

THE FOUR STAGES OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson 1

Christians Are Expected To Grow

As a born-again child of God, Jesus Christ expects us to grow, develop, and mature. We are not called to remain on the same spiritual level year in and year out our entire life. Just as a human baby that never develops mentally or physically is considered to have mental or physical retardation, so likewise a Christian that never develops beyond their born-again experience can be considered to be spiritually retarded in their growth.

In these lessons we will study the four stages of Christian growth. This lesson will show how important it is to keep growing.

JESUS EXPECTED GROWTH

It is evident from the scriptures that Jesus Christ did not intend for His disciples to enter the Kingdom of God at one level and then remain there. He expected growth.

Jesus rebuked His disciples for an underdeveloped faith.

- **Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?**
Luke 24:25

At His resurrection, Jesus rebuked His disciples even calling them fools for being slow in the development of their faith. What should have been a time of celebration for them became a rough rebuke.

Jesus expected His disciples to learn of Him as they walked with Him. He still does!

- **Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?**
John 14:9

How long have we been with Jesus and yet He could ask us, “Do you not know me?” Jesus seemed disappointed with Philip because he hadn’t grown any more than he had.

When a man sought the disciples to cast a devil out of his son and they could not, he complained to Jesus. Jesus was none too pleased.

- **“You unbelieving generation.” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”**
Mark 9:19 NIV

Jesus was frustrated because He had been with them for so long and they still hadn't developed their faith. His biggest complaint was their unbelieving condition. Has your faith grown in the last year?

Jesus expects us to continually learn of Him. Learning is a process of growth.

- **Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. **Matthew 11:28-30****

This verse can be applied to our lives every day. Every day there are things we are to learn of Jesus by binding ourselves to His yoke.

THE APOSTLES EXPECTED GROWTH

The apostles expected the early Christians to grow. The epistles do not give us permission to be stagnant or stunted in our Christian growth.

Paul expected the saints to increase and abound.

- **And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: **1 Thessalonians 3:12****

Paul did not give the Thessalonians permission to not increase and abound in the love of God.

We are expected to grow in the glory and power of God in our life.

- **But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. **2 Corinthians 3:18****

As we look into the mirror of God's Word, we will be changed from one level of glory to another. Paul clearly taught "glory to glory." Not "same ol', same ol'."

The Bible teaches us to increase with the increase of God.

- **And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. **Colossians 2:19****

The Body of Christ is designed to increase, not shrivel. To thrive, not dry out. If you stay attached to the Head, Jesus Christ, you will receive nourishment, you will be knit together with the rest of the Body, and you will increase. Any Christian who fails to increase demonstrates they are not holding fast to Jesus Christ.

We are expected to grow in faith.

- **For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: . . . ¹⁷For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.** **Romans 1:16a, 17****

The righteousness of God is not revealed to us all at once. We must walk by faith in order to have more of it revealed. It is revealed from one level of faith to the next. As we walk with Jesus, our faith grows, and more of the righteousness of God is revealed to us. Are you at the same level of faith today you were six months ago?

The Apostle Peter commanded the Church to continually add the things of God to their life. The Bible promises it will take diligence.

- **And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; ⁶And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; ⁷And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. ⁸For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **2 Peter 1:5-8****

Peter gives us eight things we are to diligently and continuously add to our lives: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance (self-control), patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and the God-kind of love. These verses give the secret to never being barren or unfruitful in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. Grow! And keep growing!!

YESTERDAY'S GROWTH DOES NOT ENSURE TOMORROW'S VICTORY

We must also be cautious and avoid living off of yesterday's victories. Just because we were once on fire for God does not mean we still are. Do not let yesterday's fires blind you to today's shortcomings.

If anyone had a right to take it easy, it was the Apostle Paul.

- **Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, ¹⁴I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 3:13-14****

Paul's successes were not good enough to carry him forward. He could not rest on his laurels. He had to forget all that was behind him, including his victories, and keep pressing forward. There is a mark in Christ we must grow towards.

HOW BACKSLIDING WORKS

We cannot draw back. Many take their ease and it costs them spiritually.



- **Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. ³⁹But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul. Hebrews 10:38-39**

Here, draw back means: *to withdraw, to be timid, to shrink back from declaring due to fear, and the timidity of a stealthy retreat.* Many Christians stop growing because of fear and timidity. They simply shrink back and stop advancing. This is called backsliding.

- **The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: . . .
Proverbs 14:14a**

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Lesson 2

Baby Christian Stage

Just as human beings develop through various stages of life, so do Christians. Once a person has been born again their life starts anew. They must develop spiritually just as they once developed naturally. The New Testament uses very familiar terms to describe the growth of a Christian. The four stages of Christian growth are: babe in Christ, little child, young man, and father or mother in the LORD. We will cover the baby stage in this lesson.

Remember, just because you are born again does not mean you have grown any past your new birth experience.

BABES IN CHRIST

The baby stage of Christian development is a stage very often spoken of throughout the epistles. Once a Christian is born again, they have literally just begun a new life. They are newly born in the spirit and must develop in their spiritual walk just as a baby must develop a natural walk. The LORD chose to use this allegory to help us understand the spiritual reality of what it means to be a babe in Christ.

- **As newborn babes, desire (*crave, lust*) the sincere (*guileless, pure*) milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:** **1 Peter 2:2**

The most critical key to growing up as a Christian is to crave and desire the Word of God. Without the Word, you cannot grow up. The more you eat the Word, the more you will grow.

15 ATTRIBUTES OF BABY CHRISTIANS

The New Testament gives us many verses describing the behavior of baby Christians. Babes in Christ parallel their natural counterpart very closely, hence the use of the allegory. Let us look at some Bible verses. Below are 15 attributes of baby Christians.

- **And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.** **1 Corinthians 3:1**

This passage reveals that a baby Christian must be treated differently. Some of the ways a baby Christian must be treated are:

1. **Baby talk**: Babies must be spoken to differently. Babies cannot understand the deep or responsible things of God.

- **I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.** **1 Corinthians 3:2**

Just like a human baby, baby Christians require a different spiritual diet.

2. **Milk:** Milk is the simple teaching of the Gospel.
3. **Sensitive Tummy:** Babes cannot handle heavy teaching, instruction, or correction. They are fragile and must be handled accordingly. They must be held and constantly encouraged.

- **For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men? 1 Corinthians 3:3**

This verse gives several qualities of a baby Christian:

4. **Carnal:** Carnal means, “to be governed by mere human nature, under the control of the animal appetites.” Natural babies are governed by what they feel and what their flesh wants. They cry when they’re cold, hot, wet, poopy, tired, hungry, alone, overcrowded, startled, and sometimes for no reason at all.
5. **Envious:** Babies are often full of rivalry and jealousy. Envy is baby behavior.
6. **Strife:** Contention is the aroma of a stinky diaper.
7. **Divisive:** This word means, “to rebel due to discontentment.” A baby Christian is easily discontented. When they are discontented, they scream like a little baby.
8. **Walk As Mere Men:** A baby Christian will often still act like a mere man. They have not had time to produce the fruit of the Spirit yet.

- **Not a novice (*neophyte, newly planted one*), lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:6**

This passage uses the term “novice” or “newly planted one.” That is a baby. This verse gives us three more qualities of a baby Christian.

9. **Pride:** Though we all must contend with pride, a baby Christian is ill-equipped to deal with it. This verse says it will lift him up for a demonic fall.
10. **Easily Condemned:** A baby Christian will often struggle with condemnation. A babe in Christ has yet to learn they are forgiven and therefore falls easily into condemnation.
11. **Roller Coaster Rider:** Notice the two-step action described in this verse: 1) lifted up, 2) falling into condemnation. Baby Christians may often be up and down, up and down. Happy today and sad tomorrow. Rollercoaster Christianity is an indicator of a lack of maturation. God wants us to go from glory to glory.

- **For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. Hebrews 5:12**

From this verse we gather another quality of a baby Christian:

12. Ignorant: Babies do not understand the first principles, or the basics, of Christianity. They have not had the time to study or be taught the vital truths.

- **For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.** Hebrews 5:13

13. Unskilled: They are unskillful in the Word of God. Babes have only begun to develop and therefore lack skills. Skill requires experience. Babes lack experience due to their new arrival into the Kingdom. Experience comes with time and practice. We must be skilled in the Word of God.

- **But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age (*mature*), even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.** Hebrew 5:14

This verse contrasts mature with immature saints. Again, babes cannot handle strong meat. So what helps us to handle strong meat?

14. Unexercised: Baby Christians are unexercised. They have not practiced the Word, either due to brand newness to the Kingdom or laziness and neglect.

15. Undiscerning: Babes are also very undiscerning. They cannot tell good doctrine from bad. A clean preacher from a dirty one. A scriptural worship song from one that is unscriptural. Just as a human baby cannot discern what to eat and not eat, what to touch and not touch, it is the same with a babe in Christ.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Below is a list of other observations I have made as both a pastor and a father.

- Babies don't realize they are not the only ones in the world.
- Babies have no responsibilities.
- Babies think everything revolves around them.
- Babies do not control their mouth, e.g., noises, drooling, biting, etc.
- Babies require constant attention.
- Babies are very delicate.
- Babies are easily startled or hurt.
- Babies are always getting into things and making a mess.
- Babies take some time to recognize their home and their family.

The only characteristic of a babe we are permitted to retain is that of desiring **“the sincere (*guileless, pure*) milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).**

May we grow up and grow fast! Do not stay a babe in Christ any longer than necessary.

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Lesson 3

Little Child Stage

Every living thing grows: trees grow, bugs grow, and animals grow. Christians are to be no exception. Just as a normal human being passes through several stages of physical and mental maturation, so too will a normal Christian pass through similar stages as they develop and mature in Christ.

11 ATTRIBUTES OF LITTLE CHILD STAGE CHRISTIANS

The following verses give us several characteristics we can expect to find in a little child. Notice the term “little child” or “children” is used in each verse. Let us use these verses to judge ourselves.

- **My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, . . . ²⁰for I stand in doubt of you (*I am perplexed by you*).**
Galatians 4:19, 20b

The Galatian Church had lost their identity in Christ and had returned to Jewish laws and customs. Paul had to pray for them to regain their Christian lifestyle, witness, and foundation. From these verses we see:

1. Little children are easily influenced by whomever they are around.
 2. Little children lose their true identity very easily.
 3. Little children do things that make mature Christians shake their head. “What are they thinking?”
- **That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;**
Ephesians 4:14

Paul listed the famous “Fivefold Ministry Offices” prior to this verse. He states that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are given to perfect and mature the saints. Without the influence and ministry of the fivefold ministers in a believer’s life, it will be impossible for a Christian to ever fully mature. This verse gives us several more behavioral traits of childish Christians.

4. Little children are tossed to and fro. The enemy easily ransacks them because they have yet to fully develop a deep foundation of faith.
5. Little children chase winds of doctrine and cannot discern truth from perversion because they lack strong doctrine. Doctrine is defined as a system of teaching you live your life by. Little children easily leave their foundation for new and shiny things, not right things, newer things.
6. Little children are easily carried away by deceivers and their cunning craftiness.

- **When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought (reasoned) as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 1 Corinthians 13:11**

The Bible clearly teaches us we must grow up. Grownups have one manner about them while little children have another manner about them. This verse lists three areas that will distinguish a child from an adult.

7. Speech: Little children speak in a different manner from mature Christians. Mature saints confess the Word. They have clean speech free from vulgarities and dirty jesting. Little children whine, complain, and hurt their lives with their mouths. Sometimes you must wash a little child's mouth out with fullers' soap (**Malachi 3:2**).
8. Understanding: Little children lack the spiritual understanding of a mature Christian. Little children see a rebuke as mean. They see tithing as a burden. They are still carnally minded in many areas. They have not yet learned to discern things spiritually.
9. Reasoning: Little children are immature in their reasoning. The thought process of a spiritual child lacks wisdom, truth, stability, and consistency.

To mature in Christ you must put away these three things: childish speech, childish understanding, and childish reasoning. Until you do so you will not advance much in Jesus.

- **Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. 1 Corinthians 14:20**

This verse only reiterates the previous point: children understand things differently. The level and complexity at which they understand things is fine and acceptable so long as they are in a child development stage. However, if a 40-year-old man still requires a puppet show to learn, something's very wrong. The Hebrew believers were rebuked for not being mature enough to learn about Melchisedec (**Hebrews 5:10-11**). We are commanded to grow up in our understanding.

- **My little children . . . ²⁰For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. 1 John 3:18a, 20**

We saw in the previous lesson that babes in Christ really struggle with condemnation. Even into little child stage, the believer is still dealing with this issue. This lets us know that one of the signs of deep maturity as a believer is the ability to overcome condemnation while embracing and obeying conviction.

10. Little children still deal with a condemning heart. A little child's heart is still learning to believe that they are forgiven.
- **Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. 1 John 5:21**

This is the last verse of 1 John. It beautifully sums up what makes a child a child: immature and misplaced affections. Little children love one thing today and something else tomorrow. They love Jesus while at church and they love the world while they are in it. A little child must learn to be faithful to Jesus all the time, in every place, and in every scenario. Idolatry is spiritual adultery.

11. Little children struggle with idolatry. They love things they shouldn't. They chase things they shouldn't. And they have yet to learn the gravity of a life committed to Jesus Christ.

12 THINGS LITTLE CHILDREN FORGET

Even in the natural, little children are very forgetful and must be reminded of many things. This is because they have not practiced them enough to make them a part of their lives. Mom and Dad must constantly remind them, and remind them, and even pick up the pieces behind them. Christians also go through this stage in their spiritual development. According to 1 John, there are many things a little child must be reminded of:

- **My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:**
1 John 2:1
 1. Remember to not sin. Little children are often tempted by the cookie jar.
 2. Remember Jesus is our advocate (defense lawyer). Little children have yet to fully grasp the truths of having an advocate pleading their case.
- **I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.**
1 John 2:12
 3. Remember your sins are forgiven. Little children are good at magnifying the wrong they have done over the sacrifice that Jesus made.
- **Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.**
1 John 2:18
 4. Remember it is the last time. Little children forget the time we live in.
 5. Remember there are antichrists. Little children are bad to trust everyone.
- **And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.**
1 John 2:28
 6. Remember to abide in Him. Little children have short attention spans and so sometimes depart from Jesus to chase something new.



- **Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.** **1 John 3:7**
- 7. Remember, people want to deceive you and talk you into sinning. Little children must be encouraged to keep doing righteousness.
- **My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure (to induce one to believe by using words) our hearts before him.** **1 John 3:18-19**
- 8. Remember that love is an action, not a word. Little children must continue to be taught how to properly love.
- 9. Remember to speak to your heart when it wants to doubt. Little children have a heart that fails relatively easily.
- **Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.** **1 John 4:4**
- 10. Remember you are of God, not the world. Little children forget whose they are.
- 11. Remember you have overcome the world and its evil spirits. Little children don't realize the authority they walk in and forget that they are an overcomer.
- 12. Remember the Greater One lives in you. Little children don't fully understand the God who lives on the inside of them.

The only "little child" characteristic the New Testament allows us to maintain is childlike malice. The Greek word here for malice means *ill-will, wickedness, or evil*. **Howbeit in malice be ye children (1 Corinthians 14:20)**. Children are innocent and nearly devoid of ill-will and maliciousness. We must be like that!

Don't stay a child any longer than necessary!! Amen!!

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Lesson 4

Young Man Stage

As we have seen, God expects His children to grow and develop. We have already studied baby stage and little child stage and we have seen how they very closely mirror the natural developmental stages of life. This lesson will focus on the characteristics and qualities of a Christian who has developed into a young man or woman in Christ. Remember that these stages have no relation to one's natural age.

It is possible to be 65 years old and still be a baby Christian. Likewise, it is also possible for someone to be a 24-year-old and be in the young man stage in Christ and in that regard be more mature spiritually than the 65-year-old babe in Christ.

THE NATURAL ALLEGORY

As a child matures from adolescence into a young adult, certain levels of maturity and independence are achieved. A child approaching young adulthood no longer has to be reminded to care for himself. They have become somewhat self-sufficient in most of life's basics. Though there are many areas yet to be encountered, a child entering into adulthood has learned how to learn and how to apply their experience toward future successes. For example, the teenage/college student:

- Understands and maintains personal hygiene and dress.
- Understands and demonstrates proper behavioral protocol for most aspects of social life.
- Understands most of the natural world's dangers and corresponding safety precautions.
- Understands and obeys time and time constraints.
- Understands nutrition and can regulate their own diet.
- Understands and, hopefully, properly manages money.
- Has a much better grasp of their emotions, knows how to share, knows how to sacrifice, and knows how to cooperate.

Though there is much for a burgeoning young man to still learn, he has learned and practiced enough to not require an ever-watchful parental eye. He can be trusted to step out into life and yet find his way home again.

SPIRITUAL YOUNG MEN/WOMEN

It should be noted that there are far fewer verses dealing with "young men" than there are addressing babes and little children. This may be because fewer Christians develop into young men than remain babes and little children. Even fewer scriptures address fathers in the faith. Below we will discover what a young man in Christ looks and acts like. For simplicity sake, we will use the term *young man* for both male and female.

EIGHT ATTRIBUTES OF YOUNG MEN IN CHRIST

Let us now look at several biblical traits commonly found in Christians who have entered the young man/woman stage of Christian development.

- **I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.**
I John 2:13b
 - **I have written unto you, young men, . . . ye have overcome the wicked one.**
I John 2:14c
1. Young men know how to walk in victory. This trait is mentioned twice in two verses, back to back. This is one of the strongest indicators of a maturing saint: they are able to stand on their own. They live lives defined by victories, not attempted victories. They have overcome condemnation. They have overcome sinful habits. They have overcome lying ploys. They live as overcomers, not as coming overs. Overcomers have overcome. Coming overs are still coming over.
- **I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong,**
1 John 2:14c
 - **The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is their gray head.**
Proverbs 20:29
2. Young men have a spiritual strength about them. Their faith has grown through hearing the Word, and experience has been gained by acting on the Word. They are now somewhat seasoned in the things of God. They can stand on their own. They can walk with God on their own. They can run their race on their own. They no longer need a cheerleader to be motivated.
- **I have written unto you, young men, . . . because . . . the word of God abideth in you,**
1 John 2:14c
3. Young men aren't just hearing and hearing the Word; they have allowed it to take root within them. Young men are students of the Word and have a grasp of the scripture that will only tighten with time. They mustn't always be reminded of the Word. They remind themselves of the Word. They encourage themselves in the Word. They are self-disciplined. They live in the Word. It abides in them.
- **Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.**
1 Corinthians 14:20
4. Young men are not defined by ignorance. They have a biblical understanding of spiritual things and they act on that understanding. Their life is defined by what they understand from the Word and not by how they feel. Their understanding can be described as spiritual and not carnal.

- **But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use (*habit, a power acquired by practice, custom, and use*) have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Hebrews 5:14**
5. Young men have made a custom of exercising their senses in conjunction with the Word of God and are working to produce a strong sense of discernment in their life. They are, therefore, not easily bamboozled by liars, connivers, false ministers, antichrists, or the like. They graduated from only hearing the Word of God to actually living a life of acting on the Word. The term “full age” means perfect and fully mature. This is not a young man in Christ, this is a Father, but we can see that young men are headed down this road.
 6. Young men discern both good and evil. Childish Christians are really good at only distinguishing blatant evil and calling attention to it. This is often likened unto tattle telling. Young men see the good and commend it, and they see the evil and they condemn it. Young men have begun to distinguish both good and evil in their own lives. Childish Christians can only see the good in their lives, or perhaps, only the bad (**Proverbs 20:6**).
 7. Young men live on meat. The New Testament speaks of meat (**John 4:34; 1 Corinthians 3:2**) and then strong meat (**Hebrews 5:14**). Young men are adept with meat and are in the process of developing strong meat in their lives. Young men still crave the milk of the Word to chase the meat down with.
- **And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: Acts 2:17**
8. Though this verse is speaking of supernatural visions and trances, we can also apply it to life vision. Young men have a vision for their life that exceeds beyond today and themselves. A mature vision glorifies God and seeks to reach as many people as possible. Children only see themselves and immediate gratification. Young men are seeing things much further off into the future and are living today in such a way as to ensure they obtain the vision.

TRANSITIONAL GROWTH

As with any and all healthy growth, stages are not arrived at overnight, instantaneously, or all at once. A young man in Christ is developing into this stage, striving to be a father in the faith while still cleaning up little child messes. These stages are not achieved all at once. They are grown into.

Be encouraged: even the Apostles demonstrated childish behavior at times, whether it was Paul’s stubbornness to return to Jerusalem, Peter’s bigotry against the Gentiles and fear of the Jews, or Barnabas’ bias toward his nephew John Mark that produced a strong contention between him and Paul. We are all still growing. Be sure you never stop!!

THE FOUR STAGES OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson 5

Father/Mother Stage

The final stage of Christian development is father or mother stage. This final stage should be an aspiration for every believer. Sadly, very few Christians will reach this stage due to laziness, selfishness, and burnout. This stage can only be obtained if you hold your faith steadfast until the end. However, many Christians cool off and become less active in the Kingdom the older they become.

The Bible speaks of both fathers and mothers. We should strive to fulfill the tremendously needful role of spiritual fathers and mothers. For simplicity sake, we will only use the term *father*.

18 CHARACTERISTICS OF FATHERS

- **I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.** **1 John 2:13a, 14a**
- 1. Fathers have walked with God a long time. It is possible in this verse that John is speaking to believers who had walked with Jesus Christ while He was on the earth. Therefore, they had known Jesus much longer than the other two groups he writes to: the young men, and the little children. Regardless, he addresses the fathers twice in two verses and mentions that they have “known him that is from the beginning.” Fathers get to be fathers by walking with Jesus Christ and never looking back.
- **But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use (*habit, custom*) have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.** **Hebrews 5:14**
- 2. Fathers diet on strong meat. This is not only the doing of the Word, but the skilled and difficult doing of the Word. It is the doing of the Word for both good situations and bad situations.
- 3. Fathers have a habit and custom of using the Word to try and test situations and thereby know good and evil.
- 4. Fathers can discern good and evil. Immature believers often proclaim only their good and everyone else’s evil.
- **The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; ⁴That they may teach the young women . . .** **Titus 2:3-4a**
- 5. Mothers are always looking to impart into younger daughters. They have an

eagerness to help and teach. A true mother is not selfish or competitive. She isn't worried about herself or her problems. She is looking to invest in the younger generation of women because she has something to invest. She has mastered what it means to be a godly woman.

- **For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.**
¹⁶Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. 1 Corinthians 4:15-16
- 6. You will not have many fathers in your Christian walk, nor should you. A father in the faith should be much greater and knowledgeable than you in the things of God. They should be someone you can trust more than yourself.
- 7. Fathers produce converts to Jesus Christ, but they don't stop there. Fathers adopt converts to be disciples and in doing so, become spiritual mentors to them, training them up in the things of God.
- 8. Fathers live a life worthy of emulation. It is safe to follow a father in the faith as they follow the LORD (**1 Corinthians 11:1**). Their life has become a living epistle worth reading and ordering your life by.
- **Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.**
2 Corinthians 11:28
- 9. Fathers feel the burden of the church. Just as a natural dad feels and carries the burden of a natural household with all of its bills, maintenance, structure, protection, and management, a spiritual Father knows the burden of the body of believers. While the children haven't a clue, the father works hard to keep it that way.
- **My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.**
²⁰I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.
Galatians 4:19-20
- 10. Fathers work hard to keep their converts looking like Jesus Christ, both through prayer and discipleship. A father can tell when one of his sons or daughters is changing back into the world's image.
- 11. Fathers want to be with their children when things aren't going well to check on them, encourage them, or even rebuke them. However, not all children want this kind of attention. Some children resist this and must be left to their own devices.
- **But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:**
⁸So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.
1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

12. Fathers possess a tenderness and gentleness lacked by developing believers. They have a true father's love for children. They are not rude, bossy, or arrogant. They truly see their converts as children they are responsible for.
 13. Fathers imprint and impart their own soul and personality on the believers they are around. Just as a natural child takes on the personality of their parents, a spiritual child will begin to look and act like their father or mother in the faith. This indicates a deep level of commitment. Fly-by-night preachers will not be able to impart their souls into the saints.
- **Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. ¹⁵And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.**
2 Corinthians 12:14-15
14. Fathers are not spiritual or natural burdens. They don't make messes; they clean them up. They are not a burden; they relieve burdens.
 15. Fathers gladly spend for their disciples. They spend their time, resources, energies, and life. In that regard, everything they do is focused around the believers.
 16. Fathers are not interested in money. They are interested in furthering the believer. They have not made the gospel about money but about souls. Any father who trades their children for money is a pimp and is guilty of spiritual prostitution.
 17. Fathers lay up for their children. Fathers are preparing for their eventual departure from this earth and are always setting things in order for their children. This can include getting a ministry debt free, training up a successor, leaving final orders, and praying for the continued success once the parent has departed.
- **I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.**
3 John 1:4
18. Fathers have no greater joy but to hear that their sons and daughters are living a life well pleasing to the real Father, the LIVING GOD. This causes the heart of a spiritual father to smile.

With so many characteristics to aspire to, it is no wonder that few believers reach this echelon of Christian maturity. May we strive and aspire all the same. What else have we to do?