

3. Helping Spiritual Children Develop Family Relationships

One of the key areas of development of those who have grown in their spiritual lives to the point of being spiritual children is the development of godly relationships with their families. Because of the sin of Adam, before a person becomes a Christian, the relationships he or she has with family members has been based on fear, guilt and shame.

The New Testament gives us forty-three different relationships that talk about our relationship and ministry to one another. Thirty-one of these are positive and twelve are negative. These are best developed within the family with those members of the family that are Christians. Many times, when we reach people for Christ, part of their family are not Christians. In that case, we need to help the new Christians learn to develop these relationships within a spiritual family so that they will be shown by example how to develop a godly relationship with family members whether those family members are Christians or not. This is very important if we are going to reach their family, and their extended family, for Christ.

First, we want to focus on how we help growing Christians develop their relationship with their parents. The Bible gives us certain principles for children, teenagers, and young adults who are still living in the home. Ephesians 5:21 and 6:1-3 tell us, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God...Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” In these verses, we see three principles for children who are still living with their parents:

- Children are to be taught to submit to their parents
- Children are to be taught to obey their parents
- Children are to be taught to honor their parents

Among families who are not yet Christians, many children have never been taught these things. In such cases, they will need to be shown how to submit, honor, and obey.

Some different principles come into effect when a child gets married. In Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 6:2-3 we see the following principles for married children, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” “‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’” In these verses, we see that:

- Married children are to be taught how to leave their parents (This includes such things as learning how to make their decisions with their partner instead of their parents)
- Married children are to be taught to still honor their parents

Second, we want to focus on how to help growing Christians develop their relationship with their extended family. In addition to parents, the extended family will include brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and others. We also want to help spiritual children learn to practice the one another of Scripture in relation to their extended family. If part of the members of the extended family are Christians, developing the one another relationships commanded by

Scripture are often most easily developed in that part of the extended family first. If part of the extended family are not Christians, practicing the one another's in our relationships with those family members will often give us opportunities to share the gospel with them and lead them to Christ. In the extended family, Titus 2:1-5 tells us how we are to minister to those who are younger than we are, "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed." In these verses, we see that:

- We are to teach the older male relatives to learn to lead by their example and by their teaching
- We are to teach the older female relatives to learn to lead by their example and by their teaching

Then, 1 Timothy 4:12 and 1 Timothy 5:4 tell us how we are to minister to those who are older than we are, "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. ...^{5:4}But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God." In these verses, we see that if we are a younger relative, we are to minister to older relatives by example, and by our actions, meet their needs.

In these verses, we see that we serve our extended families by:

- Being an example of godly living
- Teaching what we have learned
- Serving them in their spiritual development

Third, we want to focus on how to help growing Christians learn to build their relationship with their partner. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, there has been a great deal of conflict between husbands and wives. Husbands and wives often do not have any idea how to move from the conflict that was present before they became Christians to the point where they have a godly marriage. Before Adam and Eve sinned, God gave them three principles for building a godly marriage. Once they sinned, God chose the areas where couples have the greatest trouble to focus on to develop a godly relationship. In Genesis 2:24, we see that God gave Adam and Eve the following three principles before they sinned, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." In this verse, we see that a newly married couple or a couple who are new Christians are to:

- leave - move decision making from the old family to the new family
- cleave (be joined) - become joined together in their decision making
- become one - learn to think "us and our" instead of "me and my"

Then, Colossians 3:16-19 tell us some of the areas where couples need the most help in developing a godly relationship, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting

in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.” In these verses, we see that:

1. Couples need help in learning to apply the Word in their relationships
2. Couples need help in learning to live with grace in their hearts
3. Couples need help in learning to develop a thankful attitude
4. Wives need help in learning to submit to their husbands (Eve made her decision without talking to Adam)
5. Husbands need help in learning to love their wives (Adam placed blame on Eve - the first step to bitterness)

Fourth, we want to help growing Christians focus on building their relationship with their children. When parents did not have godly Christian parents as they were growing up, they have no idea how to function as godly parents themselves. Instead, they will tend to parent their own children the same way that their parents raised them. As a result, they need help in learning how to be godly parents to their children. Scripture points out that there are certain areas where most parents need help because of wrong examples they experienced as they were growing.

Two verses that show areas where parents most often need help are Colossians 3:21 and Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” In these verses, we see that:

- Parents often have problems provoking their children
- Parents often have problems discouraging their children
- Parents need help learning to train their children
- Parents need help learning to admonish their children

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, Paul gives us a model of things that parents need to learn, “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:

- ◆ Parents need to be taught how to be gentle with their children
- ◆ Parents need to learn how to share their lives with their children
- ◆ Parents need to learn how to sacrifice for their children
- ◆ Parents need to learn to be an example to their children
- ◆ Parents need to learn how to encourage their children
- ◆ Parents need to learn how to help their children develop a worthy walk

As you can see, there are many things that we want to do to help growing Christians develop godly relationships with their families. Some of these things are things we are still working on in our own lives. The best way we teach these things is by example as we invite growing Christians to spend time with us so they can see us as we put these things into practice in our relationships. May the Lord richly bless you as you help growing Christians learn to develop godly relationships.