

Spiritual Development Stages

Lesson

5

GETTING READY TO TEACH

Unavoidable Questions

In Lesson 1 of this series we overviewed 1 John 2:12-14 where the apostle writes to spiritual “children, young men, and fathers.” The emphasis of that lesson was on the progressively deepening relationship between God and those whom He is growing into spiritual mothers and fathers.

In this lesson, we will explore the observable characteristics articulated by John for each of his three stages of spiritual development. In later lessons, Roger will address additional characteristics for each stage that are revealed elsewhere in Scripture.

Our focus is on **Maturity Insight 7: We Mature Spiritually by Processing through Identifiable Stages of Development**. There is an unavoidable question that nearly everyone will ask himself or herself as we study and discuss this lesson. They asked it in Lesson One and will ask it again, “In which stage of spiritual development am I?”

Some will find that the relational assessment they made earlier may conflict with today’s answer to the question begged by the more objective criteria under discussion here. This will not be the last time either they or we are faced with this dilemma! I encourage you to answer this question for yourself. If you discover some conflict in your own spirit about which stage you are in, be transparent about that with your Bible Fellowship.

Encouragement as You Prepare

Roger’s teaching in this lesson is both detailed and thought provoking. I encourage you to read **STUDYING THE WORD TOGETHER** with a highlighter or pen and paper in hand. Some will discover new material and new ideas in this lesson.

Give yourself plenty of time to reflect on what he presents and to become aware of your heart responses to the wonder of what God mysteriously accomplishes in us as we mature. Experience the wonder of it before you move on to the lesson plan.

Your greatest challenge may be limiting your remarks to the most essential things. You will likely discover that there is more here to ponder than your time agenda will permit. The lesson plan will give you an outline to follow and some suggested interactive exercises, but you will have to monitor the time you devote to your discussion of key points.

My prayer is that God will quicken to your heart the wonder of the mysterious working in our inner man of the Holy Spirit, which leads to changed lives in believers. May Christ draw you closer as He speaks to your heart about your own journey and reveals new insight about the journeys of those in your department.



STUDYING THE WORD TOGETHER

Roger Barrier

Just as human beings physically mature by growing through “development stages,” Christians reach maturity by processing through various levels or stages of growth. The writers of Scripture, early church fathers, and other Christian teachers through the ages have embraced this principle. This maturity insight says:

Maturity Insight 7: We Mature Spiritually by Processing through Identifiable Stages of Development

New Testament authors use several metaphors to communicate the idea that believers mature by being processed through different stages. In this lesson, we will look at some of the most familiar word pictures.

Little Lambs, Sheep, and Shepherds

In John 21:15-17 Jesus acknowledged that His followers were not all on the same spiritual level. After denying Christ three times Peter was embarrassed to obey Jesus’ instructions to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter and several other Apostles gave up following Christ and returned to fishing on the Sea of Galilee. In one of the most grace-filled moments in the Bible, Jesus went to the seashore to restore Peter back into fellowship—and to give him a ministry. From his fishing boat anchored offshore, Peter recognized Jesus cooking breakfast. He was so excited that he jumped out of the boat and swam to shore. John recorded the next several moments in John 21:15-17:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

The church age began with Jesus transitioning Peter from the role of fisherman into the role of Shepherd. During the interchange Jesus was cognizant that His flock contained both little lambs and mature sheep. Sheep and lambs need a shepherd. Here are three distinct levels of spiritual maturity: lambs, sheep, and shepherds.

Shepherds must care for the sheep—and also for the little lambs. Their needs are not the same. One of the greatest challenges I face as a pastor is to remember that there are some tiny little lambs that need care. There are also some mature sheep. Each needs spiritual food appropriate for his or her level of maturity.

Stalk, Head of Grain, and Mature Kernel in the Head

In Mark 4:28 Jesus was discussing His death and resurrection while concurrently outlining dimensions of the spiritual life. He observed, “All by itself, the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.” Follow the threefold progression here. The planted seed sprouts into a stalk. But it is immature. There is nothing wrong with being a stalk—unless the growth stunts here. Soon the plant produces immature kernels of wheat. Finally, when fully grown, the mature plant produces mature kernels of wheat. Jesus recognized three distinctly different stages of growth,

Believers with Weak Faith and Those with Strong Faith

Paul recognized multiple levels of maturity. In Romans 14:1 he wrote: “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.” Some Christians are stronger than others. Some Christians are weaker than others. In Romans 15:1 he wrote, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of those who are weak and not to please ourselves.” Paul knew that all believers were not equally mature and he understood that the differing levels of maturity required different responsibilities.

Having examined these passages, do you find yourself again wondering how far along you are in your spiritual journey? Where are you on the continuum between spiritual childhood and spiritual mother or fatherhood? These are perhaps difficult questions to answer at this point because we have yet to detail the Biblical characteristics of the different development stages, but we will.

Children, Young Men, Fathers

In our exegesis of 1 John 2:12-14 in Lesson 1, we looked at the classic New Testament teaching on spiritual levels from the perspective of a deepening personal relationship. I discussed the increasing intimacy we have with God as we mature through three levels or stages: spiritual children, young men and women, and spiritual mothers or fathers. But there is much more revealed in this important passage.

So, in this lesson I will review milestones associated with each growth level by focusing on additional dimensions of John’s teaching. Later in the series we will analyze other characteristics gleaned from different Scripture passages. But, for now, John’s teaching will give us enough insight to move far down the road in understanding the process we must undertake to reach spiritual maturity. Again, here’s what John wrote in 1 John 2: 12-14:

I write to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven
on account of His name.

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 evil one. I write to you,
dear children, because you have
known the Father. I write to you,
fathers, because you have known
Him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong, and the Word
of God lives in you, and you have
overcome the evil one.”

Now, let’s think about the three levels in turn and get a sense of what each might look like.





Characteristics of Spiritual Children

FROM 1 JOHN 2

John refers to two characteristics of spiritual children. First, he says:

I write to you, dear children,
because your sins have been
forgiven on account of his name.

(1 John 2:12)

Spiritual children know that their sins are forgiven not only because they have experienced the gospel message of Christ, but also because they have become familiar with the meaning of the content of the message. Let's reflect upon the gospel message as it was presented by the early church in the days following Christ's ascension.

Spiritual Children Understand the Basics of the Gospel: The Kerygma

Kerygma is the Greek word which refers to the proclamation of the gospel. *Gospel* is the word which means *good news* (of the story and message of Christ). *Kerygma* and *gospel* are closely related. The *Kerygma* is the proclamation of the *Gospel*. The *Gospel* is the content of the *Kerygma*.

The early church *Kerygma* included five features as outlined in Acts 5:29-32 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

Peter and the other apostles replied:

"We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:29-32)

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

From these verses, we can identify five elements of the early and most basic teachings concerning Christ.

- ◆ Crucifixion
- ◆ Burial
- ◆ Resurrection
- ◆ Appearances
- ◆ Ascension

The first ingredient of the *Kerygma* is the *Crucifixion*. During the crucifixion God the Father placed all the sin of the world for all time on the back of Jesus Christ. Hanging crucified on the cross, experiencing a divine transaction, incomprehensible to mankind, He suffered the penalty for the sin of all mankind. What began on the cross with the words, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" ended with the words, "It is finished." How do we know that His work of forgiving sin on the cross was successful? The proof is in the next two parts of the *Kerygma*.

The *Burial* of Christ proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that He was actually dead. Without a three-day burial there was no ground for a resurrection.

The *Resurrection* proved that God the Father was satisfied with God the Son's sacrifice. The Bible clearly teaches that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit effected the resurrection. If Jesus had



failed in His mission they would have left Him in the grave. The resurrection spoke to the oldest cry of the human heart: If a man dies, can he live again? Jesus' resurrection screamed out, Yes, of course! Jesus promised that He would be raised from the dead. He guaranteed that whoever believed in Him could also cheat death and live forever in eternal relationship with God. His resurrection was His proof.

The *Appearances* validated not only the resurrection, but also the testimony of the Apostles and the early Christians. The Gospels and Acts documented appearances of the resurrected Christ to over 500 different people. We can trust their testimony. Incidentally, the Bible books validated for inclusion in the canon of Scripture were all written by Apostles who saw the resurrected Christ (or by individuals in intimate contact with an Apostle).

Finally, the *Ascension* guaranteed that we were not left to live the Christian life alone. Jesus promised that after He ascended into Heaven He would send the Holy Spirit back to indwell personally all of His followers all of the time. His life in us is the power we need to live out the life of Christ on earth.

All five elements of the *Kerygma* are important. If all Christ did when He died on the cross was to forgive our sins then He made us fit for Heaven while leaving us unfit for earth. But the whole gospel is that Christ was resurrected back to life and ascended into Heaven in order to send the Holy Spirit to indwell all of His followers all of the time. Because He is in us we are equipped to live on earth in a manner that glorifies Him. Too often only the first three parts of the *Kerygma* are shared. The result is powerless Christianity.

Do you feel comfortable in understanding and communicating the *Kerygma*? If these concepts are new to you, then you begin to get an insight as to how far along you really are in your journey.

Spiritual Children Know Their Heavenly Father

Besides knowing their sins are forgiven, John also tells us that spiritual children have entered into a personal relationship with God. They know their Heavenly Father as a toddler knows his/her human father.

I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. (1 John 2:13)

Since we discussed this relationship dimension in Lesson One on intimacy, we will move on to the characteristics of spiritual young men and women. (Refer to pages 1-2 through 1-4 for review.)

Characteristics of Spiritual Young Men and Women

FROM 1 JOHN 2

John addresses three characteristics of spiritual young men and women—those who are processing through the middle stage of spiritual development. The characteristics include the following:

- ◆ Spiritual young men and women are strong.
- ◆ The Word dwells in spiritual young men and women.
- ◆ Spiritual young men and women have learned to overcome the evil one.

Spiritual Young Men and Women are Strong

John writes to believers who are being processed through the middle stage of maturity, saying:

I write to you, young men, because you are strong. (1 John 2:14)

Strong's NT:2478, *ἰσχυρός*, *ischuros* (is-khoo-ros') refers to the spiritual power that swells up in us because of our progressively deepening intimacy with the Word of God (Christ) and our

Lesson 5

The Prayer God Always Answers

Spiritual Development Stages



expanding knowledge of the content of the inspired written Word (Scripture). Spiritual young men and women are not impotent! Rather, through both their intimate relationship with Christ and their knowledge of Scripture, they are strengthened, tempered, or made powerful to live out their Christian faith in a way that allows others to see Christ.

We also are made strong, in part, by practicing spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines (or practices) help us grow strong in our faith because they become tools in the hand of God. He works through them to draw us into deeper intimacy with Himself. The disciplines are biblical activities recognized throughout Christian history as essential practical tools for strengthening and maturing Christians. They include such practices as celebration, community (fellowship), confession, guidance, meditation, prayer, service, silence, simplicity, solitude, study, submission, and worship.¹

I want to make one thing very clear. We must NOT view the disciplines as spiritual hurdles that we can jump in order to earn a deeper relationship with God. Instead, they are profitable activities through which we can experience God revealing Himself to us by His grace. In the same way we invest ourselves in certain ways to guard and grow our relationships with our families, friends, and colleagues, spiritual disciplines help us develop a progressively more intimate relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The activities listed above are disciplines in the sense that they are most profitable when practiced with persistence and regularity. It is by God's grace that they help us become more intimate with Him.

Each practice is designed to process away one or more areas of our self-reliance, self-centeredness, and self-condemnation. The disciplines produce humility and brokenness and a corresponding increase in God-reliance,

God-centeredness, and God-commendation. They help us live life in God's strength rather than our own. The victory belongs to God, not to us.

The Word of God Lives in Spiritual Young Men and Women

John also is inspired to say about spiritual young men and women,

“I write to you, young men, because
... the word of God lives in you....”

(1 John 2:14)

In our first lesson, we discussed the relationship implications of this characteristic. Remember, I said that the term *word of God* when used by John referred primarily to Jesus Christ. Spiritual young men and women are becoming one with Christ. He is in them and they are in Him (John 17:20-22). They are securing and deepening their relationship with the person of Christ.

Many Christians do not quickly equate the *word of God* with Jesus. Instead, they associate the phrase with the Bible. Of course, the Bible is the inspired written word of God. As we study this development stage, we discover that spiritual young men and women not only know the Christ in them, but we discover that they also know the content of the Bible and how to make relevant practical applications of the Word for themselves and others.

Young men and women are learning to impart godly guidance and direction by bringing the Bible to bear upon the problems, issues, and struggles in people's lives. They are on the way to becoming mothers and fathers. As a result, they are learning the skills of shepherding, counseling, and caring for spiritual children.

Knowing the inspired written Word of God is critical to maturity in Christ. That is why Peter pleaded, “Like

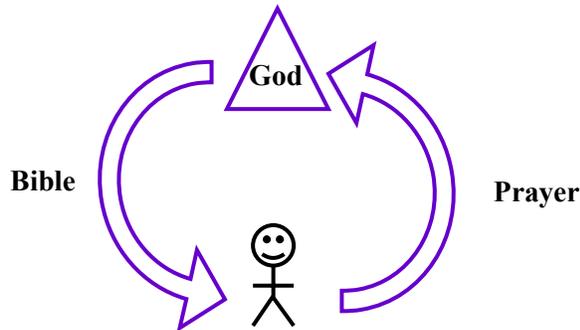
¹ See Lesson 11 for more detailed description of Spiritual Disciplines.



newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Peter 2:2). Spiritual young men and women know that the written words of God are bread and life. Spiritual young men and women meet God on the

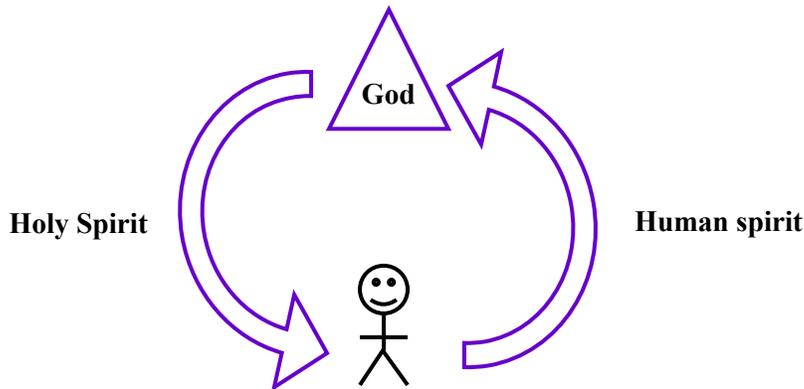
pages of Scripture. The written Word of God is a powerful tool in their hands.

Let’s go one step deeper. Early in our spiritual journeys we might say that God speaks to us through the Bible and we speak to Him in prayer.



However, as we grow, we discover further meanings to the idea of knowing the word of God. Young men and women are transitioning into a dimension where they sense God speaking

in their innermost human spirits. They understand what it means to pray in the spirit: God the Holy Spirit speaks into our human spirit. We communicate back to Him human spirit to Holy Spirit.



This Holy Spirit to human spirit relationship produces some of the deepest intimacy a Christian experiences. Spiritual young men and women are beginning this process. But this activity is embryonic in them. The full fruit blossoms later. This cultivated art of intimately knowing God’s voice is the result of a lifetime of intentionally walking with God. We will discuss praying in our spirit in a future lesson when we plumb the depths of spiritual motherhood and fatherhood.

Spiritual Young Men and Women Understand Spiritual Warfare

John addresses a final characteristic of spiritual young men and women. He says,

I write to you, young men, because...you have overcome the evil one. (1 John 2:14).

We struggle against three enemies in the Christian life:



- ◆ The world
- ◆ The devil
- ◆ The flesh (old self, old nature)

1 John 5:4 says that spiritual young men and women have overcome the world. In 1 John 2:14, the Apostle explains that spiritual young men and women have overcome the evil one. Two enemies, the world and the evil one, are overcome during the first two stages of spiritual development. We might naturally assume that the flesh is overcome by the third. Surely, spiritual mothers and fathers are no longer tempted by the lusts of the flesh! No, nothing could be farther from the truth. We will struggle with the flesh until the day we finally enter into Heaven's glory.

The word *overcome* used here means to conquer, to master, to prevail over, to make helpless, to overpower, or to overwhelm. John meant that spiritual young men and women know how to use the spiritual strength or power placed in them by Christ and, acting in His authority, take on the evil one in hand-to-hand spiritual combat and win! This involves battle training and experience.

In another sense, the word *overcome* means to be no longer deceived by Satan's workings and devices. Satan's basic work against Christians is accomplished with lies and deceit. His basic tools are temptations, accusations, and insinuations. Remember how Satan tried to overcome Job. The test between God and Satan was over whether or not Satan could get Job to curse God. The evil one tried to sneak in the back door of Job's life by deceiving Mrs. Job into tempting him to "Curse God and die." Spiritual young men and women are no longer deceived by the workings of the evil one. Not only are they able to defend themselves adequately in battle; they are able to help those who have been ensnared in his traps.

An Early Experience with Spiritual Warfare

I remember my first recognized encounter in the spiritual warfare realm. While I was in college, I pastored a small, rural church in Texas. During my second year at the church, one of our fine Christian men, Brian, suffered a massive heart attack and was in a coma. On Thursday, Julie and I went to the hospital to encourage his wife, Betty, during her vigil for our friend. Since it was lunch time we offered to sit with Brian while she took a break to eat.

Brian was unconscious and unable to communicate. After Julie and I chatted for a while we decided to pray. We joined hands, and as we were praying, Brian halfway opened his eyes and uttered, "Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh."

Startled, I looked at Julie; she looked at me. We both knew 1 John 4:2-3: "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."

I said to Julie, "Did he say what I think he said?"

"Yes! He said, 'Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh.'" The implication was incomprehensible. Julie said, "Do you think he has a demonic spirit?"

"I don't know," I replied.

Fortunately, that morning in a college class I was taking on the life and teachings of Christ, Dr. Flanders taught on the Gadarene Demonic. I said to Julie, "Dr. Flanders said that whenever Jesus confronted a demon, the first thing He did was to find out the demon's name. If this is a demon, let's pray for it to reveal its name." We held hands, bowed our heads, touched one of his shoulders, and prayed, "If this is a demonic spirit, we demand in the name of Jesus Christ, by the blood of



Jesus Christ, that you reveal your name!”

Brian articulated, clear as a bell, “My name is Clarissus.”

Julie started to cry, and I felt like it. She settled down long enough to ask, “What do we do now?”

“I don’t know! The bell rang to dismiss class when we were in the middle of the story. All I know is that Jesus cast that demon out into some pigs! Should we pray for the demon to come out?”

We resumed positions and prayed to cast that demon out—nothing happened. (It never dawned on us that we ought to cast it somewhere.). After a while, Betty returned. “Well, how’d it go?”

I looked at Julie; she looked at me. “Fine,” I said. What else could we say? How could we tell her what transpired with her comatose husband!

Julie and I were in the parking lot when Betty ran out of the hospital yelling, “What happened in there? What happened in there?”

I looked at Julie; she looked at me. “Um...nothing. We just prayed for your husband.”

“Well,” she said, “he has this big smile on his face. Something happened in there!”

About ten o’clock that night, Brian opened his eyes, came out of his coma, and said to his wife, “I just had the strangest dream. I was climbing up the steps to Heaven, and when I got to the gate, Peter said, ‘You can’t come in now.’ So, I climbed back down the steps. I guess God has some special things left for me to do on Earth.” Ten minutes later, Brian had a massive coronary and died.

That was my introduction to spiritual warfare. I never dreamed when I was eighteen years old, praying on the floor of my dormitory room, “God, please make me a spiritual man at any price,” that this might include overcoming the evil one. In the ensuing years I’ve fought through numerous spiritual battles with exhilarating victories and many heart-breaking defeats. I should have suspected

what was ahead. John wrote of it quite plainly in his letter.

The odds are that you will never face a demonic encounter like my first one. Your encounters overcoming the evil one will probably be much less overt. But entertain this thought: no one can be a spiritual young man or woman and bypass overcoming the evil one. Too many Christians say, “I want to be a spiritual father or mother; but, I don’t want to do that spiritual warfare stuff.” They do not understand. Engaging the evil one and overcoming is part of growing on to maturity.

Remember, John gives us one

Characteristic of Spiritual Mothers and Fathers

FROM 1 JOHN 2

characteristic of a spiritual mother or father. Twice he says,

I write to you, fathers, because
you have known him who is
from the beginning.
(1 John 2:13-14)

Spiritual Mothers and Fathers Know God Intimately

Spiritual fathers and mothers never exhaust experiencing the infinite person and character of God. As they scale the mystical mountain peak of godliness they soon discover not one, but multiple mountain tops in the distance beyond. They know and experience God to levels which little spiritual children can’t fathom.

Fatherhood and motherhood is an enormous challenge with the high calling of feeding sheep and caring for newborn spiritual lambs. Spiritual mothers and fathers go to the utmost extreme to keep sin out of their lives. They understand how sin impairs their ability to commune with God. John wrote succinctly about spiritual parents: they just know God.

Lesson 5

The Prayer God Always Answers

Spiritual Development Stages



But the Bible teaches that much more is involved—and required.

John 6 recorded one of the most exciting stories in the life of Jesus. After teaching all day He took five little barley loaves and two small fishes and proceeded to bless the fish and the loaves. As food multiplied in His hands, He fed upwards of twenty thousand people—5,000 men plus the women and children.

The next morning the people woke up inquiring, “Where’s breakfast? Where’s Jesus?” They soon discovered that He had gone to the other side of the lake. Multitudes trekked around the Sea of Galilee to find Jesus. Others found boats and sailed after Him. When they arrived, Jesus preached the most demanding sermon that He ever preached. He keyed off His miracle of the day before. “I tell you the truth,” He said, “You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval” (John 6:26-27).

Then, Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (v. 35). Be careful not to miss Jesus’ offer. He invited them to experience the most fulfilling personal relationship imaginable. He Himself is the bread we all long for. But John remembered that the people did not understand. They grumbled when they realized that He had no intention of feeding them.

He continued, “Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v. 49). Notice how personal and far reaching is this invitation. He offered Himself in order to restore mankind to the

intimacy that existed between God and man before the Fall. He was thrusting Himself right into the middle of their lives.

Jesus then upped the ante by doing two significant things. He repeated His offer of life. Then, He added to it the requirement of total commitment: “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (vv. 53-54). They finally understood the message (as evidenced by their response in verse 66). It was possible to taste bread and if they did not like it to spit it out without swallowing. No commitment need be made. But once eaten, total commitment necessarily followed. Bread became flesh and blood.

John 6:66 was ominous: “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” This giving up of their adherence to Christ was manifest by their immediate and physical withdrawal from His presence. This was spiritual apostasy. The high point of His earthly ministry occurred the day before when He fed the 5,000. The next day was one of the lowest. Before Jesus finished preaching, the multitude had departed. Only twelve were left.

Jesus looked around at His closest followers and said, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” (v. 67). There were two ways in Greek to ask that question. The interrogator may indicate that he or she expected the answer to be yes—or no. If the answer was to be yes, a form of the negative οὐ [NT:3756, *ou* (oo)] began the question. For example, the disciples in the storm in the middle of the Sea of Galilee wanted to know that Jesus was still caring about them and their safety. Very clearly they asked in Greek, “It is a concern to you that we are perishing, isn’t it?” (Mark 4:38). They expected Him to say *yes* so they began their question with *ou*.

On the other hand, if the interrogator



expected the answer to be no, a form of the Greek negative *μη* [NT:3361, *me* (may)] began the question. When Jesus asked the disciples if they wanted to go away, too, He began His question with *μη*. What He said may well be translated from Greek as, “You don’t want to stay with me, do you?” He expected their answer to be no.

I can’t imagine the deep emotions of sadness and grief that flooded His heart when the multitudes rejected Jesus. It is easier to imagine his elation when Simon

Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68).

Spiritual mothers and fathers have long ago waded through their questions and doubts, as well as the self-reliance, self-centeredness, and self-condemnation that cause so many to turn back from the journey. They long for the intimacy of the relationship at any price. After all, He not only *has* the words of life, He *is* Life.



COMMENTARY

Word Study

In 1 John 2:12-14, the apostle says that spiritual young men are strong and have overcome the evil one. Below are definitions from several sources that will help you get a taste of the larger meaning of the words as used in the context of our focal passages.

Strong: ἰσχυρο, *ischuros* (is-khoo-ros') NT:2478; from NT:2479; forcible (literally or figuratively): in the KJV - boisterous, mighty (-ier), powerful, strong (-er, man), valiant.² Adj. from *ischúō* (2480), to be able; strong, mighty, powerful. In 1 John 2:14, *strong* means firm in faith.³ In 1 John 2:14 the young men are strong because of God's word dwelling in them.⁴ ...Strong, mighty; used of one who has strength of soul to sustain the assaults of Satan as in 1 John 2:14.⁵

Overcome: νικάω, *nikao* (nik-ah'-o) NT:3528; from NT:3529; to subdue (literally or figuratively): in the KJV - conquer, overcome, prevail, get the victory.² ...To be victorious ...prevail.... Spoken of Jesus or His followers as victorious over the world, evil, and all the adversaries of His kingdom.³ ...Is used of one who by Christian constancy and courage keeps himself unharmed and spotless from his adversary's devices, solicitations, assaults: the devil, 1 John 2:13 f.⁵

In extant extra-biblical Greek literature, we often read that νικάω (victory, an overcoming) cannot be an achievement of mortals; only divine power can bring it about. A god alone conquers, is unconquered

and unconquerable. Gk. art was the first to proclaim the divine origin of victory in numerous depictions of the goddess Νίκη (*Nike*). Nike is also crowned as victor on monuments.

In the New Testament, the word νικάω (victory, an overcoming) is a word of promise, an eschatological word. But the promised victory or overcoming is materially no other than the victory or overcoming of Christ...It takes place through His blood. It rests on the fact that God makes believers His children and that through faith in His promise it makes men victors or overcomers...*for example*, it is through His power that the young men are successfully deployed against the ancient foe (1 John 2:13 f.) and that evil is overcome.⁴

Kerygma⁶

Kerygma is a transliteration of the Greek word that means proclamation or preaching. Depending on the context, it may refer to either the content proclaimed or the act of proclaiming. The word is used...six times in Paul's letters (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 1:21; 2:4; 15:14; 2 Tim. 4:17; Titus 1:3). All of these New Testament occurrences appear to refer to what is being proclaimed.

There are two occurrences (1:21; 2:4) of the term *kerygma* in the first major unit of 1 Corinthians (1:18-2:5). In this large passage Paul contrasts the influence of the Jews who are concerned about signs and of the Greeks who are concerned about wisdom.... The believers in Corinth seem to view the gospel...as "wisdom" and the

² BibleSoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 BibleSoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.

³ The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament © 1992 by AMG International, Inc. Revised Edition, 1993

⁴ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, abridged edition, Copyright © 1985 by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

⁵ Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2000, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

⁶ Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. Copyright © 1996 by Baker Books. All rights reserved. Used by permission.



evangelists as “wisdom teachers.” Paul is correcting this...misunderstanding.... His reference to “the wisdom of the world” (1:20) shows what the *kerygma* has rendered untenable.... For Paul *kerygma* is the gospel or the proclamation of the death of Christ to bring about the salvation of all those who believe. Verses 1-5 of chapter 2 explain that belief in the message comes about not by human wisdom or eloquence, but by means of the demonstration and power of the Spirit. Verse 4 refers to Paul’s word or proclamation (*kerygma*), and verse 5 asserts that faith in this proclamation results in trust in the power of God. That is, the believer in this message is brought into a relationship with God: salvation or redemption.

At the end of 1 Corinthians, in the last major unit on the resurrection (15), Paul returns to the theme of *kerygma*. Interestingly, at the beginning of this section Paul uses the word *gospel* (*evangelion*) and spells out the four crucial elements of the gospel: Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and appearances (vv. 1-8). Then, in the process of asserting the absolute necessity of the resurrection, Paul refers to “our preaching [*kerygma*]” (v. 14). Clearly Paul understands “our preaching” as the gospel he has just defined in the opening verses of the chapter. The interchangeability of *kerygma* and *gospel* in this

passage brings out unmistakably that the *kerygma* is the gospel message about Christ’s death and resurrection. These two large units (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5; 15) are the definitive passages in the New Testament on *kerygma*.

There are...other references to *kerygma* in Paul’s letters. In the closing doxology of Romans, Paul parallels gospel (*evangelion*) and proclamation (*kerygma*) (16:25). Probably the conjunction “and” (*kaí*) would be better translated “that is,” which would show that by proclamation Paul means the gospel or message about Christ. As it is here paralleled with gospel, *kerygma* is certainly intended to mean the content or message Paul proclaims. Because the entire Letter to the Romans is an elaborate and systematic development of the gospel, it might be suggested that Romans is at the same time the most extensive statement of Paul’s *kerygma*. Thus, even though the word *kerygma* occurs only in the closing doxology, Romans in fact is Paul’s own masterful development of his earlier definition of *kerygma* in 1 Corinthians, which was written about two years before Romans.... The meaning of *kerygma* all six times that Paul uses this term is consistently the message about Jesus, the content of the gospel Paul so courageously proclaimed throughout his ministry.

Lesson 5

The Prayer God Always Answers

Spiritual Development Stages



RESOURCES

NEEDED:

- ◆ 2-sided copies of Lesson Notes / Take-Home pages
- ◆ Pencils or pens for each person
- ◆ Dry erase markers and white board or felt tip markers and a flip chart
- ◆ Slips of paper with these references (one on each slip):
John 21:15-17
Mark 4:28
Romans 14:1

TIME FRAME:

- ◆ 45 minutes

LESSON PLAN

Focal Scripture:

- ◆ 1 John 2:12-14

Maturity Insights Covered in This Lesson:

- ◆ **Maturity Insight 7:** We Mature Spiritually by Processing through Identifiable Stages of Development

Teaching Goals:

- ◆ Learn: Find out that several New Testament word pictures illustrate that God processes us through several stages of development as we grow to spiritual maturity
- ◆ Experience: Identify heart response to the truth that spiritual young men and women are not impotent, but rather are indwelt by Christ and filled with power to overcome the evil one

Before Class Begins:

- ◆ Give the slips of paper with the references from John, Mark, and Romans to three people who have their Bibles and enjoy reading aloud. Ask them to be ready to read their passage when you call for it.

STEP ONE: GETTING READY TO LEARN (5 MINUTES)

- ◆ Ask your classmates to answer the “How Old Am I?” quiz *at the top* of their Lesson Notes and then compare their responses with 3-4 other people.
- ◆ Then say: We all can identify human stages of growth toward physical maturity. Today we will consider how to identify Christian stages of growth toward spiritual maturity.

STEP TWO: BIBLICAL METAPHORS FOR STAGES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT (10 MINUTES)

- ◆ Explain that biblical metaphors help us understand spiritual concepts. Today we will look at three metaphors relating to stages of spiritual growth.
- ◆ Ask your three readers to read their passages aloud. Then divide the class into three groups (or multiples of three, for a large class). Assign each group one of the three passages. Allow 2-3 minutes for them to read the passage together and fill in the blanks on their Lesson Notes.
- ◆ As each group reports back, verify their responses and comment briefly on each (see pp. **5-2—5-3**). Then read 1 John 2:12-14 aloud, relating the metaphors’ growth stages to spiritual children, spiritual young men/women, and spiritual fathers/mothers.



STEP THREE: WE MATURE SPIRITUALLY BY PROCESSING THROUGH IDENTIFIABLE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT (25 MINUTES)

- ◆ Write the text of *Step Three (Maturity Insight 7)* on the board.
- ◆ Explore *Characteristics of Spiritual Children*, pages 5-4–5-5. Refer to **COMMENTARY, pp. 5-12–13** for additional insight into the meaning of *kerygma*. (Next week offers a more in-depth picture of spiritual children.)

As you explain the material following the subtitles, **write each subtitle on the board** so that your classmates may complete the blanks on their Lesson Notes.

Take time to celebrate the stage of infancy or childhood with those who are new believers or have loved ones who are new in their faith. Being a spiritual child is an exciting place to be when one realizes how much he or she has to anticipate in the future.

- ◆ Explain *Characteristics of Spiritual Young Men and Women* in depth. **Write on the board the three bulleted statements (p. 5-5)** to fill in Lesson Notes blanks.

As you develop each subtopic, begin by rereading the accompanying scripture. As you explain the concepts of God speaking to us through the Bible and prayer, and also Holy Spirit to Human Spirit, **draw the graphs from page 5-7 on the board**. (Note that your classmates have the graphs with blanks on their Lesson Notes.)

Refer to the **COMMENTARY (pp. 5-12–13)** for additional insight into the meaning of *strong* and *overcome*.

This lesson provides an excellent opportunity to whet your students’ intellectual appetite about spiritual warfare. Be sure to relate (or read) to them Roger and Julie’s first experience with spiritual warfare. Since spiritual warfare is one of Casas’ three major streams of theology, it is important that our Bible Fellowship adults begin to understand why their pastor has made it such an integral part of his ministry.

As you teach this section, convey the excitement of the strength, wisdom, and discovery of deeper relationship with God that spiritual young men and women experience. More than likely, a large percentage of your class members are—or already should be—in this growth stage. Help them rejoice in God’s provision—and if they have lagged in their journey, help them hunger to experience more!

- ◆ Build the excitement of the spiritual growth process as you teach the ***Characteristics of Spiritual Mothers and Fathers***. As you prepare to teach, pause to reconnect with your desire to become (or your joy in being) a spiritual mother or father. Allow the sweet Presence of the Spirit to fill your heart and overflow into your teaching plan. Carry the joy of His Presence forward as you teach your classmates!

STEP FOUR: CLOSING REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

- ◆ Refer your students to the “How Old Am I?” exercise *at the bottom* of their class notes. Ask them to quietly and prayerfully complete the exercise. Tell them this is a private time; you will not ask them to share their responses.
- ◆ After you have allowed a minute or so

Lesson 5

The Prayer God Always Answers

Spiritual Development Stages



for them to reflect, close with a prayer such as the following:

Father God, we come together to You as a faith community, thankful that You have brought us to this place at this time.

What a privilege it is to be part of Your family—to be spiritual children, or young men and women, or spiritual fathers and mothers.

Thank you for providing that privilege through the precious Life of Jesus.

Lord, I pray for myself, and on behalf of each man and woman here, that you will make us strong and mature in our faith. Help us

grow to be spiritual mothers or fathers. Knit us into closer relationship not only with You, but also with each other. Help us individually to grow up well and as a community to love and encourage one another.

We love you, Lord, and ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

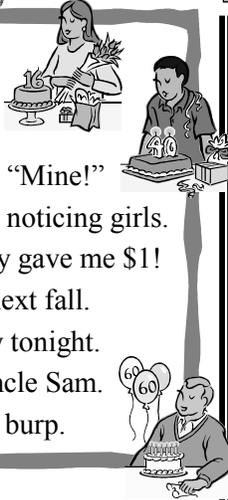
- ◆ Invite everyone back for next week's lesson: "Characteristics of Spiritual Children." Let them know that next week's study will look at additional characteristics of spiritual children and some tendencies that might keep them from growing up.

Today in My Department

How Old Am I?

About what age would you guess each person to be?

- ___ My first grandchild was born this week!
- ___ I'm 3 feet tall. My favorite words are "No!" and "Mine!"
- ___ I comb my hair and shower a lot more since I'm noticing girls.
- ___ I lost my first tooth yesterday, and the tooth fairy gave me \$1!
- ___ I'll miss my friends when I head off to college next fall.
- ___ My retirement center is having a bingo party tonight.
- ___ I've finished my 4-year tour of duty with Uncle Sam.
- ___ After I eat, my mommy pats my back until I burp.



Today's Scriptures

1 John 2:12-14 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

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 evil one.

I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

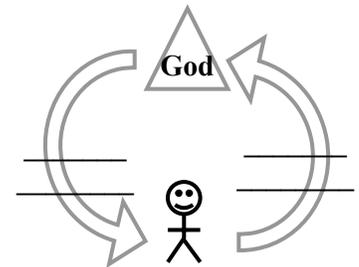
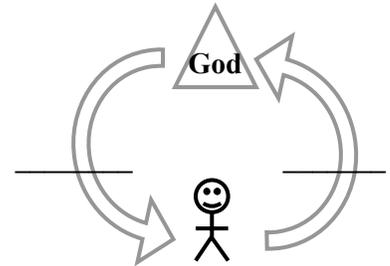
Metaphors in Scripture for Spiritual Growth Stages:

- ◆ Little _____, _____, and _____ (John 21:15-17)
- ◆ _____, head of _____, and mature _____ in the head (Mark 4:28)
- ◆ Believers with _____ faith and those with _____ faith (Romans 15:1)

MATURITY INSIGHT 7:

We mature spiritually by processing through _____ of development.

- ◆ Spiritual children
 1. Understand the basics of the _____ (the *kerygma*)
 2. _____ their Heavenly Father
- ◆ Spiritual young men/women
 1. Are _____
 2. Have the _____ of God living in them
 3. Understand spiritual _____
- ◆ Spiritual fathers/mothers _____ God _____



Next Week's Lesson:
"Characteristics of Spiritual Children"

How Old Am I? Based upon the insights in this lesson, place an **X** on the scale below where you perceive your current spiritual development stage to be. Place a 😊 where you would like to be.



Spiritual Development Stages

Daily Reflections

Monday: *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15).*

My lambs. What a term of endearment. Jesus would be ascending soon. He didn't want His loved ones—His lambs—to be without a shepherd. Because you love me, He had told Peter, feed those I love! Can you hear Jesus' deep love for his followers? Can you receive it? Can you see yourself as a helpless lamb, in need of being fed? Or as a shepherd? Pause to reflect upon the cycle of care that Jesus set in motion that day on the seashore. Where are you in that cycle? Will you allow Him to care for you? To call you to feed His lambs?

Tuesday: *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep" (John 21:16).*

If we don't happen to have sheep in our yard, we miss some meaning of the metaphor. We don't understand why they need so much care. Sheep have neither fangs, claws, horns, nor venom. They wander, unaware of danger. They are totally vulnerable. They need constant care. We, too, are vulnerable—both to enemy attack and our own tendency to wander. Have you placed yourself today in the Shepherd's care? If not, what are you waiting for?

Wednesday: *The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17-18).*

Interesting, that Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. Perhaps it was to allow Peter to state his love as many times as he had denied Jesus. Perhaps recalling those denials caused Peter's hurt. Yet there Jesus was, entrusting Peter with the care of His loved ones. How comforting it is to know that our Lord not only will restore us to relationship when we've failed Him, but also will invite us to share His glory by caring for one another! Then, as we respond to His call, He's there in the Spirit to guide, strengthen, and protect us.

Thursday: *Christ died for our sins ...was buried ... was raised on the third day [H]e appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, ...Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born (1 Cor. 15:3-8).*

The five basic elements of our faith—Christ's crucifixion, burial, resurrection, appearances, and ascension. Because they are familiar to us, might we tend to take them for granted? Focus for a moment on each element. Envision Jesus voluntarily being crucified for your sin. Grasp the significance of his burial—the corroboration of his death. And His resurrection, to assure you that there is life after death! Then the proof: His appearances. Yes, He arose! Next, He ascended and sent the Holy Spirit—His very Presence within you! *How exciting is that?!* As we mature, may we continue to marvel in the Object of our faith!

Friday: *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me" (John 17:20-23).*

Immediately prior to His arrest, Jesus voiced this last prayer that John recorded. He prayed for His disciples, but He didn't stop there. He prayed for you and me! Do you long for that closeness that He prayed for you—that oneness with Him and with others? Then tell Him so. Ask Him to show you how to have that oneness. Listen as His gentle voice draws you near!

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