MRS. OSTRICH
Lamentations 4:3

"The daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches of the wilderness."

The Bible has nothing complimentary to say about Mrs. Ostrich. It is equally silent in its praise of Mr. Ostrich. And when I speak to you about them today, I am speaking of one just as much as the other. Mrs. Ostrich is certainly no more to be blamed than is Mr. Ostrich. And oftentimes she is far less so. But neither of them shine in the least upon the pages of this Book. On the contrary, they are severely censured. They are condemned. An ugly charge is laid against them. Their guilt is blazoned to the world.

What is wrong with Mrs. Ostrich and her husband?

The charge laid against them is the charge of cruelty. They are not accused of unchastity. They are not accused of being gossips. They are not accused of sowing dissention and discord in the community. No charge of slander is laid against them. They are not condemned because of their stinginess. They are not rebuked because of their failure to tithe. The one sin laid at their door is the sin of cruelty. They are not kind. They are unkind. They are not tender hearted. They are heartless, cold, cruel. "The daughter of my people is become cruel like the ostriches in the wilderness."

But this cruelty is not of an aggressive type. If you should charge Mrs. Ostrich with having done a great wrong, she would look at you in blank amazement. If you were to accuse her of having mistreated her children, she would be greatly surprised. She would tell you with indignant frankness that she never spanked one of them in her life. She would inform you that not once had she slapped their jaws even. Her cruelty, therefore, did not take the direction of kicks and cuffs. She has not left a scar on a single member of her family. Not one of them has she sent maimed to the task of life because of her cruel blows. Cruel she has been, but in a negative way. Her cruelty has been the cruelty of neglect. She has not mistreated her children. She has simply let them alone.

Job gives a picture of her conduct. "She layeth her eggs in the earth and warmeth them with the dust, and forgeteth that the foot may crush them or that the wild beasts may break them. She is hardened against her own young as if they were not hers." That is the whole matter in a nutshell. She lays her eggs in the sand, allows the sun to hatch them and then leaves them to the tender mercy of the wilderness. If they get on and grow into strong, vigorous birds, allright. But if a chance passer-by happens to crush the eggs, or if wild beasts chance to find them and make a dinner off them, that too is allright. It is none of her business. She has not time to look after such matters as keeping a nest. She must needs attend the ostrich club and read a paper on "The Preservation of the Home."
Now the prophet is not accusing the people of his day with the folly and cruelty and positive wickedness of the ostrich. He is accusing them of the sin of neglecting their own children. Many were guilty of that sin in that far off day. What has been the sin of the Church thru the long centuries. We have improved wonderfully in this respect in the last generation. More has been thought and written on the welfare of the child in the last quarter of a century than in possibly all the rest of the world's history put together. But this evil against which the prophet speaks has been by no means cured. Millions of children are being lost in Christian America today because they have fathers and mothers who are more like the ostrich than they are like Christ in their attitude toward children.

1. Now the neglect of childhood is nothing short of tragedy. This is true in the first place because the child is our greatest asset. He is the most important individual in the world at this time. There are four children, Frank Boreham tells us. He found them sleeping in the Little Palace Beautiful. One of them is the child that never was. The second is the child that was. The third is the child that is and the fourth is the child that is to be. But all the memories of these first two children and all our hopes for the child that is to be and all our love for the child that is urge us to center our attention and our efforts upon the saving of the child that is. He is the most important individual in the world at this moment.

This is true, first, because he is the ruler of tomorrow. An army of invasion is on the march in this country. That army is sure of conquest. It is going to capture every home in America. It is going to capture every Church. It is going to capture every school. It is going to take the place of every bank and every business house. The things that you and I possess today are going to slip out of our hands absolutely. They are going to be in their hands. They are going to have complete control. And we shall have less to say than a handful of slaves. That army of invasion is the children that are in our homes at this moment. The world of today is our world. The world of tomorrow is theirs. What that world will be depends upon the kind of men and women we make of the children of today.

It is evident, therefore, that, while we have many problems, there is fundamentally but one problem and that is the problem of the child. Were we to solve every other problem and leave this one unsolved, civilization must at last go upon the rocks. But if we can only solve the child problem, then, the every other one were left unsolved, the Kingdom of God must needs finally come and the glory of God as surely cover the earth as water covers the sea.

Such a view is consistent with the teachings of Jesus. It was He who discovered to us the supreme importance of the child. When asked to point out who was greatest, He took a child and set him in the midst. The ancient world had no conception of the value of the child. They looked on the child with contempt. That is the reason Jesus had to say: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." To despise is to undervalue. They had no conception of the value of the child. Ancient literature, with the exception of the Bible, has practically nothing to say about children.
The literature of the middle ages has not a child in it. Homer's Iliad has only one. But the Bible laughs and shouts and sings and romps with children.

But even now there are many of us that still in some measure despise children. That is, we fail to set a proper valuation upon them. I knew a man who gave as a reason for living in a certain place that it was a good location in which to raise stock, but he acknowledged that it was bad for children. The hog that took the prize at the Dallas Fair some years ago was raised by a man who had one of the most scrub boys to be found on the grounds. He seemed to set a higher value upon hogs than upon boys.

So highly did Christ value the child that He identified him with Himself. He said whosoever should receive a little child in His name received Him. What an encouragement and a thrill that should be to every father and mother, to every Sunday School teacher, to every worker with children. When you took hold on the grimy hand of that little child and tried to help him, you were taking hold on the pierced hand of your Lord. So dear are they to His heart that He identifies them with Himself.

So dear are they that He fenced them in with some of the most terrible words that ever fell from His lips. While in London I went to see the crown jewels of the British Empire. There they lay right before my eyes and they were worth from fifteen to twenty millions of dollars. But how they were guarded! Everything almost that the ingenuity of man could devise had been brought in to make them safe. And Jesus fortified little children by walling them in with this tremendous safe guard: "It is better" He said "to have a mill stone tied about your neck and be drowned in the sea than to offend one of these little ones." How intense must be the love, how high must be the appreciation of Him who gives utterance to such forked lightning as this.

Then it is a tragedy to neglect the children not only because the child is our most important asset, because but because all we have to do to lose this great asset is to neglect it. In order for us to destroy our children physically we need only to let them alone. When the Spartan mother gave birth to a child physically unfit it was exposed on a certain mountainside. The mother did not murder the child with her own hands. She just let it alone. Neglect is fatal physically. It is fatal intellectually. It is fatal spiritually. If you do not bias your child in favor of God and righteousness, then the powers of evil will bias him. To neglect is to lose. To neglect is to destroy.

What is the cure for this neglect?

1. We are to realize the sin of it. To allow your child to go wrong when you might lead him right is no less a sin than to deliberately lead him wrong. We must realize the deadly sin of simply leaving it to chance the intellectual and spiritual welfare of our child. Few things have done more to discount all the high claims of Mrs. Eddy than the fact that she deserted her child and let him grow up in utter mental and moral ignorance so that at the age of sixty he could not read nor write his name.
2. Love for our children ought to prevent us from neglecting them. And it does prevent us from so doing in many respects. We look carefully after their physically bodies. And that is right. We have grown so much wiser in the securing of the physical well being of our children than were our fathers. By so doing we have added eighteen years to the span of life in the last few decades. And we are not equally keen in the realm of the spiritual. Should your child have a broken bone you would have the injury looked after lest he should grow up a cripple. But many a time we do not look with equal attention and interest after those wounds that might lead to moral infirmity. But every claim of love urges upon us this absolute necessity.

3. The possibility of victory ought to make our neglect impossible. With the right kind of training we can save our children. "Train a child up in the way it should go and when it is old it will not depart from it". This promise, you understand, is not to those who simply try to train a child. There are some times when very earnest and conscientious people fail. But those who honestly do adopt the right kind of training will succeed. Let us address ourselves anew to this task with the realization of the following important facts: (1) A child can be a Christian. This is true from the simple fact that those characteristics necessary to the making of a Christian are by nature in the heart of the child. God put them there. First, it is easy for a child to believe. As you grow older faith becomes increasingly difficult. But a child will believe anything you tell him till by deceiving him we teach him to believe otherwise. Second, a child is naturally loyal to what it loves. As we become older we begin to make distinctions between class and class. A child is the only true democrat. He will spurn a princess to hug the neck of a black mammy if he loves that black mammy. It is our privilege to take this loyalty that is inherent in the life of a child and tie it on to the heart of God. (2) A child can be a Christian easier than anybody else. First, because has not formed habits of evil thinking and of evil conduct that those form who remain long away from Christ. A man was converted in my church some years ago who had been a drunkard. But he slipped back. He could not resist the tug of his old habit. Second, it is easy for a child because he has not formed evil and entangling alliances that belong to those who have lived long in the world and long in sin. I knew a young fellow some years ago who was converted from a life of unfaithfulness. He went home and called up the companion of his guilt and told her he was thru. And she said "Yes, now that you have wrecked my life you are going to throw me away and be decent. You will not do it. I will camp on the trail." And she did that till he fell. If you come to Christ as a child it will be easier for you to be a Christian than if you come in later life.

(3) Those who come to Christ as children make the best Christians. We forget that, but when we do we shut our eyes to the plain common sense of the situation. Who makes the best violinist? Not the man who begins playing at sixty, but the one who begins playing at six. Who makes the best Christian? Not the one who learns to trust in Jesus at sixty, but the one who learns at six or younger.

(4) Then if we do not reach our children while they are children, the chances are that we will never reach them at all. The impressions that you make upon them in their young and tender years are the impressions that abide. Did you ever read "The Laughing Man" by Victor Hugo? The laughing man was a man of high character, of fine intelligence, a man with the best
blood of England in his veins. But his face was distorted into a hideous
gimace. He seemed to be continually engaged in horrible laughter. This
was caused by a cruel operation that was made upon some of his facial
muscles when he was a child. And no skill was sufficient to cure it when
he had grown to manhood. And the grimace of the soul is almost equally
incurable. If we do not reach our children as children, the chances are
that they will never be reached.

No wonder, therefore, that Jesus said: "Suffer the little children
to come unto me and forbid them not". And what greater hindrance is there
in the life of a young child than that of a blind indifference to their
high spiritual development? Blessings on the father and the mother that
allow nothing to prevent them from giving their children the best possible
chance of God. There are some even in the Church who are too indifferent
and too lazy to bring their children to Sunday School. There is no re-
ligious training in the home. The public school has none. They neglect
the Sunday School and their children, while normally Christian grow up really
heathen.

There are but two institutions today thru which we can have any
hope of reaching and Christianizing our children. The first of these is the
home. The supreme need of America today is for the Christianizing of the
home. The second of these is the Sunday School. But the Sunday School can
do little unless it is backed up by the home. And there is only about thirty
minutes a week. But the two working together can do much.

Mrs. Wesley was not making a very great noise in the world when she
was rearing her family down at Epworth Parsonage. Her name was not mentioned
among the social set of London. But her task, as mean as it might seem, was
bigger than that performed by any other man or woman of her day. In that
little home she was training a new Church and bringing into life a new
spiritual era.

It was troublesome, no doubt. It takes a little time to have family
prayers. It takes a little time to read the Word to your children. It
takes a little time to get them up and dress them for Sunday School. It
takes consecration to live before them as becometh the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
But there is nothing that pays as well. That father thought so when his
dying lad told him that the first thing he was going to do when he got to
heaven was to go straight to Jesus Christ and tell Him that ever since he
was a baby his father had done the best he could to get him to love Him.
I had ten thousand times rather send that word home to heaven by a child of
mine than to wear all the crowns of the world.

So the facts are before us. Our important work is the saving of
the children of this generation. We cannot save them by neglecting them.
We can only save them thru the home and thru the Sunday School. I have
little hope at the present for the day school, for it needs to be Christian-
ized quite as much as any other institution in our national life. But in
spite of all difficulties we can win if we will but talk to God and avoid
the cruel and wicked folly of neglect.