



## Week 3 // Childhood

*In this Post-Easter series we explore the first Epistle written by Jesus' disciple John. This love-filled letter prompts us to explore five distinct stages of life in Christ: spiritual death, infancy, childhood, young adulthood, and reproducing parenthood. Learn to identify the stage of someone's spiritual growth based upon the key phrases they use. This series is sure to lead to self-reflection and greater growth toward spiritual maturity.*

### Connect

- 1) What is a favorite memory from your childhood? Share!
- 2) In general, what are some of the positive things about being a child? What are some of the negative things about this phase in a person's growth?

### Digging Deeper

- 3) Read Hebrews 5:11-14 and then answer the following questions: Based on what you see here in the New Testament, do you think God is okay with us stalling out in our Christian growth? What are the consequences if we do so? Name a spiritually mature Christian who has been an encouragement to you. Explain how they have helped you to grow in your faith.
- 4) In this 'Stages' series, we are becoming aware that certain phrases identify a person with a particular stage of discipleship. Below are a few samples of the 'Phrase from the Stage' that tell us a person might be traveling through a 'childhood' phase in their spiritual growth.
  - I don't know if this church is meeting my needs anymore. Maybe I should go to a different church that does better.
  - Don't break my small group into two. We won't get to be with our friends.
  - Who are all these new people coming into our church? The church is getting too big. It's too hard to get a parking spot anymore.
  - Why do we have to learn new songs? I like the old hymns better.

- No one ever says hi to me at church. The pastors don't care about me.
- I wasn't fed at all by that sermon today. And my small group isn't taking care of my needs like they should.

Have you heard anyone use one of these phrases?

Have you ever heard a comment like these come out of your own mouth?

What do all of these phrases seem to have in common?

- 5) Childhood is typically marked by self-centeredness. In your experience, how does a newer Christian effectively move toward being others-centered and God-centered? What factors or experiences seem to help that to happen?
- 6) Read 1 John 3:16-24 together. Note how the apostle John is spurring his spiritual 'children' on to maturity in Christ! What specific shifts toward maturity do you see contained in these verses?

## Live It Out

- 7) Rather than using a 'Phrase from the Stage' to judge a person... the words they use actually help us know what they need. Spiritual children are still focused largely on themselves; but move into maturity through strong connections with God, their spiritual family, and a larger purpose.
  - + Name someone you know who may be identified with this stage.
  - + How has today's discussion helped you to reframe your relationship with them?
  - + What is the Holy Spirit nudging you to do or say?

## Lifting it up

As you take time to pray in your small group or throughout the week on your own, here are some ideas and concepts which may help focus your prayers.

- Pray by name for someone God is calling you to invest in.
- Pray that God would use the influence of your relationship to help them make connections with God, with a spiritual family, and with a larger purpose.