

A young man and woman are shown in profile, looking down at a book held by the man. They are standing in front of a red brick wall. The man is wearing a light-colored, patterned button-down shirt, and the woman is wearing a light-colored, patterned top. The overall mood is intimate and focused.

The Days of Your Youth

Plain Talk for Teens

A Thirteen Lesson Bible Class Study by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

It's never been tougher to be a young Christian—a teenager committed to doing the right and moral thing in a society that generally doesn't care and often even rewards those who do the wrong thing. So many are willing to look the other way and soften any consequences for bad behavior. They punish those who stand up for truth—creation, objective biblical standards for behavior, moral purity. If ever there was a season in which our youth could be forgiven for giving in to sin, this would be it. But it isn't. As difficult as it is, even now and perhaps more than ever, we hope and expect that our young people will take that perilous stand with Jesus and insist upon doing the right thing.

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The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 1

Character and Integrity

It is never too soon to start developing strong moral character and personal integrity.

In fact, our parents have been trying to instill virtues in us since before we were able to understand what they meant. Even when they themselves failed to live up to them, Mom and Dad tried to teach us to be honest, fair and compassionate. Having character and integrity is not just about submitting to the Bible's teaching, but about choosing a life that will be honorable and productive en route to Heaven (see John 1:12).

The Bible enumerates many virtues that combine to form the Christian character, and does so in several different passages of Scripture. Character is not only about the habits we practice, but also the behaviors we avoid. In Jesus Christ, we find an obvious and perfect example of godly character—an impossible standard to match, but one that always shows us exactly how to try. Character really is about trying to do the right thing, regardless of who is or isn't watching and what the consequences might be.

Timothy was a young man, trying to preach the gospel in spite of deep opposition and little immediate support. He had all the passions and desires of any young man, but the apostle Paul explained that he needed to overcome his weaknesses—the desire for sexual gratification, frustration, fear, etc. so that he might be a good servant of God (see Second Timothy 1:7, 2:22-26).

Timothy had to learn that a big part of character is simply self-control. Getting control over one's emotions, desires, weaknesses and fears so that he can master success instead of being enslaved to failure. Peter also wrote, "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love" (Second Peter 1:5-7).

Many people have excellent character until it is tested and then suddenly they have none. "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small" (Proverbs 24:10). In reality, such people have no character or integrity at all, for "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character" (Romans 5:3-4). Tribulation is what tests the solidity of our faith to determine its genuineness (see First Peter 1:3-9). We might make all kinds of excuses when we give in to temptation, but when it comes to sin, there just isn't any excuse. Character means doing the right thing anyway.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is character? What is integrity?

2. Before one can establish good character, what must he do (Ephesians 4:17-24)?

3. What single virtue is key to establishing good character and maintaining one's personal integrity (First Corinthians 9:24-27, Titus 2:12)?

4. What made Noah a man of character (Genesis 6:5-9; cf. Micah 6:8)?

5. How did Job prove his integrity (Job 1:1, 13-22)?

6. List the virtues that correspond to the following passages
 - Ephesians 4:25:
 - Second Thessalonians 3:10-12:
 - First Thessalonians 4:3-5:
 - First Corinthians 13:1-8:

7. Think about these virtues. Describe some real situations in which they are sorely tested.

8. When is it all right to suspend your character? Explain.

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 2

High Hopes

When my son was about two years old, he was fascinated with the garbage man.

He would run to the window and watch every week when the big, heavy, smelly truck rumbled down our street. The men would jump off the side of the truck, run up to our collected refuse and toss it in the back. To him, this was the essence of cool. Big. Loud. Powerful. Smelly.

“Dad, when I grow up, I want to be a garbage man!”

Naturally, I felt compelled to burst his bubble. “But, son, that’s hard, dirty work and wouldn’t you rather be a doctor or lawyer so you can make big money?”

His innocent ambition was to do a work that interested him and money was not the point at all. Good for him. When our ambitions are rooted in acquiring great riches, the chances increase that we will choose something to do that is unpleasant to us or that robs our hearts of true passion.

The Bible warns that, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (First Timothy 6:10).

It’s great to want to be a doctor because you yearn to heal the sick, or to want to be a businessman because you love the challenge of selling and innovating, or even to want to be a preacher because you want to teach the truth and help the lost. Targeting these as careers because they appear to promise great riches or easy money, however, is a very warped form of ambition (especially in the last case!).

Our parents and teachers are often most guilty of inspiring selfish and material ambition in formerly pure hearts that are enthralled by exciting, but not terribly lucrative, occupations. Ambition is great if spiritual gain has complete priority and if the craving for riches is held in check.

Five New Testament passages discuss selfish ambition, a term that is broader than choosing a career for the wrong reasons, but which certainly would include it. It is a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:20), borne of a shameless lack of sincerity (Philippians 1:16), the practice of conceit and selfishness (Philippians 2:3), an offense against truth (James 3:14) and a forerunner of disorder and evil (James 3:16).

Selfish, material ambition has the potential to make one rich in things but bankrupt of joy and emotional contentment. More than that, it has the potential to pervert his heart so thoroughly that he loses his fellowship with heaven and slides toward destruction. Ambition must be channeled.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When you think about choosing a career, what are your goals?
2. What are the dangers in focusing your ambitions around making money (First Timothy 6:6-10, Luke 12:13-21)?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-13. Can you think of any reason the rich would lose sleep at night (see also Matthew 6:25-34)?
4. How could ambition for wealth interfere with one's spiritual health (Matthew 6:19-24 and James 4:13-17)?
5. In Galatians 5:19, Paul lists several works of the flesh, including "selfish ambitions" (NKJV) or "rivalries" (ESV). How might rivalries on the job cause the Christian to do things that are counter to his convictions (Matthew 7:12, Romans 12:10)?
6. There were some New Testament evangelists who even preached because of selfish ambition (Philippians 1:15-16)? What was their motivation?
7. What does conceit have to do with ambition (Philippians 2:1-4)?
8. What might uncontrolled ambition engender among people who share it (James 3:13-18)?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 3

With Friends Like These

People talk about choosing friends, but in reality, friendships usually develop out of our hobbies and associations rather than through a purposeful effort to enlist allies and well-wishers.

The means by which we “choose” our friends are much more subtle and slippery. When we are drawn to activities that interest us, friendships tend to follow, so it’s really our pursuits and diversions that cause our friendships. The chances are good that if we have wholesome interests, our friends will be of that character, but if we enjoy doing risky and dubious things, our friends will bring us even further down.

The book of Proverbs was written to young people and much of its ink is devoted to the effect of friendships upon one’s morality and direction. The very first chapter describes a young person who had probably played by the rules all of his life until he gained enough maturity to push outward to see what danger was like. “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood ... throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse’—my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood” (Proverbs 1:10-16).

Here is a young man who went further than he ever intended to go; young women are not immune from that kind of pressure these days either. Peer pressure is a powerful force—when people are suggesting you are immature or “holier than thou” or scared because you hesitate to do what they are doing. Peer pressure exposes the difference between genuine faith and the kind that most people have, the kind that is only strong in fair weather and when untested.

Paul confronted Peter when he realized that he had become the sinful victim of negative peer pressure, “For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (Galatians 2:12). The other Jews and even Barnabas, the son of encouragement, were then infected by Peter’s hypocrisy as the negative peer pressure spread. Paul would warn, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’” (First Corinthians 15:33).

It is less publicized, but peer pressure can be positive as well, and here is where the Christian has the opportunity to let his light shine and build up the people around him as a good example of his faith. No man is an island and influence and pressure are inevitable, but the kind is up to you.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What pressure caused Israel's King Rehoboam to make a bad decision (First Kings 12:1-11)?
2. What is the context of the warning of First Corinthians 15:33? What is the peculiar danger under consideration (Second Timothy 2:16-17)?
3. How does "bad company" entice a person to choose to do wrong (Proverbs 1:10-19, Psalm 1:1-2, First Peter 4:1-5)?
4. What makes for good friendships (Proverbs 17:17, 27:6, 9)? How do we choose our friends?
5. What kind of peer pressure should we seek (Second Timothy 2:22)?
6. In what things should we seek to be a positive example (Matthew 5:13-16, First Timothy 4:12)?
7. How did the Hebrew writer describe the Christian's willingness to suffer ostracism (13:9-14)?
8. What can a little leaven accomplish (Luke 12:1, First Corinthians 5:6)?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 4

Don't Bet On It!

Gambling has become a multibillion dollar industry, no longer confined to Vegas excursions or weekend poker games.

Because of changing state laws and the advent of the Internet, gambling has exploded across America, wrapping its hands around every part of the country and seducing otherwise dedicated Christians. Bingo parlors are no longer confined to northeastern Catholic neighborhoods and almost every state operates a lottery by which it raises revenue in addition to already exorbitant taxes. Casinos have sprung up on riverboats, in tourist traps and in dingy corners of most every county. Interest in office football and basketball pools has likewise exploded.

Christians have traditionally opposed most gambling, although Roman Catholics have long used the practice as a means of fundraising. Now, however, a lack of preaching on the subject has accompanied a softening toward what was once considered sin. Is gambling still sinful? Was it ever sinful to begin with? Can a Christian gamble a little without falling into sin? What if the gambling is for a good cause—a charity raffle or church bingo game, for instance?

Gambling has always been sinful, but not because the Bible pronounces a specific “Thou shalt not” regarding it. Christians for hundreds of years were simply able to infer from the Scriptures that condemned greed and covetousness that gambling was an obvious expression of a sinful passion. As believers increasingly appease worldly conduct, gambling has become a frivolous matter, one hardly worth damnation in a society beset with real problems like child abuse, global warming and Restless Leg Syndrome.

Two parallel New Testament passages implicitly condemn gambling as an extension of a very sinful attitude.

Paul told the Ephesians, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints . . . For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (5:1-5).

He instructed the Colossians to put such earthly attitudes to death within themselves. Covetousness is the problem and gambling is just an expression of it. Covetousness and gambling are powerful desires to get something for nothing and to take it away from others.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. List some ways that people gamble.
2. How do people use the Internet to gamble? What is the appeal and danger of gambling online?
3. In what ways is gambling sometimes presented as wholesome? How could one support such efforts without gambling (First Timothy 6:17-19)?
4. Which Bible passage contains the phrase, “Thou shalt not gamble” or overtly discusses the practice at all? Does this make it all right? Explain.
5. What is the biblical problem with gambling (Ephesians 5:1-5, Colossians 3:1-7)?
6. What is covetousness and why should it be wrong (Luke 12:15)?
7. Why do some people become addicted to gambling?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 5

That's Entertainment?

You ain't nothin' but a hound dog!

Believe it or not, your parents (or maybe even your grandparents!) thought that was the height of musical entertainment. Every generation redefines entertainment for itself, choosing its own music, movies, television, hobbies and interests. That is to be expected, especially as trends and technology evolve, and there is nothing that is necessarily wrong with it.

The Christian, however, has often struggled to make certain the things that entertain him are wholesome and edifying. Leisure activities are not only pleasant diversions, but they are also food for the mind and if that food is junk, the mind is likely to be infected with thoughts and desires that will translate into a devalued spirit (Mark 7:21-23).

Paul told the Philippians to spend their time thinking about “whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise ... What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (4:8-9).

There is, then, an instant connection between the things that we put in front of our eyes and ears, our thoughts and our actions.

Much popular music, including Rock, Pop and Country, describes perfectly acceptable themes, but some of it is highly sexual, violent, or hateful. Profanity pops up from time to time, especially in Rock and Rap music, and some songs even celebrate drunkenness and drug abuse. Some music in the Inspirational or Christian categories is very wholesome, but those songs that are intended to worship God directly with mechanical instruments infringe upon his silence regarding such (Ephesians 5:19).

Movies and television programs have changed drastically since the early days. A half-century ago, it was not permissible to show an actor and actress in bed together, even though they were portraying husband and wife. Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball were actually married in real life, with children, and had to occupy separate beds when on the set of *I Love Lucy*. Today, it is still rare to see a husband and wife in bed together on the screen—but because they are usually in somebody else's! Adultery and fornication, even involving children and homosexuals, appear to be the norm.

Many find no moral problem with the violence in our entertainment, and certainly the Bible is a book that contains much violence, as well as sexual sin. The difference, however, is that these things are depicted realistically and with the purpose of dissuading people from committing them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can a person be a faithful Christian and still have fun and enjoy music, TV shows and movies (First Timothy 4:7-8)? Explain your answer.
2. What could possibly be wrong with fishing as a leisure activity (Revelation 2:4-5)? How does this apply to more popular entertainment?
3. What are some themes that appear in popular music that might make the song, an entire album, or even the artist or group unwelcome?
4. What is the danger in watching people fornicate with reckless abandon on television programs? What about watching as more and more homosexual characters appear?
5. What is the likely effect of magazines, web sites and shows that contain immodestly dressed people (Matthew 5:27-32, Romans 13:11-14)?
6. Why don't more television and movie characters go to worship?
7. What is the risk of using entertainment that is peppered with profanity (Ephesians 4:29-5:12, Matthew 12:36)?
8. What do you think happens to your conscience when you allow yourself to be entertained by something you know is wrong (Ephesians 4:17-19)?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 6

Your Body Is a Temple

“Your body is a temple” is usually a reminder these days not to eat too much junk food, but its original context had more to do with fornication than fat.

“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (First Corinthians 6:18-20).

A principle, however, is established. Contrary to what the first-century Gnostics thought, it matters how we treat our bodies and what we choose to do with them. They are to be used to glorify God, and although they will gradually wear out on their own, we should refrain from doing things that will make them useless to his service. Moreover, we should avoid using them in a way that disgraces ourselves and brings reproach upon the body of Christ as a whole (First Timothy 6:14, First Peter 4:14-16).

The Bible says that after Noah docked his ark, he “began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard” (Genesis 9:20). At some point, it occurred to him that his grapes could be fermented and made into an intoxicating juice. He got drunk one night and was shamed by his own son, signaling the terrible danger in losing one’s inhibitions and senses to alcohol (Genesis 9:21-25, Proverbs 31:4-5).

Alcoholic wine has since been joined by whiskey, beer and even solid substances like marijuana, cocaine and heroin, as well as chemical concoctions like methamphetamine to promise inebriation and a mental excursion to their users. Not only do these toxins injure and addict the body, they have the much more immediate effect of tearing down the walls of common and religious sense, so that the user becomes more likely to violate legal statutes, morals principles and self-preservation.

Tobacco, long a staple of American agriculture, is made into cigarettes and smokeless products, leading to an increased likelihood of life-shortening cancer of the lungs, mouth and throat. No product seems to be quite as addictive as tobacco, yet the apostle wrote, “I will not be enslaved by anything” (First Corinthians 6:12). Tobacco is a merciless master.

Jesus recognized that the human body is a gift from God that a believer should never take for granted. When encouraged by the devil to test God’s care for him by throwing himself off the pinnacle of the temple, he cited Scripture: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (Matthew 4:7).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does the writer mean when he suggests that the believer's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (First Corinthians 6:12-20)?
2. What is the danger in trying potentially addictive substances (First Corinthians 6:12, 9:24-27; Acts 24:25)? Why are certain things addictive?
3. How can you tell before you try something that you will or will not become addicted to it?
4. What's so bad about being hooked on nicotine, alcohol or marijuana?
5. How many drinks does it take to become drunk (First Peter 4:1-5)?
6. Define "inhibitions." What is often an initial effect of alcohol on them (Romans 13:11-14 and Proverbs 20:1, 23:29-35)?
7. How might the temple idea affect our eating and exercise habits (Proverbs 23:21, Titus 1:12, Philippians 4:5, First Timothy 4:8)?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 7

You Eat With That Mouth?

James wrote, “the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness” (3:6).

People are known more for the things that emit from their mouths than for the work they do, the clothes they wear and the company they keep. The difference between crudeness and refinement is usually right on the tips of our tongues.

God gave man the ability to speak where he denied it to every other segment of his creation so that we might express our free will fully. We can communicate not only with him, but also with others, and many are the ways in which we introduce holiness or vileness into our communities with speech.

Paul told the Roman believers, “For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (10:10). By inspiration, he could reason that this was so from what Jesus had told an earlier audience: “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

Denying Christ, however, is not only a matter of blatantly recanting faith; more often, one denies Christ by the kinds of things that he says and how he employs his tongue to vent his anger, lust, crudeness or selfishness. “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work” (Titus 1:16).

In the 10 commandments, God forbade his people to use his name in vain, that is, thoughtlessly and carelessly. It was part of his effort to indicate his exclusive sovereignty to them. Today, we hear God’s name used in vain more often than any other way as people carelessly ask him to damn this or that, or as they use his name as an exclamation of joy or wrath. Jesus taught, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

Vanity gives way to profanity in most who adopt such habits of the tongue. Obscene language references sexual or bathroom activity in a coarse manner and verbalizes prejudicial hatred of certain groups (Ephesians 5:4). “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

Lying, gossip and slander are just more abuses of the tongue.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some proper uses of the tongue, according to these passages?
 - Romans 10:9-10:
 - Psalm 54:2:
 - Ephesians 5:19-20:
 - Ephesians 6:19:
2. Why do you think God prohibited the vain use of his name (Exodus 20:1-7, Leviticus 24:10-16)? What does it mean to use his name in vain?
3. What three categories are most associated with obscene language (Ephesians 5:3-4, Matthew 5:21-22)?
4. Why shouldn't thoughtlessness be a valid excuse for using God's name in vain or slipping into profanity (Matthew 12:36-37, First Corinthians 9:24, Matthew 15:16-19)?
5. What is to be the fate of the liar (Ephesians 4:25-27, Revelation 21:8)? But, doesn't everybody lie at least some of the time?
6. What is gossip (Proverbs 11:13, 20:19; Romans 1:29, Second Corinthians 12:20, First Timothy 5:13)? Why is gossip one of the sins of the tongue (Matthew 7:12)?
7. What is the overwhelming inconsistency in a Christian—young, old, or in between—who abuses his tongue (James 3:1-12)?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 8

Monkey's Cousin

Centuries ago an apostate church held sway even in matters of science and persecuted those who dared to question their hybrid orthodoxy.

Today, the pendulum has violently swung against even true interpretations of the Bible so that the new orthodoxy is entirely godless and questions about human origins are reduced to atheistic naturalism.

It is only logical that early man began to wonder where he came from and the biblical book of Genesis was written, in part, to explain the answer. The Bible indicates in both old and new testaments that Jehovah God created the universe, including humanity, and that he made them not through a long evolutionary process, but with the appearance and benefits of age built in from the beginning. Just as Adam was not created a baby, so the earth and the solar system were ready to function fully from the point of the creation week. Perhaps that accounts for the wild scientific estimates of a billion-year old earth when the Bible only seems to record about six to ten thousand years of history.

There is evidence of creation outside the Bible and it is so thorough that any sensible person who is not prejudiced against God can see it. The evidence lies in the amazing orderliness and design of our universe, the earth itself and especially the human body. Where naturalists suggest that humans evolved from something like monkeys, who had evolved from even lower species of life, it becomes outlandish to think that such a thing could have occurred by pure chance over and over again to reach the human apex. And since no one has ever witnessed such macroevolution, he could only believe it is true by ... faith! Not Bible faith, of course, but faith in nothingness and statistical improbability. It is faith, though, since it is a conviction rooted in something unseen (Hebrews 11:1-2). It's even religious, fervently so, in that its defenders seek to evangelize and suppress other notions, like creation.

The Bible even indicates that the evidence of design within creation is so obvious and overwhelming that disbelief in God is inexcusable. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Romans 1:18-20). As the psalmist put it, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (14:1).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Write what you know about the hypothesis of evolution.
2. How does the Bible describe the origin of the universe and mankind (Genesis 1-2)? What could account for the earth appearing very old?
3. What does man lose if he is reduced to an evolutionary byproduct of monkeys, slime and snail darters (Genesis 1:26, Mark 12:30)?
4. What does Paul identify in nature that should show people the reality of God (Romans 1:18-20)? What tends to follow when they ignore such evidence (21-32; cf. Isaiah 5:20)?
5. What declares the glory of God (Psalm 19:1-6)? How? To what should this acknowledgement lead us (7-11; cf. Psalm 8)?
6. What is it about the Bible itself that suggests a divine presence (Second Peter 1:21, First Peter 1:24-25)?
7. What kind of faith is required to believe in Darwinian evolution?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 9

Raising Your Parents

Under the Law of Moses, parents could legally have a disobedient child executed by stoning.

Remember that the next time Dad takes away the car keys or Mom hides your precious cell phone. It could be worse!

It's true. "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

There is no record of this ever happening in the history of Israel; perhaps the threat itself was sufficient disincentive to misbehavior, but it is just as likely that few parents would ever go so far as to bring their offspring up on capital charges.

The family is the second most important of the three institutions that God made, the first being the church and the third the state. All around us, families are falling apart—usually because the adults cannot cooperate or compromise. Too often, though, the children are a part of the disharmony because, freed from the threat of stoning, they disrespect their parents and dishonor their authority and experience.

Moses wrote, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" and "Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death" (Exodus 20:12, 21:17). That concept, if not the immediate penalty, is likewise present in the New Testament. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1; cf. Colossians 3:20).

Parents' love for their children must sometimes be expressed through restrictions, regulations, warnings and punishments. The Hebrew writer suggested that God loves us all the same way and shows it by chastening us just as our parents did (Hebrews 12:1-12). Too many parents just accept disrespect and claim they do not have the heart to discipline a child or to tell him no but a father or mother who loves for all time will suffer the pain to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did God allow for parents to have their children stoned under the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)?

2. What was the first commandment with promise (Exodus 20:12)? Explain. What was the promise (Ephesians 6:1-3)?

3. What do you think will be the eventual benefits of obeying your parents?

4. What reason might Jesus have had for disobeying his parents (Luke 2:41-52)? Can you figure out how that same reason creeps up on us today?

5. How did the Old Testament proverbs describe parental punishment?
 - Proverbs 10:13:
 - Proverbs 13:24:
 - Proverbs 23:13-14:
 - Proverbs 29:15:

6. What is the important limitation upon a parent's discipline (Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21)?

7. What did God identify as Eli's fault in his sons' wickedness (First Samuel 3:13)? What is the duty of parents today?

8. What is the ultimate punishment for disobedience to one's parents (Romans 1:28-32, Second Timothy 3:1-9)?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 10

Modesty

Modesty implies an attitude of humility and discretion, a willingness to reserve one's rights and to consider others first (see Romans 12:3, 16-18).

Modesty shows up in our speech, our attitude, our behavior and even the way we present ourselves.

Some get excited by the prospect of shocking those around them and they dress in bizarre ways or act out. Other hope to provoke lust or envy in the people around them and dress for sex or success. Most people, though, want to go first and they do everything to put themselves in a position where that will be the result. Modesty has the courage and the meekness to let others proceed and to think about the consequences of behavior on them.

Jesus pronounced a blessing upon the meek who, he said, would inherit the earth and the Holy Spirit extolled the virtue of a woman who could contain her gifts without provoking the people around her. "I desire then that ... women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness" (First Timothy 2:8-11). Her modesty prevents her from dressing ostentatiously or provocatively. Modesty is not only about hemlines and necklines, but is also about character and attitude. A modest person does not need or desire the envy or lust of anybody (Matthew 5:28, 18:7, Galatians 5:26).

Peter celebrated the godly woman whose adornment was in "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious" (First Peter 3:4).

Today's fashions celebrate something else—the human form which when exposed or emphasized is cause for frustrating and soul-damning lust in the hearts of men. The exposure of the thighs and midriff, the emphasis upon the chest and backside—the combination serves to intensify desire and engender lust. While this is especially true in women's attire, it is just as likely that men can become the object of female lust through the clothes they wear or remove.

Most of what passes for dancing today is eminently immodest, especially when the gyrations mimic sex acts and thrust the sexual parts of the body forward. It is sensuality, from a Greek word for indecent bodily movements and unchaste handling, that makes provision for the flesh (Galatians 5:19, Romans 13:11-14).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is modesty (see First Corinthians 12:23, Proverbs 11:22)?
2. What are the signs of immodest behavior?
3. Why shouldn't we want to provoke others' lust or envy (Matthew 5:28, 18:7, Galatians 5:26)? What if it can't be helped (Romans 12:18)?
4. Is it possible "nakedness" could describe someone who has at least some clothing on (Genesis 3:7, 10, 21; Exodus 28:42, Isaiah 20:4)? Explain.
5. How do modern fashions help to provoke lust?
6. Why shouldn't people be allowed to do whatever they want with their bodies (First Corinthians 6:18-20)?
7. What is the sin problem with much modern dancing (Galatians 5:19)?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 11

Dating Games

Things were much simpler when little kindergarten boys and girls avoided each other like gender-specific skunks upon the playground.

Only a few years later, their bodies began to change and their minds soon followed. Suddenly, boys and girls were interested in one another, fascinated with someone who looked and thought differently from them.

Then began the dating games.

“Do you like me? Check yes or no.”

Going steady—really just a euphemism for going out with one person until somebody better comes along.

Class rings and varsity jackets were exchanged. A single rose on a simple budget sufficed for Valentine’s Day. It’s all a game.

But the game gets very serious much more quickly these days.

Dating includes the inevitable heartbreaks and disappointments, as well as the potential for taking young affection much too far, much too early. Sometimes lives are turned upside down because hormones get ahead of morals and the result is sexual sin, sometimes also disease or an unplanned, unwanted baby who might be unloved, aborted, or abandoned.

Although some Christians have determined not to date at all but to locate a mate by less conventional means, most will plunge in when they think they are ready and then find out they’re not. Understanding the opposite sex is not as easy as it looks—and it doesn’t look easy to begin with.

The most important aspect of dating, though, is that it is about mating. The fun and food are often a precursor to romance and displays of affection and desire can lead a young couple too far.

Nowhere is self-control a more vital subject than when it comes to dating. One must have the self-awareness to keep himself out of situations where he will be easy prey to his own desires. Young men and women must have the sense to keep their hands and hearts pure and that is much harder to do when the lights are out, the grown-ups aren’t watching and both your hearts are pounding. Our society makes it incredibly easy and attractive to slip over into fornication, but it is impossible afterward just to slip back.

Sexual purity—waiting until marriage—sets apart the true believer from the pretender. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God” (First Thessalonians 4:3-5).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who wanted to “date” Joseph (Genesis 39:1-12)? How did he react?
2. What was Paul’s advice to Timothy (Second Timothy 2:22)?
3. What criteria do we use to choose whom to date? Whom should we learn to avoid (First Corinthians 15:33)?
4. Define sanctification. What role does sexual morality play in a person’s identity before God and others (First Thessalonians 4:1-8)?
5. Against whom do the Proverbs repeatedly warn (5:3, 6:20-28)?
6. What do you think are modern dating equivalents to “taking fire to the bosom” (Proverbs 6:27, 7:21-27)?
7. When is the right time to begin having sex of any description (Song of Solomon 2:7, 3:5; Hebrews 13:4)?
8. What should one do who finds himself in a tempting situation (First Corinthians 10:12-13)?
9. What are some of the effects of premarital sex?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 12

Room in the Kingdom

“There is room in the kingdom of God, my brother, for the small things that you can do.”

It’s a classic song, but the idea is not dated at all. There is room in the kingdom—in the church—for the things that young men and women can do—sometimes as well or better than their senior counterparts.

Room in the kingdom, though, depends upon first entering through the door. The apostle Peter and his eleven friends were given the keys to the kingdom, which they used on the first Pentecost holiday after Christ’s ascension back into Heaven. In the second chapter of the book of Acts, they preached a gospel message of belief, repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, convicting an audience that had complied with the execution of Jesus, allowing them to be forgiven.

Getting into the kingdom means entering the body of Christ, which is the church, and the baptism of a penitent believer is the only means by which that can happen (see Romans 6:1-7, Galatians 3:27). It is, quite obviously, not automatic or easy. Early in his ministry, Jesus taught, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Even some who are usually religious can be led astray by hypocrisy and taking the easy way out: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (7:21-24).

Once a person is mature enough to understand sin and to believe personally in a risen savior, he becomes accountable for his own misdeeds and needs to be converted to Christ by obeying the gospel invitation.

He or she can only then begin truly to grow in grace and knowledge, seeking out talents and abilities that will be useful to the kingdom and the cause of Christ (Second Peter 3:17-18). Young men can aspire to preach, serve or oversee a local congregation while young women can prepare to live godly lives, to share the gospel message and to teach others.

There is so much in the kingdom that needs doing. The church depends upon each generation taking its place in the effort and seeing it forward.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does one enter the kingdom (Acts 2:36-47, Galatians 3:27)? What is the kingdom (Matthew 16:13-19, Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:13)?
2. What must one know or understand before he becomes eligible for conversion to Christ (Acts 8:26-40, cf. Romans 7:7-25)? How old must he or she be to be baptized?
3. What keeps some people from entering the kingdom (Matthew 7:13-14, 13:18-23; Luke 7:30)? What is the duty of those who make it in?
4. How could religious people still end up being lost (Matthew 7:24-27, Colossians 1:21-23, Hebrews 12:14-17, Second Peter 2:20-22)?
5. What can a young convert immediately do in the kingdom (Second Peter 3:17-18, First Timothy 4:13-16)?
6. What aspirations might a young convert develop?

The Days of Your Youth: Lesson 13

Review

1. What is character? What is integrity? What single virtue is key to establishing good character and maintaining one's personal integrity (First Corinthians 9:24-27, Titus 2:12)?
2. What are the dangers in focusing your ambitions around making money (First Timothy 6:6-10, Luke 12:13-21)?
3. How does "bad company" entice a person to choose to do wrong (Proverbs 1:10-19, Psalm 1:1-2, First Peter 4:1-5)?
4. What is the biblical problem with gambling (Ephesians 5:1-5, Colossians 3:1-7)? What is covetousness and why should it be wrong (Luke 12:15)?
5. What do you think happens to your conscience when you allow yourself to be entertained by something you know is wrong (Ephesians 4:17-19)?

6. What does the writer mean when he suggests that the believer's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (First Corinthians 6:12-20)? What is the danger in trying potentially addictive substances (First Corinthians 6:12, 9:24-27; Acts 24:25)? Why are certain things addictive?

7. What three categories are most associated with obscene language (Ephesians 5:3-4, Matthew 5:21-22)?

8. What declares the glory of God (Psalm 19:1-6)? How? To what should this acknowledgement lead us (7-11; cf. Psalm 8)?

9. What is the ultimate punishment for disobedience to one's parents (Romans 1:28-32, Second Timothy 3:1-9)?

10. Why shouldn't we want to provoke others' lust or envy (Matthew 5:28, 18:7, Galatians 5:26)? What if it can't be helped (Romans 12:18)?

11. Define sanctification. What role does sexual morality play in a person's identity before God and others (First Thessalonians 4:1-8)?

12. What can a young convert immediately do in the kingdom (Second Peter 3:17-18, First Timothy 4:13-16)?

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