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**Presentation Transcript
The Millstone Warning
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This is *Important Stuff* series, number 10. It's called *The Millstone Warnings*.

Good afternoon to everybody – those of you here and those scattered around with us on our live stream. Don't forget that, if you can't stay to watch all of it, you can always pick it up later. These are all stored online for you. So we're glad we can do that.

Today we're working on more of our *Important Stuff* series. So far we've covered items related to the two greatest commandments – love God and love neighbor. Those are things that God tells us we should do. Now we're going to look at some things we are told *not* to do. And the first one is, what I call, *The Millstone Warning*. Let's read about it. We can find it in Matthew 18, beginning in verse 1.

Matthew 18:1 – *At that time, the disciples came to Jesus saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn” – change – “and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in My name, receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones, who believe in Me, to sin, it will be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”*

Who are the little ones who believe in Him? Well, they are – and I know this applies to more than just children – it's talking about those who are new in the faith – but, you know, He did have a kid on His lap while He was talking about this, so it applies to children. And who are the little ones that believe? Well, they're the ones that are raised by people in the Church of God and who are receiving a calling through their relationship with their parents. So that would be talking to those of us, who are members of the church, about *other* people's children, wouldn't it, as well as our own.

Let's continue reading.

V-7 – *Woe to the world for temptations of sin, for it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom that temptation comes. And if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It's better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It's better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell fire – or to have a millstone hung around your neck and dropped into the sea. This is powerful language.*

Continuing, verse 10:

V-10 – *See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that, in heaven, their angels always see the face of My Father, who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and go and search for the one that went astray? And, if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than the ninety-nine that never went astray to begin with.*

When we looked at the things we were told to do, one of them had to do with loving others. And this warning is for us and it's about a category of society that we are likely to overlook when God tells us to love our neighbor. And that is children. Think about the things that He just said there. This isn't a casual, "Oh, by the way, if you get around to it" kind of thing, is it? This is stuff that is required of *all* Christians. The language about it is shockingly strong. "If you mistreat children, I will find out about it and I will get you!" That's the essence of what He's saying. So I take from that – and I think you will, too – that all adults have the responsibility to take care of all children. Now, I'm not saying that we're all their parents – there are different relationships – but we are *all* responsible to take care of all the children.

(Oh look! It's raining in New Mexico! What do you know! The desert will blossom as a rose.)

There are some clues here about what causes us to do that and how to avoid the judgment of God in this area of our lives. So we're going to look at that as we go along.

I'd like to call your attention to the effects that Western culture has on children. Jim O'Brien just wrote one of his Friday night letters about what's going on with the children in Great Britain. It's a disaster! It's a disaster that, if it's not in the making, it's full-blown happening right now. They are leading the way and we are not far behind.

Anxiety and depression in children is *skyrocketing* in this country. I got a call from a young woman sometime back, who had suffered depression and anxiety from early teenage. And, as a young adult, she was having trouble driving and taking care of her children. She'd been feeling that way for along time.

I learned of a teenage girl who killed herself and left a note, telling us that she just didn't fit in anywhere – school, church, family were the three things she mentioned.

I know of a girl who kept a piece of glass hidden in her bedroom so that she could cut herself when her feelings became overwhelming.

Meth and heroine among teenagers today is a virtual tidal wave in the United States. We're not talking about smoking some weed here. We're talking about heroin addiction and methamphetamine, which is a toxic poison that corrodes every system in the body!

We see kids who have no motivation to educate themselves, who work, who have no motivation to enter into relationships with other people their age, which totally undercuts all developmental material. Kids are *hardwired* to want to be with other people their age. And yet we see people who are so discouraged about their possibilities there that they're withdrawing. Promiscuity is running rampant. And an overwhelming sense of emptiness is reported by so many young people.

What's causing all this? I was talking to an older teen one day, who was becoming obsessive, and she confided that she had been mistreated by her grandfather who was coming to visit. She was beside herself with dread. And I asked her if she could talk to her parents about it. They told her to stay away from him while he was in their home. I asked her if she knew any adults she could talk to – teachers, counselors, coaches, ministers. She drew a blank – did not know a single adult that she felt like she could talk to. Can you imagine that? A teenager who doesn't feel connected enough to talk to a single adult in her life? Now, let's also realize that any number of those adults that she knew – if they knew she was in trouble – they would have been there to help.

But what is it about *us* that causes our children not to realize that we don't care. Where's the disconnect there? Why do our kids feel so isolated from the adults who are a part of their life? They have their own music, their own language, their own clothing. They have their own culture – their own friends. We look at them walking in the malls of America and they look like people from somewhere else. We don't realize that they don't do that. *We* do it! We make them feel like they don't belong and then they're acting out those feelings. They *show* us how they feel by how they dress, who they associate with, and what they say and listen to.

We love our children. We might die to protect them. But we don't *listen* to them when they tell us how they feel.

I was talking to a fourteen-year-old boy once who was depressed. He was failing in school. He was withdrawing from his friends. He was dropping out of extracurricular activities. And I asked him what it was like when he got home from school every day. He said that he was the first one who got home. When his mother came home several hours later, she would always start cooking right away. His father usually got home after everybody had eaten. And he usually ate standing up in the kitchen. Then he would go off to the loft to play computer games till bedtime. The boy's comment was, "Neither one of them cares about me. They yell at me for my bad grades, but I can tell that they're really too busy to care." Do you think that boy is offended? I think he is.

I was talking to a teenage boy once who told me that his mother and his stepfather hated him. I suggested that that was a very strong term and how did he know that they hated him? I was asking him for some information. He said that before his mother married his stepfather, his stepfather told his mother in front of him and his siblings that he didn't want anything to do with the kids. And they were to stay out of his way and not bother him. He said, "We begged my mother not to marry him, but she did anyway. And ever since then, the two of them have been off in their own world." That's what he said. "We have to do the best we can by ourselves."

Think about the context that triggered Jesus' remarks. What was it they were asking about? Who's going to be the greatest? It's about what *we* want and what *we're* interested in. In our culture, what adults want comes first. We tend to disregard children. And we say, "But shouldn't she be able to get married to whomever she wants?" Well, she already did once. And, because of her choice, she now has family to take care of, and is she going to take care of them or not? Since they're all going to have to live with him, their feelings ought to also be considered.

If three or four people were sitting around in a group, and they were talking about where they might want to go for dinner, out of courtesy, we would all listen to and consider what everyone wanted to do. But that doesn't count with kids in our society. And those of us who are listening to this say, "We would never do that. We're Christians." Many of you know that I'm a counselor and that I talk to kids all the time. And yet none of the examples I cited just now came from my private practice. They're all examples of interchanges I've had with kids in *our* church. We might be Christians, but we're also Americans. And we grew up in Western culture and we act like Americans act. We have not integrated our religion enough into our lives to shed off the negative aspects of our culture. That's why, when the disciples began talking about who would be the greatest, Jesus *immediately* pulled a child up on His lap. He wanted them to realize that their adult power struggles and their adult issues were *not* important compared to the needs of the children in their midst.

Have you ever asked two or three teenagers who go to church what they think of church politics? I've never heard any of them say anything other than, "It's a *total* turnoff!" How do we deal with this? What can we do? I'm going to rely a little on my private practice experience now.

Parents bring their children to my office often hoping to find help for their kids, who usually are exhibiting negative behaviors. Their intentions are good. But without realizing what they're doing, are, in essence, saying, "Fix my child." That implies that there is something wrong with the child. In most cases, the child is only responding to parental disregard. There is something missing and they're trying to bring attention to that fact. They don't *know* they're doing that, but that's how it works. So I explain to them that, if they want their children to change, then they first need to change themselves, and their children will respond to it.

Adults are the ones that set the tone in the home, the church, the schools – *not* the kids. That was the approach Jesus took with the disciples. When He saw them doing something He knew would isolate and discourage children, He told them *they* needed to act differently – *not* the kids.

We're in the midst of trying to craft a festival site this year that will include care of children. It's hard for us, because all the examples we have seen tend to pull kids out *away* from adults. And we're just isolating them by doing something fun. I know that kids do need their own activities. So there probably wouldn't be a single activity I would point to that you could say that he's talking about this or that. I'm talking about the *amount* of it that goes on and the *lack of inclusiveness* that occurs.

So we've driven our stake in the ground. Children should be *included*. First, they should be included in their family. Parents are responsible – *before* the church – for the spiritual development of their children. And they are to be *included* in the family in that exercise. So we're going to provide high-level training for parents and show them how to do that. They should also be included in the church – age-appropriate integration in church things – church activities – but also decision-making in worship. And part of this integration has to do with the way adults interact with and draw in those who are younger. By the way, I'm not trying to imply that the festival sites that we've attended in the past were toxic to kids. I'm only saying that we are trying to apply biblical principles in an *intentional* way, as best we know, by including rather than isolating children. And *regarding* them is an important responsibility for *all* of us, rather than dismissing them out of mind.

So what changes should we make? What can we do, if we want to do our part, to make sure that our children are not offended – that is discouraged – spiritually? Well, there are so many things to think about, but I'm going to focus on two things that I've already mentioned. I talked about isolation, so instead of that, I'm going to talk about *inclusion*. And I talked about disregard, so I'm going to talk about *regard, respect and consideration*.

Let's talk about *inclusion* first. Every summer Guy and Jennifer Swenson operate an activity called Camp Outreach. What they do is, they involve the young adults in the independent Church of God from a good section of the Midwest and they do very high-level spiritual activities. They help poor people. They remodel their homes. They fix damaged parts of them. They work with children. It's really as simple as that. Instead of creating activities *for* them, they *involve* them in a meaningful way in the activities of the church. They find out what gifts they have and then they put them to use in a meaningful way. They start them early learning what they're good at. Then they get them to do those things.

At our festival site this year, we have a number of people who are younger (people keep getting older that I call younger as I get older – people who are younger than I am – and, I think, significantly younger than the norm of our very old church) and they're going to be shouldering high visibility and important responsibilities at our festival site. Now, there's been a debate among us about all of this. And my response to that is.... The issue

has to do with quality. Are those who are younger as experienced and qualified to do some of these things? My response to that is that when Jesus sent out the seventy disciples to evangelize, do you think He could have done a better job if He was in their place? Well, the answer, of course, is yes. He was God. So why would He send them out anyway? So they could learn! So He sent them out. First He trained them. Then He debriefed them when they got back. He did everything He could do, but He also sent them out by themselves, two by two. After having done all that He could to prepare them, He trusted in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide them and bring them success. Remember, He said, “Don’t worry about what to say. It will be right there. I’ll be right there with you. I’m sure you’ll do well.”

When I first began speaking at church, there was a man, who was the mate of one of our church’s members, and years later he and I became good friends. But he told me that, after he first heard me give a sermon, he told his wife to let him know when I was speaking so that he could stay home that weekend, because I was so boring. After forty years, I’m still not a great orator, but I can, at least, interest some of the people I speak to sometimes about some of the material I talk about. That happened because those people, who were my teachers, knew that the only way for me to learn was by *doing*. So we have to walk the fine line of providing good spiritual material at the Feast, while giving those who are younger a chance to learn by doing. This year – looking at what’s happening and some of the people who are involved – I think we’re going to get both. The material that I’m hearing come in is really just quite high level. I’m completely pleased.

So how would we think about this inclusiveness thing on a personal level? How could we act in an inclusive way regarding children? When the disciples were arguing about who should be in charge, that was not inclusive of children. That was all about me, me, me and what I want. And that’s a turnoff to everybody but me. And it includes turning off the kids. So, if you have a responsibility, how do you handle it? Can you recruit other people to help you in the responsibility you have? If so, some of them can be children. Instead of thinking about grasping for control, can you give away some of that? Can you prepare for the future?

If you talk to young people who have left the church – and I’ve talked to lots of them – one thing that they all say is – they say it in different words – but what they say is, “There wasn’t a place for me at church. I didn’t feel like I belonged.” So how can we undo that?

Let’s talk about what I’m just going to call *regard, respect or consideration*. When teens come into my office, they’re usually afraid. They’ve been told there is something wrong with them. I had a thirteen-year-old girl who came to me some time back who had some very disturbing hallucinations. She told me that her psychiatrist told her she was becoming schizophrenic. Now this child had been assaulted repeatedly by her drug-addict mother’s boyfriend when she was five and younger. When she was five, she can remember being responsible to take care of her one-year-old brother, because her mother was whacked out of her head. Can you imagine a five-year-old changing a one-year-old’s diaper? Her mother recently began living with the guy that abused her daughter. Now, if you were thirteen, and you had all that happen to you, would you need your doctor to tell

you that you were doomed to a life of insanity? I told her – out of regard for her feelings as a human being – “If you’re becoming schizophrenic, I’ll eat my hat! Anybody who has had happen to them what has happened to you could *easily* have hallucinations. They can be caused by trauma and you have been traumatized. And you can get over all of that. And if you keep coming, I will show you how.” You know, just a normal consideration that we ought to give to anyone, ought to be given to our children.

“Children are to be seen and not heard.” Have you ever heard that before? That is a philosophy of Western culture. In every other culture in the world – including a lot of those that we really disrespect and look down on – if two adults are talking and a child approaches them, their conversation is put on hold until the child’s needs are met. You know, we think they’re cute, but that’s where it stops. We’re not going to pay attention to them. *We’re* more important. See that’s where that *regard*.... We have to start looking at them like they are actually human beings. We have to see the person.

A young teen came to my office once, and she had one of these teased up, multi-colored hairdos. And she had a leather dog collar with spikes sticking out of it around her neck. She had cuts all over her arms. She had some tattoos. She had her tongue and her lower lip pierced. She told me she was bisexual and wiccan – pretty scary kid. As I talked to her I looked past all of that to see who she really was and what I found was a really kind, polite, creative, funny, respectful, terrified child, who couldn’t sleep at night or control her own emotions, and who felt completely alone in the world. When I saw that, I realized that all that other stuff was just a façade to protect and insulate her from what she feared the most. Her façade was designed to keep me from seeing who she really was. I hope we won’t let that happen to us when we look at children and teenagers. I hope, if we see things we don’t like, we’ll realize that we’re part of a culture that causes that to happen to our kids, and that we will try to do something about that one at a time.

Sometimes kids do intimidate us because we’re so poor at connecting with them. But there really is no need to be intimidated. Just do one simple thing. Start caring about them and watch what happens.

If you want to know more about this topic, you can go to www.liferesouce.org and locate our series called *Reclaiming Lost Children*. And there you will see a personal strategy laid out for you, so that at the end of your life, you’ll not need to be fitted for a millstone.

That’s it for the millstone. We have a few more warnings in this series straight out of the mouth of Jesus about things we ought to avoid. So stay tuned for those.