

## 1. Helping Spiritual Children Continue Proper Development

In the last fourteen topics, we have been talking about how to help a new Christian or a spiritual toddler grow and become a spiritual child (see Growing Christian Leader Series Manual #2 Developing Effective Follow-Up). Today, we will be starting a group of topics on helping spiritual children continue their spiritual development. We have mentioned that Christ gave Four Calls and a Commission to His disciples. They were:

- ◆ Come and See - John 1:39-46; Matthew 9:9-10; Mark 1:30-33
- ◆ Come and Grow - Mark 1:16-20
- ◆ Come and Serve - Mark 3:13-15
- ◆ Come and Shepherd - John 21:15-17
- ◆ As you are going, Make Disciples - Matthew 28:19-20

All of the last fourteen topics deal with the first call - Come and See. That period for Christ and the disciples lasted for about a year. During that period, they came to Christ and began to grow in their spiritual lives as they observed Christ and began to imitate Him. Beginning with the second call, Come and Grow, the disciples were growing and beginning to participate with Christ in ministry. Healthy development in the life of a new Christian will bring them to a point where they are ready to function at a more mature level of development where they begin to participate in ministry. The development of the spiritual child to a spiritual young man or woman is what we will be covering in our next series of topics.

Just like a physical child wants to grow physically, the spiritual child wants to grow in his spiritual life. A person who has become a spiritual child has already learned many lessons about building his relationship with God, his relationship with other Christians, and his relationship with those who are not yet Christians. However, for proper growth to continue, he still needs spiritual parents. In addition, he also needs spiritual brothers and sisters who now become more important in his development, and he becomes more important in their development.

During this stage of a person's spiritual development, he needs to become strong in spirit. Luke 1:80 describes the development of John the Baptist by saying, "So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel." A person becomes strong in spirit as he learns to submit the control of his human spirit to the Holy Spirit, so that the power of the Holy Spirit flows through his life.

Just like the spiritual newborn and toddler, the spiritual child continues to need encouragement and an example to follow. Paul told the Christians, 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."

A key part of the development of a spiritual child is the development of healthy relationships with a growing number of other Christians. John 13:34-35 says, "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.’” In order to develop healthy relationships with a growing number of other Christians, the spiritual child needs to be in at least one small group to develop a healthy relationship with the others in that group. The early church focused on getting Christians into groups where they could grow together both in their relationship with God and their relationship with each other. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The early Christians spent time together studying the Word of God, having fellowship together, having communion together, and praying together.

There are at least three things spiritual children need in order to continue their growth and become spiritual young men or young women:

- They need to become strong in spirit - Luke 1:80
- They need to have encouragement and an example to follow - 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12
- They need to build healthy relationships with other Christians - Acts 2:42

Just like the spiritual newborn, and the spiritual toddler, the spiritual child also has certain characteristics. A spiritual child is one who is growing in the same way Christ grew as a child. Luke 2:40-52 give us some of the characteristics that were present in Christ when he was twelve years old and describe characteristics of spiritual children.

“And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know *it*; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.’ And He said to them, ‘Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?’ But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

In these verses, we see the following characteristics of a spiritual child:

1. He is becoming strong in spirit - Luke 2:40  
(development of godly attitudes and character) - Galatians 5:16, 22-23
2. He is increasing in godly wisdom - Luke 2:40; James 3:17
3. He is growing in grace - Luke 2:40; 2 Peter 3:18  
this is the reproduction by the indwelling Holy Spirit of the graciousness of God in the life and service of the believer (Christian growth)
4. He has the attitude of a learner - Luke 2:46

5. He is growing in ministry - Luke 2:47
6. He is growing in his relationship with the Father - Luke 2:49
7. He is growing in his application of submission - Luke 2:51
8. He is developing a proper family relationship - Luke 2:51
9. He knows that his sins are forgiven because of Christ - 1 John 2:12
10. He is growing in His knowledge of the Father - 1 John 2:13

1 John 2:12-14 gives us a summary of the characteristics of a spiritual child, a spiritual young man and a spiritual father, “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.”

In these verses, we see that spiritual children have the following characteristics:

- They know that their sins are forgiven
- They have known the Father, not just known about the Father

In these verses, we see that spiritual young men have the following characteristics:

- \* They are strong
- \* They have the Word of God abiding in them
- \* They have overcome the wicked one

Our goal in the next series of topics is to focus on how we help a spiritual child grow and become a spiritual young man. Only as Christians mature and become spiritual young men, and spiritual parents, do churches develop and become healthy reproducing churches. May the Lord richly bless you as you help younger Christians in their spiritual growth.