

Phase 1: Baby to Preschool

I love that intro to this morning's message. I've seen it several times now, and it kind of gets to me every single time!

Today, we're starting a new series called, "It's Just a Phase."

You know, throughout the course of our lives we all go through different phases, don't we? There's childhood, the teenage years, the years when you're a young adult, the parenting years, and the golden years. Some days it seems like you want to rush through whatever phase you're in, and just get on to the next one; it seems like the phase you're in is going to last forever. And, other times it seems like you barely blink your eyes, and several phases of life have gone by just like that!

If anyone has ever said to you, "It's just a phase," chances are what they intended to convey to you were some words of consolation, or maybe even words of encouragement. What they probably meant was something like, "Don't worry...you can get through this...you'll survive...this time won't last forever."

But during this sermon series, we're going to be thinking about phases of life from a very different perspective—really we'll be looking at them from the opposite perspective!

Listen to this definition of a phase: A phase is a timeframe in your life when you can leverage opportunities to influence the future! ... (Again) A phase is a timeframe in your life when you can leverage opportunities to influence the future!

In every phase of life, there are really important things going on; critical things taking place physically, emotionally, and spiritually. From infancy to old age, every phase of life can be

life-giving and spirit-filled; every physical phase is also a spiritual phase where God is at work.

I'm reading today a passage of scripture found in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6. Here's some context: all the Israelite families who have been wandering in the desert for forty years are about to cross over the Jordan River, and enter the land which God has promised them.

The Israelites are being reminded by Moses how important it will be for them to follow God as they enter the Promised Land. They will be tempted to adapt to the culture around them, and forget about God. Moses tells them if they follow God, if they weave the awareness of God into their everyday lives, then it will go well with them in the land.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

There are several really important things in this passage I want to lift out for us this morning. First, is the Oneness of God. It's like Moses is saying: "Listen up, Israel! There is only one God, our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You're going to enter a land where there will be lots of other gods with little "g's" competing for your attention, and your loyalty. Don't be fooled by them. They are not really gods at all; they are only idols which will try and draw you away from the Lord our God".

The second important thing we can take away from this passage of scripture is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength. How do you keep from turning to other false gods when they compete for your love and loyalty? By remembering to keep the one true God first in your love. If you love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, it will be very hard for anything else to get a foothold and compete with your one, true loyalty in life to God. Jesus quoted these same words as the greatest commandment when he was asked in Matthew 22.

One other thing I want to mention that we can really learn from this passage are some simple ways we can weave the awareness of God into our everyday lives. We are to write the commandments of God on our hearts—these are not something we just learn with our head—they are to become a part of the way we live. And we are to impress this way of living upon our children, so they will grow in the Lord too.

The passage says you are to “Talk about them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the road; when you lie down and when you get up”. Here at Anderson Hills, we believe that the church is meant to give parents the tools they need to raise their children to be active, loving, followers of Jesus Christ. At most, a child will spend an hour or two here at church each week. But especially in the baby to preschool years, that same child will spend many, if not every other hour in the presence of his or her family. So how do you talk about God when you’re sitting around at home, or when you’re driving around town in your car? How do you talk about God when you wake up in the morning and eat breakfast, or before going to bed at night?

One of the tools we give parents is called Faith 5. We teach families to weave five simple faith acts into their regular routine every evening. We teach parents how to share highs and lows of

their day; to read and talk about a daily bible verse; and to pray for and bless one another. Faith 5 is designed to take about 5-10 minutes each night. Yet in just that amount of time, you develop and maintain great relationships with your children, and help ensure they are raised to be strong, caring, thinking Christians. The next Faith 5 class is next Sunday morning; make sure you sign up if you want some practical ways to increase your child's faith through every phase of life. Sign up information is in your Weekly.

Now all of us, whether we're parents or not, have influence over children. We're aunts or uncles; we're grandparents; we're teachers and coaches; we're neighbors and volunteers. And all of us, when we are part of the body of Christ, have more influence than we may be aware of. We volunteer in the nursery, or the Family Ministry area. We help with Whiz Kids, or with families staying in the IHN house. Or we just show up on Sunday morning; children watch you and listen to you even if you don't know it. One family that moved here from out of town and started attending church here, specifically came to this 8:30 worship service--not usually known for brimming over with young children. But they chose this service because they said every person here was like a loving set of grandparents for their children who had no biological grandparents here in Cincinnati! Each one of you oohed and awed over their little babies! You have influence!

Every single one of us in the church has a role to play, and a vested interest in every child's future. We are all called to help raise up the next generation of believers. And we can all support parents, and we can all pray for the parents and children in our congregation.

So today, we're talking about the first phase in life—the baby to preschool years. Now, the first five years of a child's life are fundamentally important. They lay the foundation that shapes a

child's future health, happiness, growth, development, and learning achievement at school, in the family and community, and in life in general. Children learn more quickly during their early years than at any other time in life. They need love and nurturing to develop a sense of trust and security that turns into confidence as they grow.

Now, the newborn to one-year-old phase is that phase when “nobody sleeps, everybody smells, and one mesmerizing baby convinces you, “I need you”.

I remember bringing our oldest Sarah home from the hospital. At first when she slept, and Marge and I could have been sleeping, we just stared at her sleeping in her crib. She was amazing to watch! But then, when it became so tiring taking care of the constant needs of a helpless baby, and I wanted to sleep, there were always things that needed to get done just to keep up!

Back in those days, I worked in retail, and often had weekdays off during the week, while Marge worked a more normal Monday through Friday schedule. I remember whenever Sarah would go down for a nap, that was when I would wash and sterilize bottles, make formula, and get ready for her next feedings.

And speaking of smells, I remember the first time I ever changed Sarah's diaper—she was only a day or two old—and I became oddly aware that her poop didn't smell! I got really excited, like my baby was extra-special somehow! Of course after she got more in her belly and in her system, of course it smelled just like anyone else's!

But anyone who's ever held a baby knows that not all the smells are bad! There's the wonderful smell of a baby's skin when they're freshly bathed; the scent of baby shampoo as you

snuggle and tussle their hair, and even the smell of freshly laundered diapers.

More recently with my grandbabies I've been reminded how much a newborn needs his or her parents for everything! And as you stare at their miraculous little human frame, the words of the psalmist come to life,

*“God, you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.*

At this stage, a child is dependent on his parent for everything, just as we are truly dependent upon God for everything. By being there for your baby, by meeting her physical needs, she will come to feel safe and secure, and to trust the world around her. And this will help set the stage as later you begin to teach that we can depend upon God for our needs, that we can be safe and secure in God’s love for us, and we can trust God.

Even simple stories and songs of our faith are important in this infant stage. I remember after my grandson Ace was born, and I was with him in the NICU at Children’s Hospital singing to him, “Jesus Loves Me”. I wanted him to know from the very beginning not only how much his family all loves him, but that Jesus, who knit him together in his mother’s womb, also loves him with an infinite love.

During the years when children are between 1 – 2 years old, you can expect families to be late for everything. This is the

age when a child begins to rebuff your offers to help them, and they respond by telling you, “No! I can do it myself!” They want to feed themselves. They want to dress themselves. They want to try everything for themselves!

This is the stage where your child will come downstairs with some adorably mismatched outfits on, ready to face the day. This is the stage when shoes get put on the wrong foot. This is the stage when everything takes longer as this child learns new skills but has not mastered the speed with which you could do it if you helped them.

This is the stage when there will be more messes than normal. The spill on the coffee table as they try to drink from a cup on their own. The food that misses the mouth, and ends up somewhere else—sometimes almost anywhere else but in their mouth.

My grandson Greyson loves his Skyline Chili! He’s definitely a chip of his old Poppy’s block, ‘cause Poppy loves his Skyline too! Not long ago, we were eating at Skyline and Grey wanted to eat by himself. He sometimes uses a utensil, but often he just eats with his fingers! We get two of those plastic bibs for him at Skyline—one we tie around his waist, and the other we tie around his neck to keep clothes as clean as possible. But he has a ball as he shovels that chili into his mouth, creating a chili-beard that Poppy find adorable!

In this stage, children are learning new skills, and they are developing confidence for the future.

When children are 3 and 4 years old they begin to think like an artist. Their world is full of wonder and imagination. Absolutely anything can be imagined, and everything can be a game.

When my girls were little, everything was a castle with princesses, a school room with teachers, or a house with a family. Now, with my grandsons, everything is a world of superheroes, and a world of good guys and bad guys. I'd venture to say my four year old grandson Logan, absolutely believes he can shoot spider webs out his finger tips like Spiderman does! And he saves the world from danger when he's Captain America!

Although much of their world is imaginary, quite a bit is still understood as literal. Recently, Logan was riding in the car with his family, and they were listening to Christian music on the radio. They were actually on their way to church for a Thursday night band practice. A song by the group Rend Collective came on the radio called "Build Your Kingdom Here". It's a song about revival, and the some of the words go, "Set your church on fire, win this nation back..." and his little voice from the back seat said, "Uhh, are we supposed to set our church on fire?" You gotta love it when little ones come up with lines like that!

Sometimes they are so adorable, and other times not so much. And usually its all within a short time span, isn't it? And in those moments, something amazing can happen.

A month or so ago, my daughter Allie wrote this on her Facebook page about my grandson Logan... "Sometimes, your almost-four-year-old kid throws a tantrum worthy of some kind of award, and you don't even know why you ever signed up to be a parent. But then later that evening, that same kid lies next to you in his twin-sized bed and says quietly, "Did you know that God is in my movies in my eyes* (that's what he calls dreams) but he's also in the world? And God is trying to find all of us, but he already found me... Hey. Remember when you didn't have a kid and a baby but now you have a kid and a baby? Tell me about both of those." And when you've recovered from processing his oddly profound description of God, he quietly listens to you tell the

story about life before him and his brother, and he laughs at the part where you talk about how much you love him. 😊😊😊😊😊😊

Children at this age can be very aware of God. If they are learning about God, and hearing about God, sometimes it's uncanny just how much they really understand about God.

Colton Reinhart has still left a big impression on me from his baptism several weeks ago. He's three and a half years old, and as I started to place the water on his head to baptize him, he started saying over and over, "I love you God, I love you God." Colton's mom and dad are using this phase to give him, and no doubt his little brother a strong and solid foundation of faith for the next phase and beyond.

I want to say a word or two to those of you who may be sitting here this morning thinking about a difficult childhood you had, with parents who weren't so loving and nurturing. Or maybe your children are beyond this first stage, and you're regretting that you weren't there for them as much as you wanted to be. While it's true that you can't change the past, it's also true that today is a new day, and a fresh day, and a new start is possible right now! We just finished a series on forgiveness...perhaps it's time you forgive your parents, or forgive yourself, and allow the fresh start God wants to give you now. No one is perfect but God.

One of the things we can do to help each other is to learn from each other. It's awesome when someone who has already lived through the phase that I am in, can offer wisdom and advice to help me.

I want you to watch this video clip from a mom in our church, Stacy Hammond, whose children are just out of this first phase.

[\(Play Video\)](#)

Spending time with children in the birth to preschool years is amazing! It's a phase you want to enjoy and spend time in. It sets the stage for so much that is to come. When we meet the physical needs of our children, set good, safe boundaries for them, and help them with their spiritual development in this phase they will come to know that God created them, God loves them, and God wants to be their forever friend.

It's just a phase...Don't miss it!