

13. Helping Spiritual Newborns Build Their Relationship with God

In order to help new Christians build their relationship with God, there are at least five areas where we want to help them:

- Learn about God (Bible study)
- Learn to talk to God (prayer)
- Learn to know God (fellowship)
- Learn to serve God (obedience)
- Learn to yield to the Holy Spirit (power for change)

First, we want to help new Christians and toddlers learn to build their relationship with God. The key to helping spiritual newborns learn how to build their relationship with God is not to tell them to study their Bible. Instead, the key is to have Bible study with them so that they get their questions answered. Christ took the disciples with Him so that He could answer the questions that were in their minds. Before people become Christians, they lack spiritual understanding - 1 Corinthians 2:14. (Many people also lack reading comprehension.) For this reason, a new Christian will have many of the same questions, whether he has never been to school or has multiple doctoral degrees from the best universities in the world.

As we are studying the Bible with the new Christian, we want to help him learn to know God from the Word of God. In the process of studying with him, we want to help him learn about God from the Bible in five ways:

- ⇒ By hearing the Word of God - Romans 10:17
- ⇒ By reading the Word of God - Revelation 1:3
- ⇒ By studying the Word of God - 2 Timothy 2:15
- ⇒ By memorizing the Word of God - Psalm 119:11
- ⇒ By meditating on the Word of God - Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3

Most people first get involved in learning about God by hearing someone else read the Bible. Those who become Christians, and begin to grow, usually start to read, some start to study and some begin to memorize. However, all four of these ways of learning about God through the Bible have one common problem. People learn to know about God, but they do not really get to know God. We want to spend time with them so they can see how we are getting to know God. In addition, they will usually only start to get to really know God as they learn to meditate on the Word of God, along with learning to experience the following responses to their meditation:

- * Learning to practice daily cleansing from sin - John 13:9-10
- * Learning to obey the commands of Christ - John 13:12-17
- * Learning to love one another - John 13:34-35
- * Learning to yield to the Holy Spirit - John 14:13-27
- * Learning to abide in Christ - John 15:1-8
- * Learning to take root in the love of Christ - John 15:9-17

Second, we want to help new Christians learn to talk to God through prayer. The key to helping spiritual newborns learn how to pray is not to teach a class on prayer. Instead, the key is to pray

for them and with them. Many people have learned how to say prayers, but they haven't the slightest idea what it actually means to pray. (I often ask Christians what they feel like when they are praying. Do they feel like they are talking on a phone with a million mile line and a bad connection or do they feel like they are talking face to face with God. Even many who have been Christians for a long time feel like they have a bad connection.) Paul told people what he prayed for them many times. One of the great examples of Paul's prayer for Christians is given in Ephesians 3:14-21. "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 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. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Paul included the following things in his prayer for the Ephesians:

- That they would be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man
- That Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith
- That they would become rooted and grounded in love
- That they would know the love of Christ which passes knowledge
- That they would be filled with all the fullness of God

We need to help new Christians learn to pray that the Holy Spirit would give strength to their human spirit (this happens as they learn to yield to God instead of depending on their own strength). We need to help them learn to share their lives with Christ by praying in faith. We need to help them understand how to begin to take root in the love of Christ (this happens as they ask Christ to give them His love for others). We need to help them begin to know the love of Christ which is greater than any human love (this happens as they pray for spiritual understanding of the love of Christ rather than human understanding). Then, they need to pray that God will help them to understand how He fills their lives as they yield to Him (this happens as they learn to pray at any time about anything so that they have Christ's power flowing through them).

Third, we want the new Christian to learn to know God through fellowship. The key to helping new Christians learn to experience fellowship with God is not to teach a class on fellowship. Instead, the key is to invite them to share fellowship with you so that they will be able to observe your fellowship with God. As you spend time together and share how you are applying Biblical principles to your daily life, they will begin to learn those principles and how to apply them to their daily lives. John shared some key principles for fellowship in 1 John 1:3-7.

"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. This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship

with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But 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.”

In these verses, John shared the fact that we can only share what we have experienced ourselves. In addition, he shared the following principles about fellowship:

- ◆ True fellowship is with both the Father and the Son
- ◆ True fellowship will produce joy rather than happiness (happiness is based on what is happening around us, joy is based on what is happening within us)
- ◆ True fellowship is based on the fact that God is light
- ◆ True fellowship will not happen if we are walking in darkness
- ◆ True fellowship will happen as we learn to walk in the light
- ◆ True fellowship happens both with God and with other Christians
- ◆ True fellowship requires daily cleansing from our sins

As we can see, fellowship is a life shared not a topic taught!

Fourth, we want the new Christian to learn to serve God through obedience. New Christians do not have a history of obedience to God. The new Christian did not even know God to obey Him. The spiritual toddler has not had a history of obedience, and that is why he has remained a spiritual toddler. Obedience is primarily caught rather than taught. Christians learn to obey and serve God as they have the opportunity to see by personal observation of other Christians how to obey and serve God. Paul made this very clear by the principles he shared in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

“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 the following principles for learning to obey and serve God:

- New Christians learn to obey by the example of other Christians
- New Christians need examples that are devout, just and blameless
- New Christians need examples that spend time with them
- New Christians need examples that will encourage them
- New Christians need examples that will comfort them
- New Christians need examples that will urge them to do right
- New Christians need a caring spiritual father and mother
- New Christians need to be shown a worthy walk to follow

From these principles, we see that new Christians learn how to serve God and be obedient to His commandments as they see spiritual parents giving them an example to follow. The only way they can have an example to follow is if Christians will become spiritual parents who spend time with them. As new Christians spend time with you, they will become what you are whether that is good or bad. Obedience and service are caught not taught!

Fifth, we want the new Christian to learn to yield to the Holy Spirit so that he or she has the power to change. Most new Christians and spiritual toddlers have a great desire to change, but they have no idea how to change. They have tried to change at different times and have always failed. What they are experiencing is described perfectly in Romans 7:18-20.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how to perform what is good I do not find*. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

In our lives, we see that one of three things is true about our life at any time. There are great differences between non-Christians, Christians who depend on self, and Christians who yield to God. These differences are:

Non - Christians

Have no desire to change Have no power to change

Christians who depend on self

Have a desire to change Have no power to change

Christians who yield to God

Have a desire to change Have the power to change

The sin that dwells in us is the sin of depending on self (acting independent of God) instead of yielding to God and asking Him to give us His strength to change. Christ told the disciples in John 15:5 that they could do nothing without Him. He told them, in Luke 24:49, to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. Then, He promised them, in Acts 1:8, that they would have power to be witnesses for Him as they yielded to the Holy Spirit. We are also given the following promises in 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” We want to help new Christians learn from our example, and from the Word, that:

- ◆ They have been given the spirit of power
- ◆ They have been given the spirit of love
- ◆ They have been given the spirit of a sound mind (self-control)

We want to help them understand that if they depend on self, they will:

- Only have human will power
- Act out of fear
- Act out of guilt and shame

We want to help them understand that when they yield their spirit to the Holy Spirit, they will:

- Have the power of the Holy Spirit
- Act out of love
- Act out of self-discipline

One of the most exciting things after seeing a person become a Christian is seeing them build their relationship with God. May the Lord richly bless you as you show new Christians how to build

their relationship with God.