

Lesson 4: Childhood Development

Spiritually speaking, childhood development has three stages (cf. child psychology):

I. Naïve (“simple”): cf. Aaron Darlington – having an “open” mind (easy access, unguarded – Pr. 14:15)

Everyone begins here (Proverbs 1:4 – parallel to youth) – two components:

1. Innocent ignorance – naïve do not know consequences (A leads to B) –
Examples: touching hot stoves, sexual sins (Proverbs 7:7, 23), innocent because lacking experience.
Problem: what you do not know, can hurt you.
Need: prudence = the ability to foresee evil and avoid it (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12) – how gained?
Two ways recommended:
 - (1) Receiving reproof (Proverbs 1:22-23; 9:4-6; 15:5)
The Scriptures make wise the simple (Psalm 19:7; 119:130).
 - (2) Storytelling – a lab for life by learning from others’ experiences (Proverbs 19:25; 21:11).
Fools learn from their own experiences; the wise learn from others’ (Abraham Lincoln).
Example: cautionary tale (Proverbs 7) – cf. fairy tales, Peter stories
2. Culpable foolishness – Proverbs 22:15, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child...”
The seeds of folly are there – sinful nature hugs folly.
Sum: added to ignorance is a sinful bent – more than education is needed: Grace!

II. Fool or Prudent:

No child stays static: “The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge” (Proverbs 14:18).
If the naïve refuse correction, habits form: they become fools.
There is a limited window of opportunity for training: “Chasten your son while there is hope” (Pr. 19:18).
Cf. bending the sapling vs. old dogs and new tricks (“No fool like an old fool.”)

Marks of a fool:

1. A fool despises verbal instruction and correction (Proverbs 1:7; 15:5).
He hates being told he is doing wrong – he will not listen.
Foolishness is not intellectual deprivation, but moral depravity—less of the mind, more of the will.
Therefore, parents of a fool must use the rod or wait for the rod of God (“a rod for the back of fools”).
In other words, the fool is treated more like a beast than a human being (taming more than teaching).
This method is also less effective (“than a hundred blows”), but the parent has no other option available.
Note: Foolishness is often reached in the teen years → parenting then is more limited.
Contrary to some “Gospel-centered” approaches, grace and discipline fit well together (Titus 2:11ff).
2. A fool babbles (cf. Pr. 10:10, substitute teaching vs. James 1:19)
By his speech, a fool destroys himself and others (see Proverbs 10:8, 14; 12:16; 17:28; 22:3).
Only the prudent are on the road to salvation:
The Bible is “able to make you wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15; see also: James 1:5; 3:17).
Training a child to listen opens up door to listening to God’s word.

III. Scoffer or Wise:

Eventually, the prudent become wise and the fool often becomes a scoffer:

A scoffer is characterized by a big ego and a big mouth – a know-it-all that makes fun of (mocks) wise living.
According to Scripture, there is more hope for a fool than for a scoffer (Proverbs 26:12; 29:20).

In fact, the book of Proverbs counsels against reproving a scoffer (Proverbs 9:7-8).

Beware: As naïve has the seeds of folly, so foolishness has the seeds of scoffing: “Fools mock at sin” (Pr. 14:9).

May this very lesson be a cautionary tale for you today and the children you may raise someday!