

10. Helping Spiritual Parents Continue Healthy Spiritual Growth

In our last two topics, we have seen how we help a new Christian grow and develop in his or her spiritual life. We have seen that spiritual sons and daughters go through a similar process of development as physical sons and daughters. In our topic today, we will see how a spiritual parent helps a growing Christian become an “adult son” and a partner in ministry. The result of healthy growth is usually reproduction of our lives in the lives of others, because we are able to say as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.” Of course, that also implies that we are growing and learning more and more to imitate Christ.

1 John 2:12-14 points out one key characteristic of a spiritual parent, “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 see, in these verses, that the characteristic of a spiritual parent is repeated twice. A spiritual parent has:

Known Him that is from the beginning.

- * The spiritual child has: Known the Father
- * The spiritual young man has: The Word of God abiding in him
- * The spiritual parent has: Known Him that is from the beginning

We talked about the words. “relationship” and “fellowship” in some earlier topics. 1 John 1:3-4 says, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” In these verses, we see that John wanted those who received this letter to enjoy fellowship with both the Father and the Son as a regular part of their lives. In addition, we see that such a Christian will also be enjoying regular fellowship with other Christians. In 1 John 1:7, we see that, “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” True fellowship only happens as we learn to:

- Walk in the light as He is in the light
- Experience daily cleansing from sin

A second characteristic of a spiritual parent is implied by the word parent. It is impossible to be a parent without having one or more children. A person may think that he is being a spiritual parent, because he preaches to a large crowd of people. One simple question we need to ask is, “How many of you became physical parents because you spoke to large crowds of people?” In Mark 3:13-14, we see that the first reason why Christ chose the twelve was so that “they might be with Him”. Then, as Christ came to the end of His ministry He said, in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Christ

chose the twelve so they might be with Him, with the result that they knew that He really loved them as individuals.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, we see three key needs of a spiritual parent, “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” In these verses, we see that spiritual parents:

1. Need to continue to grow in their ability to love
2. Need to continue to grow in the sharing of their lives
3. Need to continue to grow in their godly example to spiritual children

As people become faithful spiritual parents, God continues to increase their opportunities for ministry. This provides the opportunity for you to help them continue to develop and become spiritual Timothys. In Acts 16:1-3, we see two key things about the ministry of Timothy before he was chosen by Paul to go with him as a part of the ministry team, “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father *was* Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.” Two characteristics of a Timothy are found in this passage:

- * He already had a good report of other Christians
- * He already had an effective ministry to other Christians

Lystra was about eighteen miles from Iconium, and Derbe was about forty miles the opposite direction. The fact that all three of these cities are mentioned in relation to the good report about Timothy show that he was already reaching out beyond his own city to help others develop in their spiritual lives. As a result, a spiritual Timothy is a maturing Christian who we adopt as a spiritual son to help him develop a wider and more effective ministry. He may still be a spiritual young man or he may already be a spiritual parent. However, he is a growing Christian who has the potential for a much greater ministry if he can spend time with a mature spiritual leader to learn from his example.

A second thing we notice about Timothy is that he came from a family that was multi-cultural - his mother was a Jew and his father was a Greek. If the Lord happens to lead us to a maturing Christian who already has a multi-cultural background, we will see that such a person has already been prepared to develop a ministry to a variety of cultures and ethnic groups. As a result, that individual will have the potential to effectively develop other leaders in various cultures.

A third thing that we see about Timothy, in 2 Timothy 1:5, is that both his mother and grandmother

had a true faith in Christ but nothing is mentioned about the faith of his father. Whether this was due to the fact that his father was not a believer or had died when Timothy was quite young, we do not know. However, whichever was the case, Timothy grew up with the godly spiritual influences all coming from his mother's side of the family. This also meant that Timothy understood those who lacked the spiritual influence of a godly father. Some of those we help become spiritual parents will have a similar background to Timothy. We want to help them learn to recognize how their background uniquely equips them to minister to others.

As you help spiritual parents develop their ministry to spiritual children, remember that they may have the potential for a wider ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you help them develop that wider ministry possibly even to other cultures, religions, ethnic groups, and even other language groups.