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“Making a Difference at Any Age”

2 Kings 22:1-23:25

7.05.09

How are we doing living out the truth of the gospel- that our lives have changed when we come into contact with Jesus? Are we living out a transformed, different-than-the-world-around me kind of life? Or are we just casual Christians? George Barna explains the difference between a Captive and a Casual Christian. He writes, “The lives of Captive Christians are defined by their faith; their worldview is built around their core spiritual beliefs and resultant values. Casual Christians are defined by the desire to please God, family, and other people while extracting as much enjoyment and comfort from the world as possible... Casuals are about moderation in all things while Captives are about extreme devotion to their God regardless of the worldly consequences.” Barna’s research has revealed that 66% of the adult population are Casual Christians while 16% of the adult population are Captive Christians.

Are you a Casual or Captive Christian? A Casual Christian may go to church regularly. A Casual Christian may talk about Jesus. But a Casual Christian’s lifestyle may not be any different than the world’s. It ebbs and flows with the current of the culture. A Casual Christian will not change the culture around them but will rather just blend in. One of the problems with being a Casual Christian- claim Christ as Savior but don’t live like Him is that it tragically impacts one’s witness for Jesus. Brennan Manning writes, “The greatest source of atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips but deny Him by their lifestyles. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”

Is there someone who can teach us how to live a life that makes a difference in our generation? Can we find examples of men or women who are captive God worshippers? There are several examples in the Bible to choose from. But the individual that we will be turning our attention to is an Old Testament King. If you are reading the *One Year Bible* you just finished reading about him. His name is Josiah. The world around him was extremely wicked, with few seeking after Yahweh. Many were caught up in idolatrous worship and depraved lifestyles. And yet he didn’t allow the culture to take him down. Instead, he rose above his situation in life and impacted the

generation in which he served. **Josiah has a lot to teach us about the lives we live today and how we can make a difference in our generation.**

If you are reading along in *The One Year Bible* you have been reading 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings- a lot of historical information regarding the kings of Israel. Let me give you a quick synopsis of the kings of Israel. As we have been reading the Old Testament we have seen the leadership of the people of God handed down from Moses to Joshua. After Joshua's death a full generation of Israelites died and a new generation grew up that didn't know the LORD nor what He had accomplished, they turned to the gods of the peoples around them- Baal and Asherah. God became angry and sent raiders to turn the people back to Him. Once they came to their senses and cried out to God He sent them Judges. Judges were the primary leaders of Israel. Their job was not to hold court, listen to complaints or make legal decisions like we think of judges today. Their primary responsibility was to deliver Israel from foreign threat or opposition. Judges 2:16 reads, "Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders." The Israelites would, after a time of peace, fall back into their false religions and idol worship and God would send more enemies to turn their eyes back on Him. They would cry out for help and He'd send another judge to save them. This was their pattern for some time. Ray Ortlund calls this sequence "The cycle of apostasy, oppression, repentance and deliverance." Toward the end of Samuel's life, his sons were in position to lead the Israelites. Unfortunately, Samuel's sons were wicked and the people didn't want to follow them. So they asked Samuel for a king to rule them. The Israelites saw other countries and peoples had their own king and they wanted their own. They wanted to be just like all the others. This was a huge slap in God's face. He was their leader throughout their history but they wanted a human being to rule them. God told Samuel to give them what they wanted.

According to God's command, a king was to be the spiritual leader of the nation. He was also forbidden to accumulate horses, chariots and money. Instead, he was to seek God and trust Him. He was also to lead the people in the way they should go. Saul was chosen as the first king over all twelve tribes. Years later, David ruled and then his son Solomon. After Solomon's death, the twelve tribes were broken up into ten tribes of Israel- the northern kingdom ruled by Jeroboam and two tribes of Judah- the southern kingdom ruled by Solomon's son, Rehoboam. The

northern kingdom's leadership could be characterized by wicked, idol worshipping kings who chose not to follow Yahweh. They chased after the false gods of the foreigners. Israel brought to the throne 20 kings before they were overtaken by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and exiled to Assyria as a judgment from God for their abandonment of Him. In that same timeframe, Judah was ruled by 12 kings. Some followed in the footsteps of David- seeking God wholeheartedly. They tore down shrines, idols and stopped other pagan practices to try to purify God's people. Others were wicked and built up pagan shrines, idols and instituted heinous practices. Josiah became Judah's 16th king.

Please turn in your bibles to 2 Kings chapter 22 starting with verse 1. **[SLIDE]**

Josiah impacted the generation he served. We can too if we apply some of the lessons from his life. The first lesson we can learn from King Josiah is:

I. Your past doesn't have to determine your future. **[SLIDE]**

Josiah didn't a wonderful upbringing. He didn't grow up in a godly family where the Lord was cherished and followed. Josiah became king due to the assassination of his father, Amon. According to 2 Kings 21, Amon did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He was involved in idolatry and encouraged God's children to do the same. He was a wicked man. Amon reigned as king in Jerusalem only two years before his officials conspired against him and killed him. So Josiah's father was not a good example but he must've had a good role model in his grandfather Manasseh. Manasseh was actually worse than Amon. He did much more evil in the eyes of God. Instead of being a champion for God, Manasseh turned God's children away from their Heavenly Father. He shed innocent blood. He placed an Asherah pole in the temple of the LORD. 2 Chronicles 33:9 sums up Manasseh's life and leadership, "Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites." Josiah's grandfather led God's chosen people to become more wicked than the pagan nations which existed prior to the Israelites arriving in the Promised Land.

This was Josiah's upbringing and yet he did not let it determine how he'd live his life or how he'd govern his people. Josiah chose to follow God rather than in his father's footsteps.

How does one keep from following the steps of ungodly parents or a difficult upbringing? Some of us may be emotionally overweight. Our past is so traumatic that there is a heavy weight on us that keeps us from moving forward. We need to be free from it. Or maybe your past wasn't traumatic but you didn't have a godly example to watch. There is hope for anyone who knows Jesus Christ.

Let me share three steps that can help you to overcome your past. Granted these will not be easy steps. However, over time they can work to help you move forward in victory. **The first step to help you overcome your past is to forgive.** First seek to break the cycle by choosing to forgive your family. Don't wait for them to ask for forgiveness. It may not happen. Let me be clear that forgiveness is not excusing what they did, nor is it approving or forgetting. Nor does it mean that your feelings should be positive toward them. Rather, forgiveness is an act of the will to choose not to hold them to their sins or seek retaliation. Instead you place them in God's hands. When you take the initiative to forgive your emotions and feelings are no longer chained to the past. Forgiveness releases the offending party and frees you. R.T. Kendall writes, "The person who gains the most from forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving." Freedom comes with forgiveness.

Maybe you grew up in a good home but you have made some poor choices that you feel will haunt you the rest of your life. You do not have to be labeled by that sin or mistake. That sin doesn't need to be the description of your whole life. **You are more than your mistakes.**

The bible is full of examples of people who have made some terrible mistakes in the past and yet they have not been paralyzed by them. They have been able to move forward. Moses was a murderer whom God used to save a nation. David was an adulterer and murderer and yet God characterized him as a man after His own heart. Apostle Paul attacked and imprisoned Christians before his conversion. What enabled these biblical characters and also many in this church today to not be chained to the past? The answer is they confessed their sins to God and asked for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 reads, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." The passage doesn't suggest that God will forgive us of only the little sins. It says to confess our sins. Jesus' sacrifice on the

cross is sufficient and acceptable for all sins- no matter how heinous. After experiencing God's forgiveness they were able to also forgive themselves. The gratitude for being forgiven motivated them to make a difference for the Lord. Some in this church have actually turned their most painful, sinful experiences into their most effective ministry helping others. And you can too. You can be freed from your past sins to be a new creation in Jesus.

Forgiveness is never easy. It is very difficult to do. Even children struggle with wanting to forgive someone who has hurt them. It is much easier to hold a grudge than to forgive. You may have heard this story before. My son Mac, who at the time was three and a half years old, shared his frustration about a neighbor girl who had treated him poorly a few days earlier. Mac said, "I don't like Becky (her name has been changed). She is mean." I responded with a statement I believed would help my son move past his hurt, "Mac, Becky doesn't know Jesus. She needs Jesus in her life." But Mac didn't seem to agree with me. He responded back, "Jesus is gonna give her a wedgie."

The second step to help you overcome your past is to follow the example of godly

Christians. You may have not had the godliest upbringing. So one of the best things you can do is to watch other Christians that you see good character qualities in. How do you become a godly student? Watch and meet with other godly students who want to make a difference. How do you live for Christ in a secular college or university? Watch others who are doing just that. How do you live a god honoring life as a single? Join the single's group and learn from those around you. Maybe you didn't have a positive example of what a good marriage looks like growing up. Choose to learn from couples who are making good decisions in their marriages. How do you become a better husband or wife? Check into our Marriage Mentoring. You can spend six to eight meetings with a trained couple and learn from them. We have already heard of couples benefiting from this ministry. If you have interest in connecting with another couple in mentoring please see Mike & Betsy Loehr or Sally Howell. How do you raise your children as a committed mother or father? Watch other committed Christians who have been successful as parents. Ask them questions. Consider asking them to mentor you. Young mothers have the blessing of seeing some wonderful examples of women who are doing a great job of raising their children. If you'd like more one-on-one opportunities with another woman please contact Beth

Pearson who is in charge of women's mentoring. She'd love to match you with another woman in the church to help you learn and grow. We are blessed to have some great role models in our church who have successfully navigated the parenting waters and have seen their kids grow up and thrive as believers. Following the example of godly Christians will help in overcoming the past.

The third step to help you overcome your past is to focus- set your mind on good things.

The mind is very powerful. It can change your destiny. And it starts with what we think about.

“Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.” What we allow our minds to think about will determine our future.

The saying, “Garbage in; garbage out” is true. You fill your mind with garbage and the overflow of those thoughts will cause you to live out the garbage. You may have heard many negative comments or opinions growing up or as you were older and made poor choices. Statements like, “You are no good. Why can't you be more like your sister or brother? You will never amount to anything. You will never change.”

The bible says to take every thought captive. Recognize when these thoughts come your way. Recognize that they are not good but are destructive. Then refuse to allow those thoughts access to your mind. They are lies and you should not dwell on them. Instead, replace true thoughts about who you are from God's point of view. These truths come from the Word of God. Allow these thoughts to run free in your mind. For example, the saying we repeat at communion which we will be doing in a few minutes, “I am totally accepted, fully pleasing, deeply loved, completely forgiven and empowered to live a new life in Christ because of the cross and resurrection of Jesus” can bring healing to the fractured heart and soul.

If you take these three steps then your past can be just that- your past.

The second lesson we can learn from King Josiah is:

II. Your age doesn't have to determine your effectiveness for God. [SLIDE]

Josiah became king at the young age of 8 after his father's assassination. At the age of 16 he began to follow the LORD. When he turned 20, Josiah began to purge Judah of all the evil practices and idolatry. He smashed the Asherah poles, idols and images. He even went so far as digging up false priests' bones and burned them on the idolatrous alters in order to desecrate them. He relentlessly pursued the purification of Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry. When Josiah was 26 years old he set in motion the repairing of the temple of the Lord. While work was being completed on the Temple, Hilkiah found the Book of the Law- which most likely is Deuteronomy. King Josiah responded by making sweeping changes and also instituting the Passover celebration. These changes turned the people back to Yahweh.

Josiah made a difference for the LORD from a young age. He swam upstream against the current of the culture around him. He didn't allow others to stop him from following God. And Josiah made sweeping changes that affected the way the people lived and worshiped. Remember, prior to Josiah's reign there were 50+ years of idolatrous worship and pagan practices. More than one generation was entrenched in this lifestyle. The steps Josiah took were courageous and difficult. He would rather take flack from the people around him than from God. He didn't care if he was in the minority because he was right. William Jennings Bryan wrote, "Never be afraid to stand with the minority which is right, for the minority which is right will one day be the majority; always be afraid to stand with the majority which is wrong, for the majority which is wrong will one day be the minority."

You are old enough to make a difference for the LORD right now. Whether you are 7 years old or 90 years old you can be effective in serving God. If you know Jesus then you have God's Spirit residing in you. That Spirit is characterized by power, love and self-discipline. Last month, several of our children took steps of faith to make a difference in our community. They handed out over 800 invitations for Vacation Bible School. As a result, their neighbors, classmates, teammates and friends attended VBS and some of them accepted Jesus Christ.

Parents, please be careful not to squelch the passion and desire of our children. They are usually bigger risk takers for God than we are. God loves childlike faith more than adult, skeptical faith. It is easy if we are not careful to hinder their ministry by our negative words or unwillingness to

help them accomplish their ideas. If our kids hear, “No we can’t do that.” Or “I don’t have enough time to pick up your friends to take them to church.” Or “That is not a good idea” they will at some point quit attempting things for God. The best thing you can do is cultivate your kid’s passion. Help them to realize their ministry desires. In the process your faith will be touched by God. You will see God do some really neat things through your kids’ lives. And your ministry territory will expand.

If you are in Jr. High School you do not need to wait until you are in high school to be effective for Christ. If you are in high school you do not have to wait until you are in college to be effective. You have so many opportunities in front of you to touch people for Christ. Look for opportunities in the lunchroom to reach out to kids who don’t have many friends. Reach out to people on your sports teams, or in drama or band or at your job. Invite them to know Jesus and come to church with you. And like Josiah, you have many opportunities to be pressured to follow the crowd. Stand strong even when you are in the minority. Having convictions does challenge others. And being a follower of Jesus requires us to be different not in a weird way but in a way that honors and draws others to Him.

If you are starting or are already in college you do not need to wait until you have a career and money to make a difference. You know who is hurting in your classes. It might be someone who is homesick. It might be someone who is having a tough time with the schoolwork. It might be an exchange student trying to learn the customs. Many of the exchange students have nowhere to go for holidays. Maybe you can invite one or two to your place so they do not have to be alone. Reach out to them with the love that Jesus has reached out to you with. Invite them to join you when you go to church or to a ministry on campus. Don’t settle for getting only an education. If you only get a degree you have wasted those four years at school. Get a degree and make a difference in others lives.

In college you will also need to choose whether you will be like Josiah and swim against the culture around you or whether you will allow the culture to take you wherever it is going. May your desire to follow the God who saved you override the pull of the culture around you.

If you are in your career don't wait until you retire to make a difference. You have a huge sphere of influence right in front of your nose. Remember that you are not placed in your job just to earn a paycheck. You are wasting your time if that is all you are there for. Make a difference in your workplace by being someone who is compassionate, appreciative, thankful, positive and a hard worker. That kind of person has a great amount of clout in the workplace. Fellow employees will be coming to you for advice and for information on why you live the way you do. If you live this way in the workplace, I guarantee others will want what you have. And when you invite them to an event at church they will want to come because they will want to be around you and will desire what you have. Now those are real perks- seeing coworker cross the threshold of faith. That is divine compensation for living for Christ.

Maybe you are a stay at home mom with several kids. You can make a difference even now when your plate is so full. You do not need to wait until your kids are older. Consider getting together with non-Christian mothers and spending time together. Invite them to the Esther class going on right now at our church. Consider bringing them to the ROCK Center to allow the kids to play and you and the other mothers sit and talk (as best as you can). Or invite other mothers to go for a walk or go to the zoo or children's museum or even Chuck E Cheese's. Or consider your errands as ministry. Take advantage of those opportunities when you interact with the public at places like Wal-Mart or the doctor's office or grocery stores, etc. Look for ways to touch others with the love of Jesus.

If you are retired you have many opportunities to continue to be effective for God. There are many ministries that desire to equip those in their second half of life. Please don't lose your spiritual sharpness. Allow God to hone it and use it in other's lives. By the way, those of us who are younger are watching you. We want you to finish strong. We want you to stay committed to Christ and His church. We are watching to see if you check out or become a critic of the church. Your faithfulness to Christ over the years strengthens us and gives us hope. Keep following Jesus.

Josiah didn't allow his age to determine his effectiveness for God. You can make a difference at whatever age you are right now.

The third lesson that will help us to make a difference in our generation from King Josiah is:

III. Your amount of biblical knowledge doesn't have to determine your obedience to the Word of God. [SLIDE]

When the Book of the Law was read to Josiah he immediately applied the truths to his life. He tore his robes in repentance and commanded the leaders to make changes that would get him and the people right with God. Josiah brought all the people together and read God's word to them and recommitted himself and the people to the covenant God had made with their ancestors. Listen to 2 Kings 23:3, "The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant." And then Josiah instituted the Passover celebration. Just imagine what he would've done had he had more than the Book of the Law.

Family, we have the complete Bible in our hands. We have been given God's love letters. What kind of difference is it making in your life? If our spiritual input is based solely on whether we attend church on a given week and can ingest what was preached that Sunday then we cannot expect to see many changes in our lives. That's like me going golfing once in a while and expecting to improve over that time. There needs to be some dedication and work to become better as a golfer and there needs to be some reading, study, application and prayer in order to grow in Christlikeness. Church attendance is only part of the growth equation but not all of it.

It is not how much you know; it is what you do with what you know. I love teaching Foundations class to new believers. It is so encouraging to see them learn a truth and put it into practice immediately. Each new truth comes with excitement and commitment. That is the way God wants us to apply the truths as we are confronted with them. He doesn't want us to be just bible knowers. He wants us to be bible doers.

What happened when Josiah lived out these three life lessons? Listen to 2 Kings 23:25, "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his

heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.” Also 2 Chron 34:33, “As long as he lived, they (the Israelites) did not fail to follow the LORD, the God of their fathers.” Because Josiah swam upstream in the minority the majority changed so that the minority became the majority. So what will you do with these three life lessons?

There is a lot being said about Michael Jackson’s life and how he died. Some is good but a lot of it is bad and really quite tragic. I doubt that is the way he’d want to be remembered. How will you be remembered for the life you lived as a Christian? It all depends on how you apply the life lessons from Josiah. If you do live them out then you will change and those around you will be greatly impacted for eternity.

Let’s pray