parents!” Well, not necessarily! Often when couples are having problems in marriage, it may stem from issues having to do with parents, or family of origin. Maybe one or both parents can’t let go of us, and they’re still trying to run our life. Or maybe as young adults, we still haven’t moved in a healthy way from being too dependent on our parents. Jesus talked about the importance of committing ourselves to the new bond of marriage as our primary loyalty: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife” (Mark 10:7). “Leave” here does not just refer to physically leaving our parents and moving out, but “leaving them” emotionally too, and shifting our primary loyalties to our spouse and children.

Part of this loyalty to our new family means trying to work things through if difficulties arise in our marriage. The third through the tenth years of marriage is a stage of marriage some call “Realistic Love” – when the euphoria and glow of the new marriage begins to wear off. We see our spouse as he or she really is. At this point we can experience disappointment or even disillusionment. So, it’s wise to make that extra effort to *work at our marriage* so it will last. This might mean taking marriage enrichment courses or studies, or getting counseling if serious problems develop. It might necessitate our not being too child focused that we forget to keep romance as part of our marriage, and take quality time to be with our mate. Remember part of the advice given to young women in Titus 2 was to love their husbands and to love their children – that also goes for *men loving their wives* enough to work at making their marriage better.

Many issues for married young adults have to do with parenting (if there are children). Fortunately, there are many helpful resources today for parents – books, tapes, seminars. Many churches provide opportunities for parents to share their experiences in parenting and to learn from each other.

Many young adults today feel they are under the gun in terms of time. They are busy, busy, busy! I once did a survey and the young adults who responded listed this as a big issue. Not enough time! If we have active children in the home, parents probably are caught up in a hectic schedule, taking their children here and there. There is no easy cure for this! But here a couple of quick thoughts.

Sometimes we get in over our head because we haven’t learned to choose our priorities. We can allow our children to be in too much. We ran into this situation with one of our sons. He wanted to be in everything. Finally, Nancy and I just said, “You can’t do it all. You’re going to have to pick the things that are most important. We found out that other parents had had to do that too with their children.

Sometimes we as adults are overcommitted – we trying to do too much, and we don’t know how

to say “no”. As a result we get stressed out. Perhaps we as adults need to cut back, and choose the priorities in our own life.

The young adult years (19-35) are a time when it’s important to form new relationships.

Friendships, relationships are a “big deal” for those in this age bracket. Many start new jobs, get married, move to new locations, and this often means leaving old friends behind. So we have to develop a network of *new friendships*. This is easy for some, and hard for others, who may not be as outgoing. There is truth in the old adage, “To have a friend you need to be a friend”. You can’t sit around and wait for people to knock on your door and say, “I want to be your new friend”. For some, making new friendships may mean moving out of our comfort zone, and making an effort to cultivate new relationships.

For a Christian believer, it is important to develop friendships with other believers – so we can be encouraged and stimulated in our faith.

A few years ago I performed a wedding ceremony in Nashville for the granddaughter of some friends of ours. The young lady had moved to Nashville after high school. She went by herself. She knew nobody there. She hoped to pursue a career in music. To her credit, she got involved in a strong church there, and built a new network of Christian friends. Her postings on Facebook often highlight activities at the church and with her Christian friends.

I have merely touched the surface of some of the many issues that challenge people during the young adults years. Perhaps a good place to end is just to remind us that ***Jesus offers His friendship and power during these eventful years of life.*** Jesus was 30 years old (a young adult) when He came out of obscurity to begin His ministry. As far as we can tell, the disciples He surrounded Himself with were not a collection of old geezers, but youthful men (and women)! As they followed Him, gradually they began to realize they were on a journey with *GOD*.

Christ confronts us at every stage of life with His claim to be Savior, and Lord of all creation! He invites us to follow Him, and in so doing start on a journey with *God Himself!*

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