

8. Learning to Serve People at Their Level of Spiritual Maturity – Part 2

In our last topic, we talked about how to help developing leaders learn to serve new Christians and struggling Christians (spiritual toddlers) at their present level of spiritual maturity. We saw in our last topic that developing leaders need to be shown how to develop godly relationships with non-Christians, new Christians, and struggling Christians. We said that we need to model spending time with these three groups by taking developing leaders with us as we minister to these groups. Today, we will focus on how we help developing leaders learn to serve growing Christians who have become spiritual children and spiritual young men.

In 1 John 2:12-13, we see the characteristics of a spiritual child. Those verses tell us, “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.” In these verses, we see two characteristics of spiritual children. Spiritual children:

- Know that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake.
- Know the Father.

One of the greatest tragedies in life is to meet a person, who has been a Christian for many years, who still does not know if his or her sins are forgiven. Part of the reason why they do not know if their sins are forgiven is due to the fact that they have never understood why God has forgiven their sins. In these verses, we see that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. God did not forgive our sins because of what we have done. Instead, God forgave our sins because Christ paid the penalty for our sin and the Father was satisfied with the payment that Christ made. God did not forgive our sins for our sake but for Christ’s sake. A spiritual child has learned this and that has changed many of his fears. A developing leader needs to be shown how to help people understand that their sins are forgiven.

A second thing we see is that a spiritual child knows the Father. A key distinction to make here is to recognize that he knows the Father, not just that he knows about the Father. We can read a book and get to know all about a person who may have lived hundreds of years ago. However, we do not know that person. A person can read the Bible and know all about the Father but not know the Father. Romans 8:15 says, “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” The word “Abba” is a word that speaks of the closeness of a relationship similar to our words “Papa” or “Daddy”. It is a word that speaks of a relationship characterized by dependence, tenderness, and the absence of fear.

When a person grows to the point that they are no longer controlled by fear, He is able to really get to know the Father. A developing leader needs to be shown how to help people understand why they can come boldly to the Father. This really begins with an understanding of what Christ has done for us. In Hebrews 4:14-16, we read, “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain

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mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” In these verses, we see that:

- ◆ We have a High Priest who speaks for us to the Father
- ◆ We have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses
- ◆ We have a High Priest who was tempted just as we are tempted
- ◆ We have a High Priest who did not sin when He was tempted
- ◆ We have a High Priest who makes it possible to know that we will obtain mercy
- ◆ We have a High Priest who makes it possible to know that we will find grace to help us in our time of need (when we have sinned)

Hebrews 8:1-6 tells us that Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father where He is the mediator of the new covenant. The old covenant meant that the High Priest had to bring a covering for sins each year. First, he would go into the Holy of Holies to offer blood as a covering for his own sins. Second, he would go into the Holy of Holies to offer blood as a covering for the sins of the people. However, Christ entered into heaven and presented the offering of His blood to the Father. That blood did more than just cover sin. That offering was to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Now, Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, where He serves as the advocate (defense attorney) for all those who have repented of sin and placed their trust in Christ (1 John 2:1-2). The Father said that He is satisfied with the payment for our sins (propitiation) and pronounces us without sin because the penalty for our sin has been paid and the sin has been removed. We can come to the Father boldly, because it is not dependent on who we are, but rather on what Christ has already done for us in the offering of His blood. Once a Christian understands this, he or she can come boldly to the Father, without fear, because the penalty for sin has already been paid and the sin has been removed from their record. This now makes it possible for them to really begin to know the Father, not just know about Him. That is why it is so important to help a developing leader learn to explain this clearly.

1 John 2:14 describes the spiritual young man. That verse tells us, “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.” In this verse, we see the following three characteristics of a spiritual young man or spiritual young woman:

- A spiritual young man has become strong
- A spiritual young man has the Word of God abiding in him
- A spiritual young man is having victory over the wicked one

In order for a Christian to become strong, he or she needs to learn to yield to the Holy Spirit so that he or she consistently serves in the power of the Spirit instead of his or her own efforts. We need to help developing leaders learn to pray, for the same things Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesians 3:14-21, for those who they lead. Verse 16 says, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.” A developing leader helps growing Christians learn to depend on the Holy Spirit and yield to the Holy Spirit by his example. We help the developing leader learn by our example and by helping

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him understand how to explain and apply verses like Ephesians 3:16 as he shares with younger Christians.

The second characteristic of a spiritual young man is that he has the Word of God abiding in him. One very helpful way that I have found to help a Christian become a person of the Word, and begin to think Biblically, is to encourage a new Christian to read the book of 1 John every day for a month. I choose 1 John since it frequently says “my little children”. Then, part way through the month, I start going through the book with him to explain the things he does not understand.

When 1 John has been completed, I suggest he go to 1 Thessalonians since it was written to people who had only been Christians for a short time. If a developing leader has never had anyone do this with him, go through these two books with the developing leader in this way and show him, by your example, how to help new Christians become a person of the Word and begin to think Biblically.

The third characteristic of a spiritual young man is that he is having victory over the wicked one. This involves helping young Christians learn to understand the importance of choices and consequences and then helping them learn to make wise choices and depend on Christ to give them the strength to carry out those wise choices (Philippians 4:13). We help the developing leader learn to help other Christians in this area by teaching him the importance of choices and consequences.

A very effective way I have found to do this is when a developing leader asks a question about a decision, I answer that question with the question: “What are your choices?” each time he has a question. Usually, the person will offer one or two choices. Then, I will suggest other possible choices until there are about four or five choices. Then, I will ask the person to list both the good and the bad consequences that will happen under each choice.

I will then suggest that the person eliminate the choice that has the worst set of consequences. I will also usually suggest that they eliminate the choice with the next worst set of consequences. Then, I encourage the person to pray and ask the Lord to give him peace about which of the remaining choices would be the best choice in his situation. I then remind him that the Lord can give him the strength to carry out the choice that Christ leads him to make. I keep doing this with a developing leader until it becomes a part of his life and also the way that he has begun teaching others to make wise choices.

As developing leaders learn how to help other Christians in their growth, it also helps the developing leaders see how the Lord is helping them learn to think and act Biblically. They are learning not only what to do but why they do what they do. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to think and act Biblically.