

The Dangers of Middle Age

by Samuel Logan Brengle

The sermon warns against the dangers of middle age, including corruption, sin, and shame, and encourages listeners to maintain their spiritual youth and fervor through comradeship with God.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:15

Topics: "Spiritual Vigilance", "Renewal of Faith"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle addresses the often-overlooked dangers faced by middle-aged individuals, emphasizing that they are not immune to the temptations and sins that can lead to spiritual downfall. He recounts the tragic stories of biblical figures like David and Solomon, as well as contemporary examples of fallen leaders, to illustrate the importance of vigilance against the lusts of the flesh. Brengle encourages the middle-aged to maintain their spiritual fervor and to guard against the creeping loss of their early devotion to God. He highlights the need for constant renewal of faith amidst life's burdens and responsibilities, urging believers to find strength and victory through a close relationship with Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a proactive approach to spiritual health, reminding the congregation that true joy and effectiveness come from walking closely with God.

Transcript

We read and hear much about the dangers of youth, and they are very many and often very deadly; but how little do we hear about the dangers of the middle-aged! And yet they, too, are very many and very deadly.

I was vividly reminded of this only recently, when a man, considerably past fifty years of age, stopped me on the street and sought an interview. After a rather close examination, in which I sought to locate and diagnose his spiritual disease, he told me of his sins and temptations. He had been a Christian, but had fallen; he was becoming more and more entangled in a network of evil, and was sinking, deeper and deeper in the quicksands of his iniquity -- and his sins were sins of the flesh!

What most amazed me some years ago, when I began to consider this subject, was the fact that the middle-aged are not altogether safe from the awful corruption and blasting sin which lies lurking in the lusts of the flesh.

John, when but a young man in Egypt, fully and grandly overcame this danger. He kept himself pure and set an example for the ages. But in middle life David, and Solomon, his son, with all their light and wisdom,

fell grievously and wallowed in sin and shame, thus bringing reproach to this day upon God's people and God's cause, stirring up the enemies of the Lord to mock and blaspheme: and, doubtless, encouraging others by their example to fall into like sins.

But we do not have to go back to ancient history nor to the ranks of those who make no profession of religion to find how sins of the flesh overthrow middle-aged men if they do not watch and pray and walk softly with the Lord. I shall never forget the shock and chill that went through the hearts of American Christians some years ago, when an evangelist -- with silvering hair, the author of a number of books of great spiritual insight and power, and one of the mightiest preachers it has ever been my lot to hear -- fell into sin and shame. Oh! it was pitiful! It was heartbreaking for his influence to be ruined, his good name blackened, his reputation gone, his family put to shame, God's cause mocked, and for a soul whom he should have shepherded to be dragged to the mouth of Hell to gratify his passing pleasure.

And there are a number of others whom I have known who had great opportunities of usefulness, whose influence was widespread, and who walked in a broad day of spiritual light, but who sank into a black night of corruption, sin, and shame.

So let not only young men, but matured men as well, take heed lest they fall. Let them watch for and guard themselves against the beginnings of sin -- the unclean thought, the lascivious look, the impure imagination, the unholy desire. Let them hate 'even the garment spotted by the flesh.'

Let them beware of selling for a mess of pottage their good name, their sphere of usefulness, their place among God's people, the friendships of years, the honor of their children, the happiness of their home, the smile and favor of God, and their hope of Heaven. Let them look 'diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.' (Hebrews xii. 15, 16.)

But the more constant spiritual danger of the middle-aged is the loss of the freshness of their early experience, the dew of their spiritual morning, their 'first love,' when they were 'holiness unto the Lord ' and when they ran after Jesus 'in the wilderness.' (Jeremiah ii. 2, 3.)

There is nothing in the world so wonderful, so beautiful and so delightful as the constant renewal of spiritual youth in the midst of the increasing cares and burdens, the infirmities and losses and disappointments of middle life and old age. And there is nothing so sad as the gradual loss of fervor, of simplicity, of heart devotion, of unfeigned faith, of triumphing hope, of glowing love, of spiritual youth.

The Psalmist called upon his soul to bless the Lord, who satisfied his mouth with good things, so that his youth -- his soul's youth -- was renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm ciii. 1-5.)

But multitudes, instead of thus being renewed, fall into decay; they lose the bloom and blessedness of their early experience and become like Ephraim, of whom the prophet said: 'Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not.' (Hosea vii. 9) This loss may steal upon us like a creeping paralysis if we do not watch and pray.

1. It may come through a widening experience of the weakness and fickleness of man. We are continually tempted to lean upon men rather than upon God and His Word; and when men fail and fall we feel as though the foundations were swept away. At such times the Tempter will whisper: 'What is the use of your trying to live a holy life? There is none good, no, not one.' Then if we do not at once flee to and hide

ourselves in Jesus, and lift our eyes to God and stir up our faith towards Him, a chill of discouragement and doubt and fear will sweep over us, lukewarmness will take the place of the warm, throbbing experience of youth, and a half-skeptical, half-cynical spirit will fill the heart that once overflowed with glad, simple faith and abounding hope. It is this loss that often makes old Officers and Soldiers look so coldly upon the return of backsliders, and that so unfits them to help and encourage young Converts.

There was nothing that filled me with greater admiration for the Founder than his morning-like freshness, his perennial youth, his springing hope, his unfailing faith in God and man -- in spite of all the shameful failures and desertions and backslidings which wounded him to the heart and pierced him through with many sorrows. And where he led shall we not follow?

Instead of looking at those who have fallen, shall we not look at those who have stood? Instead of losing heart and faith because of those who have thrown down the sword and fled from the field, shall we not shout for joy and emulate those who were faithful unto death, who came up out of great tribulation with robes washed in the Blood of the Lamb? Why not shout for joy, and triumph with Joseph in his victory rather than sneer and lose faith in God and man, and thus suffer defeat with David in his fall? Why not look at the beloved John and rejoice, rather than at the traitor Judas and despair?

Why not 'consider Jesus, who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself '? If we do, we shall not 'be wearied and faint' in our minds. (Hebrews xii. 3.)

2. Again, this loss may come through thronging cares and responsibilities. Youth and old age are largely free from responsibility, which comes pressing hard and insistently upon the middle-aged. There are business cares, family cares, responsibility for The Army, the Church, the City, and State. The wide-open, hungry mouths of the children must be fed, their restless, destructive feet must be shod, their health must be guarded, their tempers and dispositions must be corrected and disciplined, their eager, wayward, unformed minds must be trained and educated, and their souls must be found and saved.

And all these cares, which swarm about like bees, must be met again and again, and that often when we are worn and weary and full of pain. No wonder that when Jesus spoke of the thorny-ground hearers, He mentioned 'the cares of life' as among the weeds which choke the Word and make it unfruitful. But no true man or woman will run away from these cares. Here again, there is victory for those who are determined to have victory.

Moses was thronged with care -- the care of a vast untrained, stiff -- necked, hungry multitude in a barren wilderness; but he walked with God, wore a shining face, and -- with but one brief loss of patience, for which he duly suffered -- he got victory, and God and angels conducted his funeral.

Daniel superintended a huge empire, with a hundred and twenty provinces, but he found time to pray and give thanks three times a day, and was more than conqueror.

Added to his whippings, stonings, and imprisonments, his shipwrecks and perils, his hunger, cold, and nakedness, Paul had pressing upon him 'the care of all the churches.' But he rejoiced and prayed and gave thanks, and did not murmur or faint, neither did he turn back, and God made him to triumph. Hallelujah!

A distinguished writer has beautifully said, 'Comradeship with God is the secret not only of joy and peace but of efficiency. In that comradeship we find rest, not from our work, but in our work. When Christ says,

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me," He does not invite us to lay aside our work; He offers us rest in our work. The invitation is to those who are laboring and bearing burdens. The promise is that He will teach such how to labor and how to bear their burdens so as not to be wearied by them. It is not a couch which He offers us, but a yoke, and a yoke is an instrument for the accomplishment of work. But a yoke is not only an implement of industry, it is a symbol of comradeship. The yoke binds two together. To take Christ's yoke upon us is to be yoked to Christ. "Work with Me," says Christ, "and your work will be easy and your burden will be light."

And this comradeship with the Lord Jesus is the secret of victory all along the way and over every obstacle and every foe. Here, O my brother, my sister, tempted and tried, and almost overcome at the noon of life, here, in fellowship with Jesus, the flesh loses its subtle power, the charms of the world are discovered to be but painted mockery, the Devil is outwitted, and while life is a warfare it is also a victory. Glory to God!

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