

#### 4. Helping Spiritual Children Develop Within Spiritual Families

In our last topic, we focused on how we help growing Christians build godly relationships within their families. Today, we will focus on how we help growing Christians build godly relationships with a spiritual family. Scripture gives us some key teachings on how to develop spiritual parent - spiritual child relationships. It also gives us similar teaching on how to develop spiritual family (small group) relationships.

One of the key reasons why so many Christians remain as spiritual toddlers for many years is due to the fact that they never become part of a spiritual family. The most important relationship in a physical child's development is their relationship with their parents. The same is true for a spiritual child. A person who becomes a Christian as an adult has never seen a Christian family modeled. Unfortunately, even many who have grown up in Christian homes have not been given good models as their examples. That is why it is very important for every new Christian to have spiritual parents (In some cases, these will also be their physical parents.).

1 Corinthians 4:14-17 and 1 Corinthians 11:1 give us some very important keys to help spiritual parents develop healthy relationships with spiritual children, "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. "Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ." In these verses, we see that:

- ◆ Spiritual parents do not shame spiritual children
- ◆ Spiritual parents treat spiritual children as beloved children
- ◆ Spiritual parents warn spiritual children
- ◆ Spiritual parents provide an example to imitate
- ◆ Spiritual parents remind spiritual children of their ways
- ◆ Spiritual parents are consistent wherever they are
- ◆ Spiritual parents urge spiritual children to follow them as they follow Christ

As you think back to when you were a fairly new Christian, you might ask yourself, "Who were my spiritual parents? And, what did I learn from the example they provided for me during those early years of my spiritual development?" For some of you, it may be hard to ever remember one or more Christians who spent time with you to help you develop in your spiritual life. If that were the case, it was probably several years before you really started to grow in your spiritual life. You can remember some of the struggles you went through during those years where you wondered whether it really made any difference to be a Christian. A few of you may still be experiencing a life of struggle, because you have never had a spiritual parent. If so, may I encourage you to find a godly Christian couple and ask that couple if you can just spend time with them to observe and learn how they walk as godly Christians.

In addition to having spiritual parents, we also need to develop a spiritual family (small group)

relationship with a group of other Christians. Just as new Christians need spiritual parents, growing Christians need a spiritual family to help them in their development. Christ formed a spiritual family when He chose the twelve to be with Him. They had to learn to relate to one another and learn to accept one another because Christ chose some very diverse disciples - a tax collector and a Zealot (the tax collectors worked for the Romans and the Zealots were trying to overthrow the Romans). In the early church, we see that Christians met in small groups so that they could share their lives.

In Acts 2:42, 45-47, we see some of the things that happened in small groups in the early church, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers...And sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” In these verses, we see that the early Christians gathered together in small groups for:

1. Bible study
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of Bread
4. Prayer
5. Meeting needs
6. Sharing meals
7. Praising God

As groups of Christians meet together, there are several keys to help these small groups develop healthy relationships which should be characteristics of healthy spiritual families:

- ◆ Focus on glorifying God - 1 Corinthians 10:31
- ◆ Focus on accepting one another - Romans 14:1-3
- ◆ Focus on strengthening the weak - Romans 15:1-2
- ◆ Focus on restoring and bearing burdens - Galatians 6:1-2
- ◆ Focus on encouraging one another - Hebrews 10:24-25
- ◆ Focus on praying for one another - James 5:16-20

Because of sin, Adam and Eve felt separated from God and from one another. The result of their sin is that the world still continues to experience that separation. However, once we come to Christ, God wants us to begin to experience healthy relationships with one another again. That is why it is important for every Christian to become a part of a spiritual family (small group) where he or she can share their life with other Christians who care. A statement that was often made about the early church was, “See how they love one another.” That statement should be true today also but it will only be true as Christians gather together in small groups where they can really care for one another. May the Lord richly bless you as you help growing Christians become part of a spiritual family who really loves and cares.