

STEPPING TOWARDS MATURITY



GRACE
CHURCH

A Biblical Personal Spiritual Growth Pathway

Stepping Towards Maturity

What is this Booklet for?

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 and 1 John 2:12-14, the Bible mentions four stages of spiritual maturity:

- "Infants" ... **Babies**
- "Children" ... **Children**
- "Young men" ... **Teenagers/Young Adults**
- "Fathers" ... **Parents.**

In these few pages, we hope to provide some identifying characteristics for each stage, so that in terms of your own personal spiritual growth you might be able to self-assess where you're up to – having sober, realistic, and Biblically objective judgment (Rom 12:3) – and to know what you should or could be focusing on, in order to keep moving towards maturity.

For leaders, we hope this will be a useful tool to identify where members of your flock are at, what they might need next in order to grow, and how we can together help one another in becoming more like Christ – making disciples of ourselves and others; disciples who make disciples.

This booklet provides a pathway (or at least some insight) for personal spiritual growth towards maturity. We've called it 'Stepping Towards Maturity' because spiritual growth is not automatic; it is not a function of time passed ... it must be intentional; we have to take steps. We hope this helps.

What this booklet is (our intent):

- A sort of *parable*. The analogies are drawn from observation of human life, growth, and development; but the lessons are drawn from scripture. Ultimately our Teacher is the Holy Spirit, who helps us understand God's Word, the Bible. Make sure you always go back to scripture and prayer.
- A *guide* ... it's a *tool*, not a *rule*. Be careful not to become too rigid or legalistic in your view of spiritual growth. Sometimes growing up is not so linear and straightforward as it may appear here. Every person is unique; their journey and experiences different. Let God guide you by His Word and His Spirit.

What this booklet is not (or, not meant to be):

- A *comprehensive* or definitive guide on spiritual growth and maturity. Here we will only look at a handful of selected but relevant scripture passages; the Bible has much more to say on faith and Christian living. Don't let this replace the Bible.
- A basis for *condemnation or pride*. Something in our sinful human nature tends to compare ourselves to others, and then to make judgements on how good or bad we are. Please don't use this as a basis for judging yourself or others as 'immature' and therefore lesser; nor should you use this to think you are 'mature' and therefore better. It is simply meant to help you to 'see' clearly ... like in a mirror.
- A suggestion, in any way, that those who are 'Spiritual Parents' have arrived. The Bible says that our goal and calling is to be like Christ (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). Therefore becoming 'Spiritual Parents' does not infer we can kick back and relax. Keep pressing on towards Christlikeness.

No-matter what stage of 'maturity' you might be at right now, we all need to keep growing. Be encouraged ... growth and maturity is not only possible, but what God intends for you. And He will do it (Phil 1:6). Keep going, keep growing!

Grace Church of Christ – **A Disciple-Making Church** ... that is Multi-Cultural, Multi-Generational, Relevant, and Reaching Out

Spiritual Babies

Key passages -- 1 Corinthians 3:1-7; 1 Peter 2:1-3; Hebrews 5:11 - 6:2

1 Corinthians 3:1-2, "I could not address you as spiritual but as **worldly** – mere **infants in Christ**. I gave you **milk, not solid food** for you were not yet ready ..."

By physical analogy ... a baby needs milk not solid food; doesn't do much except eat, sleep, poop, cry; is highly dependent (needing to be fed and cared for) but knows that milk is good; needs a parent; and is too young to know right from wrong (yet).

So spiritually **Babies** are people who are: learning the basics of the Gospel, but otherwise don't do much; they need to be fed, don't know God's ways yet, may be argumentative and quarrelsome; but positively are learning to repent because they know that the Lord is good. They very much need to have a spiritual mentor/parent.

Some Identifying Characteristics:

- Needs and takes milk [1 Cor 3:2] as most basic food ... Understands and accepts the **basics of the Gospel** – Black/Death, Red/Cross, White/as Snow, Blue/Water, Green/Growth, Gold/Glory ... [Heb 5:12, 6:1-2]
- Poops ... Gets rid of sin; **repentant** (learning to be) ... [1 Pet 2:1]
- Knows that milk is good ... Knows that **the Lord is good** ... [1 Pet 2:3]
- Doesn't do much/sleeps most of the time ... **Makes little/no effort** ... [Heb 5:11]
- Cries all the time ... **Argues and quarrels** ... [1 Cor 3:1, 3]
- Cannot feed themselves ... **Needs to be fed/dependent** on people (rather than God) ... [Heb 5:12; 1 Cor 3:3-7]
- Too young to know ... **doesn't know right/wrong** from God's perspective yet ... [Heb 5:13]
- Needs a parent ... **Has a mentor**, a spiritual parent ... [1 Cor 3:4-7]

In order to grow to the next stage and start becoming spiritual Children ... here try to build up (tick) all the 'positives' and eliminate (cross) all the 'negatives', before moving on. Remember that it's okay to start here; we all do. But don't stay here; eventually we must 'grow up' and move on.

Spiritual Children

Key passages -- Hebrews 5:12-14 and 10:23-29; 1 John 2:12-14

1 John 2:12-14 ... "**dear children** ... your sins have been **forgiven** ... because you **know the Father.**"

By physical analogy ... a child is learning to do basic things *for themselves* (eat, toilet, communicate, walk); needs a parent to teach and discipline them; learning right from wrong and to behave accordingly; interacting with other children.

So spiritually **Children** are people who are: feeding themselves (have a personal devotional life), convicted by the Word/Spirit and repenting without prompting from others, learning to obey God, and learning to communicate/have a relationship with God through regular daily Bible and prayer. They have a spiritual mentor for guidance, and are actively engaged in a faith community.

Some Identifying Characteristics:

- Learning to feed themselves ... **Reads the Bible (almost) every day** ... [Heb 5:14, 12 cf. Matt 4:4]
- Eats solid food ... **Constant use of God's Word** ... [Heb 5:14, 12]
- Learning to toilet themselves ... **Conviction comes from Spirit/Word**, and repents ... [1 John 2:12; Heb 10:26-29]
- Learning to talk/communicate ... to "know the Father" means to have a **growing relationship/dialogue** with God (i.e. **daily Bible and prayer**) ... [1 John 2:14]
- Learning to walk ... **Lives out what they're learning**, not just theory but practice ("constant use") ... [Heb 5:14]
- Needs a parent ... Has a **spiritual mentor** ... [1 Cor 4:14-16]
- Learning right/wrong and behave accordingly ... Learning **God's perspective of right (obey) and wrong (repent)** ... [Heb 5:14; 10:24, 26]
- Interacting with other children ... Plugged into a **faith community for encouragement/accountability** ... [Heb 10:23-25]

In order to grow to the next stage and start becoming spiritual Teenagers/Young Adults ... here try to build in and build up (tick) all 8 characteristics before moving on.

Spiritual Teenagers/Young Adults

Key passages -- 1 John 2:12-14 and 5:1-5; Rev 12:10-12; Eph 6:10-19

1 John 2:12-14 ... "young men" ... you have **overcome** the evil one ... you are **strong**, and the **Word** of God lives in you ..."

By physical analogy ... a teenager/young adult is for all intents and purposes, an adult; they are able to do everything an adult can, even help to take care of the younger children in the family. They have much to offer, even do some things *better* than older folks ... but possibly still somewhat self-centered: only if asked, only if it suits ... and possibly a bit self-opinionated. Still needs a parent to guide them into maturity.

Spiritually **Teenagers/Young Adults** are people who are: really quite mature and strong, they recognizably live out UP-IN-OUT, which means they daily read and obey the Bible; have a strong prayer life; actively care for, mentor, and encourage other believers; personally are engaged in sharing the Gospel and supporting missions. They may still be learning about self-sacrifice; and recognizing that they would benefit from ongoing spiritual guidance, they seek out spiritual mentors for their own continuing growth and development.

Some Identifying Characteristics:

- "Overcome evil one" ... **Winning** against temptation and sin; **Fighting** the devil in this world ... [1 Jn 2:13, 14 cf. 1 Jn 5:1-5; Rev 12:10-12]
- "Who is it who overcomes?" ... **Loves God** (UP); **Loves God's people** (IN) ... [1 John 5:5, 1-2]
- "Word of their testimony" ... **Personally witnessing and sharing** the Gospel/Actively supporting mission (OUT) ... [Rev 12:11; Eph 6:19]
- "Strong" ... **Recognizably living out UP-IN-OUT** (which is the end goal of being a follower of Jesus) ... [1 John 2:14 cf. Eph 6:10-19 cf. Mk 12:30-31]
- "Pray" ... **Strong prayer life** ... [1 John 2:14; Eph 6:18-19]
- "Word of God lives in you" ... **Daily reading and obeying the Bible** ... [1 John 2:14; 5:2]
- "Did not love their lives" ... **Learning to be selfless** rather than selfish; dying to self ... [Rev 12:11]
- Has a **spiritual mentor** and is **mentoring others** ... [Heb 5:12; 1 Cor 4:14-16; 2 Tim 2:1-2]

Spiritual Parents

Key passages -- 1 John 2:12-14; 1 Corinthians 4:14-21; 2 Corinthians 6:3-13

1 John 2:12-14 ... "**fathers** ... you **know Him** who is from the beginning" (x2)
1 Corinthians 4:14ff. "you do not have many fathers ... therefore **imitate me**"

By physical analogy ... a parent is someone who has had (and continues to have) children and is raising them; doing whatever it takes, whatever needs to be done (often, if not always, sacrificing self-interest) for the sake of the baby/child/teen to grow up. A parent (especially a new parent) will still need wise advice from other experienced parents.

Spiritually **Parents** are people who are: having and raising spiritual children; this means winning people to Christ and discipling them to spiritual maturity. They have mastered the basics of faith and continue to, having an ongoing, evident, relationship with God. They teach the next generation not just in the theory of spirituality, but very practically and life-on-life inviting their spiritual 'children' to closely observe and imitate. They are humble, self-disciplined, and filled/marked/motivated by the Holy Spirit. They still benefit from having spiritual mentors, and are themselves a mentor to others.

Some Identifying Characteristics:

- Learning from the Ultimate Father; having a strong, ongoing, **evident relationship with God** ... [1 John 2:12-14]
- Having spiritual children ... **Sharing the Gospel and winning people** to Christ ... [1 Cor 4:15]
- Raising spiritual children ... **Discipling others actively** and intentionally, "imitate me" ... [1 Cor 4:16]
- Teaching is practical (not just theory) and **life-on-life** ... [1 Cor 4:17]
- Humble** in their leadership ... [1 Cor 4:18-19, 21]
- Filled/marked by the **Holy Spirit** ... [1 Cor 4:20 cf. 1 Cor 2:4-5]
- Self-discipline/motivated**, do not (often) need to be driven or disciplined by others ... [1 Cor 4:21]
- Self-sacrificing** for the sake of spiritual 'children' ... [2 Cor 6:3-13]
- Would benefit from a **mentor**; and **mentoring others** ... [2 Tim 2:1-2]

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