

4. Learning to Grow to Spiritual Maturity

In our last topic, we saw that one of our goals, as Christians, should be to help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in the light, so that the life of Christ in them matures and flows out through their lives. This happens more and more in our lives as we grow to spiritual maturity. Today, we want to focus on how we can help our physical and spiritual children grow to spiritual maturity, and learn how to help others grow to spiritual maturity.

In 1 John 2:12-14, we read, “I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.” We want to show our physical and spiritual children how to grow to spiritual maturity and then learn to help others grow to spiritual maturity.

Spiritual growth begins at the moment of spiritual birth. 1 Peter 2:2 says, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” Here, we see that a person who has just put his or her trust in Christ needs the things that are the milk of the Word in order to help them grow. Since new Christians do not know what parts of the Bible are like milk, they need a spiritual parent to help them begin to understand the basics and help them experience healthy spiritual growth.

If people do not have a spiritual parent to help them in their spiritual growth, they remain like a spiritual toddler (a child who cannot speak clearly). Without someone to help them in their spiritual growth, many people who become Christians remain as spiritual toddlers for many years. There are four key passages on spiritual toddlers – 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 1 Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 4:14 and Hebrews 5:11-14. Those four passages give us ten characteristics that are common in spiritual toddlers. These are:

- He acts like one who is not a Christian - 1 Corinthians 3:1
- He is not able to understand difficult teachings from the Word - 1 Corinthians 3:2
- He experiences envy, strife and divisions - 1 Corinthians 3:3
- His talk, understanding and thinking of spiritual things is limited - 1 Corinthians 13:11
- He is tossed to and fro by every false teaching - Ephesians 4:14
- He is easily deceived by false teachers - Ephesians 4:14
- He is dull of hearing to spiritual truth - Hebrews 5:11
- He needs to be re-taught the basics of Christianity - Hebrews 5:12
- He is unskillful in the word of righteousness - Hebrews 5:13
- His senses are not developed to recognize good and evil - Hebrews 5:14

This list, of the characteristics of a spiritual toddler, shows why it is so important for us to walk alongside both our physical and spiritual children to help them grow and mature. Then, we want to show them how to walk alongside others and act as a spiritual parent to help others learn to grow

to spiritual maturity. In our verses here, in 1 John 2:12-14, we see several key things that we can help our physical and spiritual children learn and practice in their own lives, so they can show others how to mature.

In these verses, we see two characteristics of a growing spiritual child. We want to show our children how to help develop these characteristics in others through their example and teaching. Those characteristics are:

1. He knows that his sins are forgiven.
2. He knows the Father.

Most new Christians hope their sins are forgiven, but they do not know their sins are forgiven. A Christian really begins to grow when he or she truly understands how to experience forgiveness and cleansing and what that means in their daily lives. Many new Christians must have this explained several times before they fully understand. This may take even longer for people who grew up in a church where they were taught they could lose their salvation. New Christians need someone who will patiently explain passages like: Romans 8:35-39, Romans 10:9-13, John 10:27-30, and other similar passages, to them.

Growing Christians also need to understand what God does with their sins at the moment of salvation. The following passages tell us some of the things Christ does with our sins at the moment of salvation. Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Micah 7:19 says, “He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Then, Hebrews 10:17 tells us, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” We help a Christian to really start growing as we help them to understand that their sins have not only been paid for, but they have also been removed. When John the Baptist introduced Christ, in John 1:29, he said, “...Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” New Christians grow best when they no longer continue to feel guilty about past sins.

Then, growing Christians need help in learning how to get to know the Father, not just knowing about the Father. This happens best as they spend time with other Christians and hear them honestly pray and talk to God, rather than just repeating memorized prayers. Paul gave some specifics when he prayed for growing Christians, in Ephesians 3:17-19. He prayed, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Growing Christians get to know the Father as they hear other Christians share their concerns with the Father.

God gives us three characteristics of a spiritual young man or young woman, in 1 John 2:12-14. Those characteristics are:

1. He is strong in spirit (compare John the Baptist – Luke 1:80 and Jesus – Luke 2:40).
2. He has the Word of God abiding in Him.
3. He has overcome the wicked one.

We become strong in spirit as we learn to yield our human spirit to the Holy Spirit, so that the Holy Spirit can work through our lives. Romans 6:16 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” The Holy Spirit gives our human spirit the strength to obey and practice righteousness at all those times we are yielding to Him.

Christians who have the Word of God abiding in them spend time hearing, reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on the Word of God so that when people ask them questions, they are equipped to follow the instructions of 1 Peter 3:15. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” In their conversations with others, they often share principles from the Word of God.

Christians who have overcome the wicked one are not perfect, as 1 John 1:8 tells us that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. However, it does mean that they have learned to walk in love instead of fear. 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in love, they will be led by the love of Christ, instead of being driven by the fear of people. Because they are walking in love, they have grown to understand the meaning of 1 John 4:4, where we read, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” As a result, they are also walking by faith.

In these verses, we are given one characteristic of spiritual fathers or mothers. These are Christians who have become mature Christians, because 1 John 2:14a says, “I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning...” This speaks of a Christian who has really learned to share his or her life with the Lord. There are also several other characteristics of a spiritual parent:

1. He has one or more spiritual children that he or she loves. 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 says, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” Just as Paul was a spiritual parent to Timothy, Titus and others, a spiritual parent has developed a similar relationship with a spiritual family.
2. He shows the care of a nursing mother - 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9. Here, we see that a spiritual parent to a new Christian provides the same kind of care that a physical parent provides to a physical child.
3. He provides the example of a godly father – 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children grow to maturity so they can help others learn to grow. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to become mature, reproducing Christians.