

14. Helping Spiritual Newborns Build Their Relationship with a Spiritual Parent

In our last topic, we talked about helping new Christians build their relationship with God. Today, we will be talking about helping new Christians build their relationship with a spiritual parent. Paul talked about the tremendous need for spiritual parents in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17.

“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.”

In these verses, we see that:

- * Paul became a spiritual parent to the Corinthians
- * Paul said they had many instructors who wanted to drive them with severe discipline
- * Paul said they had few spiritual fathers who loved them
- * Paul said they had few spiritual fathers who provided an example to imitate
- * Paul said that Timothy was an example of a beloved and faithful spiritual son
- * Paul said that Timothy would remind them of his actions

In order to experience balanced spiritual growth, every new Christian needs spiritual parents. For those who grow up in godly Christian homes, the physical parents often become the spiritual parents. However, for those who do not grow up in godly Christian homes or who become Christians as adults, they need mature Christians who will become spiritual parents to them.

First, in order to be a spiritual parent who is able to help new Christians grow, we need to build a relationship of trust and love with the new Christian. Relationships between parents and young children are developed by what the parents say and do. The same is true for building relationships between spiritual parents and new Christians. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 gives the characteristics of a spiritual parent who is working to develop trust.

“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.”

In these verses, we see the following characteristics of a spiritual parent who wants to develop trust:

- ◆ An attitude of gentleness
- ◆ The tender love of a nursing mother
- ◆ A strong desire to show that love
- ◆ A sharing of their life with the spiritual newborn
- ◆ Treating the spiritual newborn as worthy of love

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- ◆ A willingness to sacrifice for the spiritual new born
- ◆ A willingness to be available and serve

Trust is something that a potential spiritual parent either chooses to develop or fails to develop by the choices that potential spiritual parent makes. Those who are new Christians do not even know what they need in order to develop effectively in their spiritual lives. As a result, they do not even know that they need someone who will show tender love and care to them. That is why it is the responsibility of spiritually mature Christians to become spiritual parents and help new Christians in their growth and spiritual development.

Second, in order to be a spiritual parent who is able to help new Christians grow, we need to provide an example or model for the new Christian to follow. Most of what new Christians will learn, during this period of their spiritual development, will be learned from what they see, instead of what they are taught. That is why they need spiritual parents who can provide them with an example to follow. If the examples they follow are controlled by inner fear, guilt, and shame, they will become Christians who are controlled by external rules rather than becoming Christians who are taking root in the love of Christ. That is why Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17:

“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.”

In these verses, we see that new Christians and spiritual toddlers:

- Do not need additional shame
- Do need warnings from spiritual parents
- Do need those who commit to be spiritual parents
- Do need examples that they can imitate
- Do need reminders of the way we walk

Paul also told Timothy the areas of our example as spiritual parents which will have the greatest impact on others in their spiritual development. This instruction was given in 1 Timothy 4:12, where we read: “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” In these verses, we see that:

- ◆ We are to be an example by the way we speak
- ◆ We are to be an example by the way we act
- ◆ We are to be an example in our love
- ◆ We are to be an example in our spirit
- ◆ We are to be an example in our faith
- ◆ We are to be an example in our purity

Third, in order to be a spiritual parent who is able to help new Christians grow, there are five other things that we need to do to help new Christians develop in their spiritual lives. Jethro first

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emphasized these five things to Moses in Exodus 18:19-21.

“Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.”

In these verses, we see five things that we are to do as a spiritual parent to help new Christians mature in their spiritual lives:

- We are to pray for those we are parenting
- We are to teach them the Word of God
- We are to show them the way to walk
- We are to show them the work to do
- We are to share the work

In helping new Christians grow, one of the key things is to begin to give them opportunities to share in the work of the Lord as soon as possible. One way we do this is by taking them with us when we go to share the Gospel with their relatives, their friends, their co-workers, and their neighbors. We also begin to take them with us in any other situation where they can learn by observing - visiting in the hospital, visiting the sick, comforting the grieving, etc.

Jethro also recognized that the maximum number of people most people could help to develop is about ten at a time (many may be only able to help one or two at a time depending on their own level of spiritual development). Some can only exercise direct leadership, while others can lead other leaders (indirect leadership). As a result, Jethro suggested to Moses that he appoint:

- Leaders of tens
- Leaders of fifties (work with five leaders of groups of ten)
- Leaders of hundreds (work with ten leaders of groups of ten)
- Leaders of thousands (work with ten leaders who work with ten leaders of groups of ten)

New Christians are not yet ready to become leaders of tens, because they do not yet have the spiritual maturity to lead others. However, you can begin to think from the first day a person becomes a Christian, “What do I need to do to help this person grow to a point of spiritual maturity where he will be able to lead ten other Christians?” With our physical children, we need to begin thinking from the day each child is born, “What do I need to do to help this infant become a mature adult who is able to raise his or her own family?” In the same way, we need to begin to think that way from the day we lead a person to Christ. When we do this, we will focus on bringing each person to maturity rather than just helping them with their problems. We either develop a plan of action for our ministry or we spend all of our time reacting to problems and never bring anyone to spiritual maturity. What is your plan of action to help new Christians grow and mature?

It is exciting to see new Christians grow and mature. It becomes even more exciting when we see

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them start to become reproductive Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you reach people for Christ and then help them become reproductive Christians.