

Characteristics of Childhood

LECTURE 2

*Childhood years must make allowance for error and room for growth.
They need to know their Father well.*

Session Topics:

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| Babies are self gratifiers; children are people pleasers. | |

Outcomes:

After completing this session you should be able to -

Generalise about children's behaviour and guide this group into Christian growth.

Objectives:

- **Evaluate childhood behaviour**
Using Christian norms.
- **Design growth activities**
Isolating negative behaviours. Introducing positive norms.
- **Initiate change**
Developing ongoing growth.

1 John 2:12, 13 *I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for His name's sake ... I write to you little children because you have known the Father.*

The apostle John writes his letter to all age groups in the Lord.

♦ **He writes to children, young men and fathers**

These children are spiritual children in spiritual growth.

■ Forgiven Sins

This is the age in your spiritual life when you seem to be all thumbs; where nothing you do seems to go right. It is a time of great mistakes; where you seem to learn by trial and error. It is also a time in growth where you **explore, test** and **try** your newly taught skills of **sitting, standing, walking, talking** and **feeding** all by yourself.

♦ **Learning Quickly**

Children learn quickly because they are excited about all their new-found skills and adventures. They are **bold** and **daring**. There is a whole new world of discovery ahead and the **excitement of discovering** overrides the **pain of mistakes**.

♦ **Running before Walking**

♦ **Jumping before Running**

We leap before we can walk and often we fall on our faces, but at least we are finding out how or how not to do things.

♦ **Exciting for Parents**

Children's faults and failures are **forgiven** because of the joy of seeing them **grow** and **develop**. There is nothing worse to a parent than an **unhappy, demotivated** and **lazy child**; as it is for spiritual leaders and their **lethargic children**.

Falls and flops are normal in the development of children

■ Allow Freedom to Grow

Sometimes Christian leaders inhibit and suppress the growth of the church for fear of their failing at it. Thomas Edison, after months of development and thousands of failures eventually perfected his first light bulb. This light bulb was given to an assistant who painstakingly and carefully took it up the stairs to the storeroom.

Then he tripped! The prized first light bulb crashed to the floor. Many weeks later after completing the next one, **Edison called this same assistant to store it. It did wonders for his confidence and self-esteem.**

♦ **Failure Complex**

Often growth is stunted by nurturing this failure complex in refusing to allow mistakes and expecting perfection.

Little children have a **healthy development** when there is a good strong relationship with their **fathers**.

Knowing the Father

■ The Heavenly Father

This is the first priority for believers in the childhood stage.

■ The Father Figure

It is essential that every growing child has a father figure in his life for there to be healthy development. This is someone to relate to, who will understand

hang-ups and problems without being judgemental and critical; someone who has compassion and provides wise counsel and help. He **encourages**, **comforts**, **exhorts** and **disciplines**.



1. Spasmodic

Ephesians 4:14 ... that we should no longer be **children tossed to and fro** ...

A child does things with great zeal, but soon fades out in whatever he sets out to do. They will be full of faith one day and full of doubt the next. One minute they love you, the next they find things wrong with you.

1.1 Children are Inconsistent

They have no ability to stay with their goals and push through to final completion of what they set out to do. They need the help of more mature people.

◆ The Realm of the Unknown

Mankind hates the **unknown** – it threatens him mentally and it puts him under pressure and **stress**. A child is inexperienced in handling the world around him and needs help.



Inconsistency is due to inexperience and lack of practice

1.2 Children are Sense-ruled

They will always judge God and His Word by what their senses tell them – they are threatened by adverse circumstances around them and tend to crumble.

■ Believe It When They See It

Spiritual **children** will pray for something, be truly thankful, and relax after the manifestation of their prayer – which is something that rarely happens. There is faith when all is well, there is doubt when all is bad and there is unbelief when all gets worse.

It is normal to provide the back up to the inconsistency of children

■ Help Them in Their Unbelief

Children need someone to show, by demonstration, how things work. That is why those who are mature and strong **must not neglect** children in the Lord.

Children do not know how, unless they see an example

2. Unreliable

Give a child a task and he will either forget before he gets there or will be easily distracted in the task. More interesting things take up his attention so that when you check up on him he is not there.

2.1 Irresponsibility of Children

Responsibility has been defined as the **ability to respond to any given challenge** and see it to the **end** – to full completion. Therefore the opposite is true in the case of children. The Word of God never encourages responsibilities to be given those who **are not able to finish their course**.

If you cannot finish the job you will not get it

It will discourage you, demoralise you and destroy you.

Luke 9:62 *But Jesus said to him: No one having put his hand to the plough, and looking back is fit ...*

This is a characteristic of a child – the inability to carry things through to completion, without supervision. **this is a natural growth stage in the process of learning.**

2.2 The Forgetfulness of Children

James 1:23, 24 *Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*

This is another aspect of their unreliability. Children just do not **remember what you teach them.**

■ Low Span of Concentration

Just as everything is new to a natural child so it is with a **young child.**

Isaiah 55:9 *As the heavens are higher than the earth so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.*

If you overload a child with too much new information he will **switch off. Take one step at a time.**

God takes us step by step, line by line and precept by precept, This is why children need **repetitive instruction.**

It is not the head, but the heart that must grasp the truth.

The **spirit man must grasp and understand spiritual truth for growth to take place.** We are not talking about knowledge of facts, but talk about understanding spiritual truth.

John 8:31, 32 *Jesus said: If you **hold to my teaching.** You are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*

The **key is: holding to the Word**, clinging to it and keeping it in your heart – **then you will know the Word and the truth of Word will set you free.**



■ The Weaning Process

This is the process of getting a baby off total dependence on mother to the point where it can feed itself.

This is the stage when their diet is still planned by the parents but they can at least feed themselves.

◆ They Need a Balanced Diet and Encouragement to Partake of that Diet

If children had their own way they would eat only **sweets, ice-cream and pudding** and eventually suffer from **malnutrition**. Children must be disciplined to eat the things they **do not like** for their own good.

Similarly, a young Christian in the childhood stage will only latch onto **favourite isolated verses** and neglect the **whole counsel of God.**

Our goal is to help baby Christians to feed themselves on the word of God

Have a balanced diet of God's word

3. Impulsive

Proverbs 22:15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.

Proverbs 19:2 It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.

Proverbs 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

3.1 Children Make Rash Promises

Proverbs 29:20 Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

These are Christians who say, “**the Lord told me ...**” to do this and that, to join this and that and a week later the Lord changes His mind and “**tells them**” to do something else. They make excuses for the Lord’s “**change of mind**” by saying it was “**only for a season**”.

Be honest! Admit your immaturity and mistake in not always hearing God. Praise God that you are learning.

■ Over-commitment

Children do not know clearly what their calling and vocation are and they will commit themselves to **everything** until they are working ‘**nine days a week.**’

■ Confession Beyond Faith

Children will make **bold claims** beyond their **ability** to believe or handle the situation. Mature people must be aware of this and be willing to correct and instruct in the right direction. **Remember – it is natural to growth.** It is better to **do something** and learn by your mistakes than be ignorant by doing nothing.

3.2 Children Act Before Thinking

Luke 14:28-33 Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple.

This is how a matured person will be, but children will climb to the high point of a tree with great enthusiasm only to find that they cannot get down.

4. Curiosity

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Curiosity is defined as **a desire to find out and know things.** It can be both good and bad; it can lead to blessing and cursing. The young Christian has the whole world of the Christian experience, all his inheritance to discover.

4.1 Children are Teachable

This is a quality that must remain in us all our Christian life no matter at what stage of growth we are.

1 Corinthians 13:12 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

As long as we are in this age before Jesus returns, we will always be in the **stage of childhood** as far as our **knowledge of things is concerned**. Only when Jesus returns will we know all things – until then we must maintain the **quality of curiosity**.

- ♦ Curiosity leads to **discovery**
- ♦ Curiosity leads to **experience**
- ♦ Curiosity leads to **skill**

■ Endless Questions

Children will ask every question under the sun and will wear you out.

- ♦ **Good** questions;
- ♦ **Stupid** questions;
- ♦ **Puzzling** questions;
- ♦ **Confusing** questions; and
- ♦ **Embarrassing** questions.

Sometimes they will get you **thinking** and **researching** answers.



Children are hungry for knowledge

■ Hearing and not Hearing

Often children listen to your answers **without listening to what you say**. Their minds are on their answered questions. This is another reason for them to be **taught repetitively**. They lack full comprehension of the answers anyway.

4.2 Dangerous Curiosity

Electric sockets and hot stoves and heaters are dangerous things to be curious about. They must discover those things under guidance and supervision.

Spiritual children go through a similar period of dangerous curiosity. Tell them about a problem, warn them of some dangers – some may just go ahead anyway and then say, **“why didn’t you tell me?”**

■ Watch What you Study

Avoid false doctrines, religions and philosophies – you do not need them. Avoid friendship with the world.

■ Good but Dangerous

Make sure you understand and comprehend the **principles** of deliverance, faith, God’s power, healing, etc. before you attempt to handle them. Even the **principles** of evangelism can be dangerous in the hands of a child – they can put people off for life. Don’t **‘Bible punch’!**

■ Learn by Watching

Watch **skilled** and **experienced people** doing deliverance, healing or presenting the Gospel. Watch them **flow** in the gifts of the Spirit and then **imitate them**.

*1 Corinthians 4:15,
16; 11:1*

Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. ... Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

5. Talkative

Children are naturally talkative about anything and everything. Mostly, their talk is about trivial disconnected things.

Christian children often talk themselves into trouble

Ecclesiastes 5:3 *As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.*

Proverbs 10:19 *In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.*

'**Foolishness**' means 'Not knowing what you are doing, having no know-how or skill'. '**wisdom**' is 'Having know-how and skill' – it means 'to know what you are doing'.

Talkativeness is proof that the person **lacks wisdom** and does not know what he is doing. Talkative people lack insight into the true nature of things simply because they spend more time **talking** than **thinking** about things.

A fool talks first and thinks later

5.1 Evil Speaking

1 Timothy 6:20 *O Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust, **avoiding the profane and idle babble** and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.*

2 Timothy 2:15-18 *... **avoid godless chatter**, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.*

2 Timothy 8:5 *... having a **form of godliness but denying its power**.*

Ten of the twelve spies that returned from spying out Canaan land brought back **an evil report**, while Joshua and Caleb brought back a **good report**.

Numbers 13:27-33 *They gave Moses this account: We went to the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. **But** the people who live there are powerful, ... Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said: We should go up and take possession of the land, **for we can certainly do it**. But the men who had gone up with him said: **we can't attack those people**, they are stronger than we are. And they spread a **bad report** about the land they had explored. ... We seemed like grasshoppers in our **own eyes**, and **we looked the same to them**.*

This is a mark of many Christian children. Because they are **unaccustomed to God's thoughts** they will be inclined to be **talkative** about the **world's thoughts**.

Anything that **denies the power of God** and **His Word**; anything that **questions the ability** and **Lordship** of Jesus Christ is evil speaking.

5.2 Vain Speaking

'**Vain**' means '**empty**' and '**purposeless**'.

■ Small Talk

1 Timothy 6:20 *... Turn away from godless chatter ...*

Children in the Lord do not know how to dig into **meaningful thoughts** from the **Word of God**.

Evil speaking is talking circumstances rather than the word of God

■ Opinionated Talk

Colossians 2:8 *See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*

■ Critical Talk

This is talk about the faults and failures of other people in a malicious and derogatory way. Children are cruel in this way – they notice and exaggerate the quirks and idiosyncrasies of others. If there is a weakness, they zoom in on it.

5.3 Foolish Speaking

Ephesians 5:4 *Neither filthiness, **nor foolish talking**, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*

Foolish talk is **aimless** and **careless talking** – which is another characteristic of **children**. Spiritual children give no importance to **words**, thinking that they have no effect in our lives.

James 3:4, 5 *Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.*

Here we see that the tongue is like the rudder of a ship – it can direct our lives, either toward shipwreck or toward the destination.

■ Idle Words

Matthew 12:36, 37 *But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will **give account** of it on the day of judgement. For by your **words** you will be justified, and by your **words** you will be condemned.*

God never speaks aimlessly or carelessly – every word has aim and goal

6. Impressionable

1 John 4:1 *Beloved, believe not every spirit ...*

6.1 Moved by the Spectacular

Anything exciting and great – that is where they will be. Not only do they want to be there, but they make sure they are there. Then, afterwards, that is all they talk about.

■ Blessing Seekers

No matter how superficial, or empty – as long as it is out of the ordinary. Make sure that it is the **real thing** and the **truth of the Word**.



6.2 Hero Conscious

1 Corinthians 3:4 *For when one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are you not carnal.*

Children are impressed by dynamic achievers and performers – even if they are preachers and ministers of the gospel. They will love whoever impresses them.

Supernatural is not necessarily spectacular

7. Conclusion

Children will do things to be accepted and praised. So it is with Christian children. They will do things with one goal in mind – praise from their elders and spiritual parents.

■ We All Do Our Own Growing Up

We must recognise where we are and then submit to the disciplines of **growing up**.

■ Our Goal

Every stage of growth looks forward to the next stage – which is a good part of growing up. **Let us move on!**

Babies are self gratifiers; children are people pleasers