

1. Helping New Christians Begin to Grow

Today, we are going to begin a new series of topics on “Helping New Christians Begin to Grow.” In this series, we will be focusing on the topic of how we help people once they become Christians. Like physical birth and growth, most of the work in spiritual development happens after spiritual birth. Spiritual birth is just the beginning of the process which helps a person move from becoming a Christian to becoming a healthy reproducing Christian.

In the physical life, if a couple brought a new born home from the hospital and set the new baby out on the front porch and said, “We have done our part because we brought this baby into the world. Now it is up to the baby to grow on its own,” that couple would be charged with child endangerment because they were endangering the life of that child. However, many Christians have a similar attitude. They lead a person to Christ and feel that they have done their part and it is now up to that new Christian to grow on his or her own.

With a physical child, most of the work happens during the eighteen or twenty years after the child is born. The same is true for the spiritual new born. Most of the work to help that new Christian grow happens after his or her spiritual birth. We need to have as much concern for the spiritual development of a new Christian as we have for the physical development of a physical child who has just been born. If someone does not provide that spiritual care for the spiritual new born, that new Christian will not experience a healthy development.

Scripture talks about various levels of spiritual maturity and these levels of spiritual maturity are very comparable to the similar levels of physical maturity. Those levels include:

- ◆ Spiritual new born - 1 Peter 2:2
- ◆ Spiritual toddler - 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 13:11; Ephesians 4:14; Hebrews 5:11-14
- ◆ Spiritual child - 1 John 2:12-14
- ◆ Spiritual young man - 1 John 2:12-14
- ◆ Spiritual parent - 1 John 2:12-14; 1 Corinthians 4:14-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

All new Christians need spiritual parents to help them in their spiritual growth. In a Christian home, the physical parents will often become the spiritual parents as well. However, for those who do not grow up in a Christian home or for those who become Christians as adults, they need one or more spiritual parents to help them in their spiritual growth. Ideally, some mature Christian should take the responsibility to become a spiritual parent to the new Christian within 24 hours after their spiritual birth. Tragically, many new Christians never get a spiritual parent and so they fail to grow beyond the spiritual toddler stage. As a result, many people who have been Christians for twenty or thirty years demonstrate most or all of the characteristics of a spiritual toddler. Those characteristics include:

1. He acts like one who is not a Christian - 1 Corinthians 3:1
2. He is not able to understand the difficult teachings from the Word - 1 Corinthians 3:2
3. He experiences envy, strife and divisions - 1 Corinthians 3:3
4. His talk, understanding and thinking of spiritual things is limited - 1 Corinthians 13:11

5. He is tossed to and fro by every false teaching - Ephesians 4:14
6. He is easily deceived by false teachers - Ephesians 4:14
7. He is dull of hearing to spiritual truth - Hebrews 5:11
8. He needs to be retaught the basics of Christianity - Hebrews 5:12
9. He is unskillful in the word of righteousness - Hebrews 5:13
10. His senses are not developed to recognize good and evil - Hebrews 5:14

As we look at these characteristics of a spiritual toddler (the word used in these passages means the child who is not able to speak clearly), we see characteristics which are common in the lives of people who have only been Christians for a few weeks or months. However, there is a major problem when these characteristics describe a person who has been a Christian for many years. The tragedy is that we all know people who have been Christians for many years whose lives demonstrate most or all of these characteristics including some who hold positions of leadership in churches.

At each of the different levels of spiritual maturity, a Christian will have a different focus. In fact that focus will help you understand where that person is in their spiritual growth so that you can best know how to help that person grow to the next level of spiritual maturity. The focus of the person at each of the various levels of spiritual maturity is:

- The spiritual infant - food (1 Peter 2:2)
- The spiritual toddler - MY needs, MY Problems (1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 13:11; Ephesians 4:14; Hebrews 5:11-14)
- The spiritual child - growth (1 John 2:12-14, 18)
- The spiritual young man - service (1 John 2:12-14)
- The spiritual parent - care of spiritual children (1 John 2:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12)

When we become a spiritual parent to a spiritual newborn or a spiritual toddler, we need to understand the description of a spiritual child as given in 1 John 2:12-14 and Luke 1:80 and 2:40. In those verses, we see that a spiritual child:

- ⇒ Knows that his sins are forgiven
- ⇒ Is becoming strong in spirit

Those same verses (1 John 2:12-14) describe a spiritual young man (or woman). He or she:

- * Has become strong in spirit
- * Has the Word of God in his heart
- * Has overcome Satan and is experiencing a life of joy and victory instead of defeat

A spiritual parent is described in 1 John 2:12-14 and 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 where we see he or she:

- Has grown to know the God of the Word
- Leads others by love and example

Most Christians can only really understand one level of spiritual maturity beyond the level of maturity that they are presently experiencing. This is especially true of the spiritual toddler

because he or she is usually struggling. The spiritual toddler is often like a physical toddler who just got out of diapers and off of the bottle when a new baby brother or sister is born. Suddenly the toddler is stealing the baby's bottle and needs diapers again because the new baby is getting all of the attention and the toddler is jealous.

Most spiritual toddlers read the description of a spiritual young man and say that sounds like an impossibility for a Christian to experience those characteristics while here on this earth. That is why the spiritual toddler really needs one or more spiritual parents who will walk alongside him so that the toddler begins to understand the love of Christ and sees an example of someone who is taking root in that love - Ephesians 3:16-19. In the coming weeks, we will be discussing how to help new Christians and spiritual toddlers in their spiritual growth. May the Lord richly bless you as you help others grow.