

Following God's Lead

Capital Campaign Series

Gather, Grow, & Go

©Pastor Marty Baker

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We all know we are growing numerically. Just last Sunday we experienced the highest attendance on a given Sunday outside of Easter with 2,596 people on our campus. How do you account for this continual growth? What is going on?

God is going on. God is moving. God is working in lives. God is drawing people to worship. God is moving people to get their children and teens into a viable and vibrant spiritual program. God is touching lives through the biblical body life occurring in this local church. God is feeding people through the preaching and teaching of His inspired Word in this place.

Another way to look at this growth, both numerical and spiritual, is to realize the pragmatic truth of the following sentence:

We Are Corporately Committed To Mission & Vision

The Lord gave us a mission prior to His ascension to be devoted to discipleship and evangelism and we are deeply devoted to His command (Matthew 28:19-20). Put another way, we don't just know where this command is recorded in Scripture, we can't just tell you how it was historically played out in the early New Testament Church in the book of Acts, we have purposefully designed our ministry to realize it through a short, easy to remember vision statement:



We don't just talk about what it means to be a disciple and teach to this end, we hold each other accountable to grow up in the faith and to challenge others to do the same; we don't just attend evangelistic workshops, we weave evangelistic training into what we do, we tell real life, current conversion stories, and we aren't afraid to give an evangelistic call when it is timely and appropriate. More precisely, we gather for contemporary, Spirit-filled worship to lift up God's holy name and to be fed and challenged by the unchanging, inerrant, time-tested Word of God. This is what disciples do. Show me a church committed to Christ-honoring worship, coupled

with a message from the Bible designed to give people milk and meat (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 6:12), and I'll show you a church God will work powerfully in.

Beyond our desire to gather to worship the one, true, living God, and to proclaim Him as such in a culture desirous of worshipping any and all gods, we constantly focus our attention on the next visionary concept:

We Are Committed To Grow

Thom Rainer, a skilled church growth consultant, has written many books designed to help churches reach their culture for Jesus Christ by studying trends. In his book *Surprising Insights From The Unchurched* he lists in chapter five the five big, surprising reasons formerly unchurched folks became church members at certain churches as opposed to others:

- #1: *Doctrine* ... in a pluralistic, relativistic culture they want to know absolute truth. Interesting. We give people sound doctrine here in a variety of settings, from men's Bible studies to those of singles.
- #2: *High Expectations* ... new people learned quickly and early on that church leadership expected much from their people spiritually speaking and otherwise.

I want to get a laser lock on this last concept because it contains one of the reasons God has blessed us. We do have high expectations from our parishioners in one key area: spiritual growth. We do not want you to come and sit, soak and then head back home. We want you to come and sit, soak, sizzle, and serve. You might need to read that again. Put differently, we expect you to grow spiritually after you come to a faith relationship with Jesus, the Savior. We expect your life to change as you begin to mature in your faith. We expect you to get highly involved in corporate offerings to assist you to this end. We expect you to develop a personal and private spiritual life which evidences the disciplines of a growing disciple of Jesus. We have high expectations for ourselves, spiritually speaking, and for you because this is the teaching of the Word of God. Once more I think the following premise is true: *show me a church where much is expected of disciples and I'll show you a church which is growing and will grow in every way.*

This concept of spiritual growth is so important, we will spend the next two Sundays dissecting and applying its meaning. Perhaps the easiest way to approach this large subject is to break it down into three separate quadrants:

- *The Reason For Growth*
- *The Reality of Growth.*
- *The Road For Growth.*

Today we'll focus our interpretive attention on the first two concepts, leaving the practical one for an entire sermon all on its own. And as we study this crucial subject I would be remiss in my role as a shepherd to say it is all predicated on the faith you know Jesus as Savior. If you haven't placed your faith in Him as your Savior, as your sin-substitute, then you are outside His family and are merely living a life according to the desires of the flesh, which are influenced by the Devil

(Ephesians 2:1-3). Consider making Jesus the Lord of your life this day by trusting Him as your redeemer. The moment you do that you not only become His child, you can start growing and maturing as His child in order for your life to give Him glory, which, by the way, is what you are created for (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

The Reason For Growth

You cannot read and study the Holy Scriptures and not fail to bump into a plethora of reasons as to why we, as disciples of Christ, should grow and mature spiritually from the moment we are born again until the Lord calls us to our spiritual home. Reading through the New Testament this week, I isolated more than I could speak and teach about in one sermon, so I'll just give you the three big ones, while quickly introducing seven other ones. So, let's get to it. We should grow ...

#1 Because God's Got A Goal. Here a few texts which isolate this pivotal point:

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren ... (Romans 8).

Frequently, in Christian circles we tend to quote verse 28 in tough circumstances, while forgetting it is logical and grammatically wedded to verse 29 which is its logical conclusion. What does this mean? It means, everything you face in life, from the triumphant to the tragic, is divinely and lovingly designed to do one thing: conform you to the image of Christ. Please, let's not get sidetracked with a detailed discussion about predestination and election. Yes, God does predestine people to be saved (Ephesians 1:5, 11). Yes, God elects some to be saved (Romans 11:28; Colossians 3:12; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1, 2; Ephesians 1:4). Yes, we have free will. Yes, it is a deep mystery how the infinite intersects with the finite, how the finite struggles to understand the reasoning and purposes of the divine. Yes, it is amazing that after the fall of man God, who is absolutely holy, would desire to choose just one person, let alone countless others, to become part of His holy family. That is grace.

Paul emphasizes how God has specifically and purposefully designed all the events of our lives, as believers, to do one thing: To conform us to the image, to the character of Jesus. The Greek word is most instructive. One leading Greek lexicon defines it this way:

σύμμορφος, ον (s. prec. and next entry; Ps.-Lucian, Amor. 39 al.) pert. to having a similar form, nature, or style, *similar in form* τινός as or to someth. (σ. τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ Orig., C. Cels. 2, 69, 16; B-D-F §182, 1; Rob. 504; 528) σύμμ. τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ like his Son in form or appearance Ro 8:29 (JKürzinger, BZ 2, '58, 294–99). Also w. the dat. (Nicander [II B.C.], Ther. 321 ed. OSchneider [1856]; Heraclit. Sto. 77 p. 102, 12 σ. τρισὶ θεοῖς of Agamemnon; B-D-F §194, 2; Rob. 528) σύμμ. τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ Phil 3:21.—DELG s.v. μορφή. TW.¹

¹ Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature: 958.

The word speaks of the internal nature of something, as opposed to the external nature. Richard Trench develops this lexical point well in his book *Synonyms of the New Testament* where he speaks at length about the difference between the internal form, the *morphe*, as opposed to the outer form, the *schema*.² Further, the wedding of the preposition, *sum* (συμ), to the word *morphe* merely serves to heighten its meaning in this passage. Hence, God's appointed purpose, God's destiny for each believer is that their internal character reflects that of His Son, Jesus. True, we shall reflect that holy character perfectly at the moment of eternal glorification, and this might be a sub-point of Paul; however, I agree with the Greek scholar C.E. B. Cranfield when he makes this statement in his *International Critical Commentary on Romans*:

The believers' final glorification is their full conformity to the εἰκὼν (Greek for image] of Christ glorified; but it is probable ... that Paul is here thinking not only of their final glorification but also of their growing conformity to Christ here and now in suffering and in obedience—that is, that συμμόρφους ἕ τ λ is meant to embrace sanctification as well as final glory, the former being thought of as a progressive conformity to Christ, who is the εἰκὼν of God, and so as a progressive renewal of the believer into that like ness of God which is God's original purpose for man (cf. Col 3:9f).³

Simply put, God wants believers, He wants you, to grow daily in their representation of the lofty and holy characteristics we see displayed in Jesus in the New Testament. Are you? Will you?

Let's look at this from another angle.

Ostensibly, these two powerful verses mean that no matter what is going on in our lives, whether things are going well or going south, whether we like our life circumstances or find them tough and trying, all of them are divinely designed to cause us to trade our carnal, godless character for Christlike character. The good Paul mentions here doesn't mean your spiritual life will be necessarily one of smooth sailing. Far from it, especially as we see from his tumultuous, trying Christian life (2 Corinthians 11:22-33). The good speaks of God using your life situation to cause you to end up living and speaking like His Son, Jesus. I don't know what is going on in your spiritual life right now, I don't know if you are in heavy seas which continue to pound your listing vessel, or if you're on some mountaintop enjoying the clean, clear air. What I do know is God's purposeful plan is to sovereignly, strategically, and continually work in our lives so that we grow in Christlikeness.⁴ Again I ask: Are you? Will you?

Additionally, we should grow ...

#2 *Because A Son Should Resemble A Father*. Camp on Peter's word for insight into this premise:

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; ¹⁶ because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE

² Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980): 261-267.

³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary: Romans*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1975): 432.

⁴ Other verses detailing God's desire for us to mature are easily found in the New Testament: Ephesians 2:10; 3:19; Philippians 2:5-12; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7 ... to name a few).

HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." ¹⁷ If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1).

The Greek for conform here is *syschematizomenoi* (συσχηματίζομαι). Lexically, it means to pattern your life after somebody or something.

1.29 συσχηματίζομαι: to form or mold one's behavior in accordance with a particular pattern or set of standards—'to shape one's behavior, to conform one's life.' μή συσχηματίξεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ 'do not shape your behavior to the standards of this world' Ro 12:2. In order to express the concept of 'conforming one's life' it may be necessary in some languages to indicate the factor of change, for example, 'to change one's life so that it will be like.'⁵

If you're an athlete, and you are attempting to grow in your ability by learning from a mentor, this is what Paul means by using this word. If you are an artist, and you are attempting to replicate a picture the professor has at the front of the class on your canvas, this is *syschematizomenoi*. As believers, it is God's desire for us to pattern our lives, not according to our old sinful lifestyles, but according to that intrinsically holy life of our Heavenly Father as displayed on the passages of the inspired Word of God. He, who is the essence of holiness, He, who lives separated from moral evil and embraces a life of righteousness, calls us to pursue holiness in *all areas*, not some, of our behavior. More specifically, as sons and daughters of God, who entered His family based on the redemptive work of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, the Lamb, we should live, act, and speak as His children. Yes, there should be no doubt when people come in contact with us, whether it is a wife, a friend, a new business acquaintance, a new dorm mate, and so forth, that our lives are but a reflection of our Heavenly Father's holy life.

We all remember what our lives were life before we were family members. We lived according to our former carnal lusts and desires. Put differently, our godless passions, be what they may (they are detailed, to some degree, in other passages, viz., Galatians 5:19-21; 1 John 2:16), drove and controlled us (1 2:11; 4:2, 3; 2 Peter 1:4; 2:10, 18; 3:3), and we didn't give them a second thought, and we naturally patterned our lives according to other godless people around us. If they ran to sin, so did we, and gleefully so (Proverbs 1; Romans 3).

But now our lives are to be radically different because we are the children of God, our Heavenly Father. Now, our lives should be zeroed in on reflecting His. Now, our lives shouldn't be content until everything about us has His holiness about it. Now, our lives should logically move people around us to say, "Boy, I don't think there is any doubt that that person is a follower of God."

I have a personal question in light of all of this. If you claim the name of Jesus, if you call yourself His child, are you living like His son, His daughter? If you are His child, by definition,

⁵ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, Vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996): 506.

you will constantly grow and mature in leaving no doubt in people's minds who your spiritual Father really is.

Of the many other points we could address regarding why are a church which is committed to calling you to mature spiritually, we only have time to analyze one more.

#3: Because The New Master Replaces The Old Master. Paul articulates this great theological point in Romans chapter 6:

⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God (Romans 6).

Hold it right there. As non-Christians, we were enslaved to our old taskmaster, sin. We had no choice but to live sinfully because we were positionally under the domination of sin.

Once, however, we became identified intimately, by faith, in the person and redemptive work of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, everything changed as the shackles of sin were shattered forever in our lives. Pragmatically and theologically this new spiritual standing has ramifications for our lives:

¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The precise moment you believed in Jesus as your Savior, the power of sin in your life was broken as God. Now, you are alive in God; alive to do His bidding; alive to live for Him; alive to make choices which honor Him; alive to think as He thinks; alive to love as He loves; alive to forgive as He forgives and to restore as He restores; alive to live in light of His commands and teachings regarding morality.

Paul drives this newfound freedom home with his concluding words on the subject:

¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6).

Sin doesn't call the shots in your life anymore as a disciple of Christ. Negatively, you do not have to live according to your old, sinful ways any longer. You can chose to do this, as some saints do, as the Corinthian believers did as we see in Paul's two letters addressed to them. But because of your new relationship to Jesus, you don't have to let your thoughts, your moods, your words, your addictions or the like to reign over you. Positively, you can now offer every aspect of your life for holiness, from how you lead your family to what plays on the theater of your mind. Yes, because we are so intrinsically tied to the death and resurrection of Jesus, as detailed in Romans 6:1 through 5, we can, for the first time in our lives, grow spiritually in holiness and

righteousness ... and we should. And why should we grow? Because we have a new Master, and His name is Jesus.

Believe me, there is much more we could say regarding the reasons for spiritual growth. For your own benefit, I would direct you to study the following concepts. We are to grow ...

- Because We Are To Be All Of The Call (Ephesians 4:1).
- Because Life Replaces Death (Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:13-15).
- Because New Family Life Replaces Old Family Life (Ephesians 1:5-6; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).
- Because We Are To Model The Master (Ephesians 5:1).
- Because Light Should Replace Darkness (Ephesians 5:8, 10-13; Colossians 1:13).
- Because Love Is The Life (1 John 4:9-12).
- Because We've Got The Power (2 Peter 1:4).

Based on these, and other reasons embedded in the Scriptures, we are a group of believers committed to growing spiritually and calling and challenging you to do the same. We are not content with spiritual immaturity, but with maturity. We don't want to feed on the milk of the Word and call it meat, when there is real spiritual meat to sink our spiritual teeth into. We, especially, as shepherds and leaders, know we are supposed to be focused on making sure growth is a reality in our lives and in yours. Paul says this much in his letter to the church in Colossae:

²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. ²⁹ For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me (Colossians 1).

The adjective “complete,” *telos* (τέλος) originally meant to be a mature, full-grown adult or to be fully developed in strict moral/spiritual sense (Hebrews 5:14; James 1:4).⁶ Paul's goal is now our

⁶ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature*: τέλειος, α, ον (Hom. [e.g. Il. 24, 34 of unblemished sacrificial animals] +) gener. ‘attaining an end or purpose, complete’.

① **pert. to meeting the highest standard**

Ⓜ of things, *perfect*

α. as acme of goodness, as adj. (ἀρετή Did., Gen. 40, 19.—Of aeons, Iren. 1, 1, 1 [Harv. I 8, 2]; Hippol., Ref. 6, 31, 4) ἔργον **Js 1:4a** (s. ἔργον lb); cp. ISm 11:2. δώρημα **Js 1:17** (s. δώρημα). νόμος vs. **25** (opp. the Mosaic law). ἀγάπη **1J 4:18**. ἀνάλυσις 1 Cl 44:5 (Just., D. 41, 1). γνῶσις 1:2; B 1:5. πρόγνωσις 1 Cl 44:2. μνεία 56:1. ἐλπίς ISm 10:2 (v.l. πίστις); χάρις 11:1. νηστεία Hs 5, 3, 6. ναός B 4:11 (ἐκκλησία Did., Gen. 69, 14). τελειότερα σκηνή (s. σκηνή 2) **Hb 9:11**.—Subst. τὸ τέλειον *what is perfect* **Ro 12:2**; perh. **1 Cor 13:10** (opp. ἐκ μέρους. S. EHoffmann, ConNeot 3, '38, 28–31). ἐνάρετον καὶ τέλειον (*someth.*) *virtuous and perfect* IPhd 1:2. W. gen. τὸ τέλειον τῆς γνώσεως ἡμῶν *the full measure of our knowledge* B 13:7. Pl. (Philo) τέλεια *what is perfect* ISm 11:3b (Tat. 13, 2 τὰ τέλεια).

β. as acme of badness (ApcSed 14:7 ἀπόγνωστοι τὴν τελείαν ἀπόγνωσιν), adj. ἁμαρτίαι B 8:1; Hn 1, 2, 1. σκάνδαλον B 4:3.—Subst. τὸ τέλειον τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν *the full measure of the sins* 5:11.

Ⓜ of persons who are fully up to standard in a certain respect and not satisfied with half-way measures *perfect, complete, expert* (TAM II/1, 147, 4f ἱατρὸς τέλειος; ZPE 3, '68, 86; Didymus Fgm. 281, 7 τέλειος γεώμετρος; Wsd

goal as church leaders, We, likewise, should always be concerned about leading, preaching, and teaching, and living in such a fashion that those under our care grow in spiritual maturity. We are concerned. We are committed. We are this kind of church because of all reasons stated, and because of this God is moving among us in a powerful, humbling fashion.

In addition to the fundamental reasons for spiritual growth, we need to take a quick look at a second logical point:

The Reality Of Growth

John develops this concept in his first letter.

¹² I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have

9:6; 1 Ch 25:8) τέλειος ἀθλητής IPol 1:3. Esther is τελεία κατὰ πίστιν 1 Cl 55:6. Jesus became τέλειος ἄνθρωπος *perfect human* ISm 4:2.

② **pert. to being mature, full-grown, mature, adult** (Aeschyl., Pla., X.+; oft. pap; Philo; Jos., Ant. 19, 362).

ⓐ adj. ἄνθρωπος τέλειος **Eph 4:13** (opp. νήπιοι, as Polyb. 5, 29, 2; Philo, Leg. All. 1, 94, Sobr. 9 νήπιον παιδίον πρὸς ἄνδρα τέλειον=an immature child compared to a mature man, Somn. 2, 10). In dazzling wordplay: μὴ παιδία γίνεσθε ταῖς φρεσίν, ἀλλὰ τῇ κακίᾳ νηπιάζετε, ταῖς δὲ φρεσίν τέλειοι γίνεσθε *do not think like children, yet do be infants as respects evil, while at the same time grown-up in your thinking* **1 Cor 14:20**.

ⓑ subst. (Dio Chrys. 34 [51], 8 οἱ τ.; Diogenes, Ep. 31, 3 οἱ τ. ... οἱ παῖδες; Ath., R. 17 p. 68, 31) τελείων ἐστὶν ἡ στερεὰ τροφή *solid food is (only) for adults* **Hb 5:14** (opp. νήπιος). οἱ τέλειοι **1 Cor 2:6** is contrasted with νήπιοι 3:1 by WBauer, Mündige u. Unmündige bei dem Ap. Paulus, diss. Marburg 1902 (also Aufsätze u. Kleine Schriften, ed. GStrecker, '67, 124–30 et al.; s. also GDelling, TW VIII 76–78.) But this may also belong in the next classification

③ **pert. to being a cult initiate, initiated.** As a t.t. of the mystery religions, τέλειος refers to one initiated into mystic rites (τελετή; s. τελεῖός 3; cp. Herm. Wr. 4, 4; Philod., Περὶ θεῶν p 996 1, 24, 12 [ed. HDiels, ABA 1915 p. 41; 93]; Iambli., Myst. 3, 7 p. 114 Parthey; Philo, Somn. 2, 234; Gnostics [WBousset, Kyrios Christos² 1921 p. 197, 1].—Rtztst., Mysterienrel.³ 133f; 338f; JWeiss, exc. after **1 Cor 3:3**, also p. xviiiif, Das Urchristentum 1917, 492; HKennedy, St. Paul and the Mystery Religions 1913, 130ff; Clemen² 314; in general, CZijerveld, Τελετή, Bijdrage tot de kennis der religieuze terminologie in het Grieksch '34). **Phil 3:15** and **Col 1:28** prob. belong here (s. MDibelius, Hdb. on both passages. οἱ ὡς ἐν χριστιανισμῷ τ. Orig., C. Cels. 3, 19, 13).—CGuignebert, Quelques remarques sur la Perfection (τελείωσις) et ses voies dans le mystère paulinien: RHPR 8, 1928, 412–29; UWilckens, Weisheit u. Torheit, '59, 53–60 supports Reitzenstein against Bauer.

④ **pert. to being fully developed in a moral sense**

ⓐ of humans *perfect, fully developed* (Hippol., Ref. 1, 19, 16) in a moral sense τέλειος ἀνὴρ **Js 3:2** (s. RHöistad, ConNeot 9, '44, p. 22f). τὸν τέλειον ἄνθρωπον GMary 463, 26f (restored). Mostly without a noun εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι **Mt 19:21** (EYarnold, TU 102, '68, 269–73). Cp. IEph 15:2; D 1:4; 6:2. Pl. **Mt 5:48a**; ISm 11:3a. W. ὁλόκληροι **Js 1:4b**. W. πεπληροφορημένοι **Col 4:12**.

ⓑ of God *perfect* (Pind., Aeschyl. et al.; Theocr., Diod S, Plut. et al.; Tat.4, 2, 12; 4, 15, 2; Theoph. Ant. 2, 15 [p. 138, 12]) **Mt 5:48b** (i.e. God is a role model for unlimited display of beneficence; cp. on this verse Hierocles 18 p. 459: the goal is τὴν πρὸς θεὸν ὁμοίωσιν κτήσασθαι 'attainment of likeness to God' [oft. in Hierocles]; Marinus, Vi. Procli 18 ἵνα τὴν ὁμοίωσιν ἔχη πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ὅπερ τέλος ἐστὶ τὸ ἄριστον τῆς ψυχῆς; Betz, SM ad loc.). Restoration in a corrupt context AcPl Ha 1, 11 (ed. indicates τελέσαι or τελεῖν as alternatives).—RFlew, The Idea of Perfection '34; FGrant, The Earliest Gospel, '43; EFuchs, RBultmann Festschr., '54 (Beih. ZNW 21), 130–36; PDuPlessis, Teleios. The Idea of Perfection in the NT '59; KPrümm, Das NTliche Sprach-u. Begriffsproblem der Vollkommenheit, Biblica 44, '63, 76–92; AWikgren, Patterns of Perfection in Hb, NTS 6, '60, 159–67.—Schmidt, Syn. IV 503f. DELG s.v. τέλος, M-M. EDNT. TW. Sv.

overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 John 2).

John identifies three levels of spirituality: little children, young men, and fathers. Biblical scholars are in general agreement that this is John's focus in this unique transitional paragraph.

F.F. Bruce, one of the leading New Testament scholars in the world, substantiates this interpretation when he remarks:

The threefold grouping relates to spiritual maturity, not years reckoned by the calendar ... The younger believers have made a beginning by knowing their sins forgiven for Christ sake. They have also started to appreciate their new status as children of God (cf. 3.1) in that they have come to 'know the Father.' The senior believers, as is stated twice, have come to 'know him who is from the beginning.' The same God as the children have come to know, but whereas the children have come to recognize him as their father -- demonstrating thereby, as Paul would say, they have received a spirit that makes them sons, the Spirit of Christ Himself, since like him they now call God 'Abba, Father!' (Rom. 8:15f.; Gal. 4:6) -- the fathers, through long experience of him, have come to know him a fuller and deeper fashion ... The children, then, have made a good beginning by knowing that through Christ our sins have been forgiven and that God is their father, and with proper guidance and care they may advance from there; the fathers have attained a right and intimate acquaintance with eternal God ... But it is the young men who received chief attention -- as is indicated perhaps even by their being placed last in each of the two drafts. They are the believers who have reached a stage of spiritual development where they are expected to bear the burden and heat of the day; the other churches first line of defence against attack, whether that attack takes the form of overt persecution or of subtle undermining of the Christian faith and life.⁷

All of us, as saints, are, therefore, broken up into three distinct levels of growth.

Spiritual children, or new believers, are caught up with their newfound faith. They drink the milk, or simple concepts of the Bible, and have yet to sink their spiritual teeth into meatier doctrines and teachings.

Spiritual young men, or spiritual adolescents, are consumed with doctrine and the truth of the Word of God. They've moved beyond the emotional side of their faith to balance it with the cognitive side. They love to study the Word, to read theological books, to think about tough concepts, to expose false world views, and so forth.

Spiritual fathers, have allowed the emotional side of the faith, coupled with their ardent understanding and love of sound teaching and doctrine to move them into a deeper and more intimate experiential knowledge (to know, here in Greek, is *ginoska*, which lexically speaks of experiential knowledge) of God. They love to probe the character of God, to contemplate how the God, who is from the beginning (Psalm 90:2; 102:25-27; Romans 1:20; Revelation 1:8; John

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983): 58-59.

8:58; Colossians 1:16-17) has worked and is working in their lives and in the lives around them, to study and learn from the adversity God brings to their lives and to the lives of others, to considering new ways they can sacrificially bear the cross and truly follow Christ above all else. They are the ones who fully grasp and contemplate that the Christian walk of maturity is an upward trek where one, by God's design, encounters numerous peaks and valleys, all for the purpose of honing, shaping, and conditioning the spiritual man.

Here at BCC we know we are all divinely called, as believers, to grow spiritually. We also understand all three groups John mentions are present among us. Some are brand new believers. We must challenge them to count the cost to follow Christ up to higher peaks. Some are strong, young saints and have walked with Christ for many good years. We must challenge them to dig deeper into the person and work of God. Some are mature fathers. We must challenge them to mentor others so collectively we can all grow to the father status.⁸

Here at BCC we don't just know this spiritual reality of the levels of spirituality, we expect everyone to grow from the level where they are so Jesus Christ is honored and glorified. Where are you? Are you a child? Perhaps you are a young man. Maybe you're a spiritual father. Regardless of which one you identify with, one thing is for sure. Until we see Christ, we all have our work cut out for us to grow into Christlikeness with each passing day. And because we are church sold out to this concept, God's blessing rests upon us.

⁸ For an excellent book on the subject from 1 John 2:12-14, I would direct you to Dr. Roger Barrier's *Got Guts? Get Godly* (Xulon Press, 2011). Pastor Roger, who recently retired from Casas Adobes Baptist Church in Tucson, spoke at my ordination council meeting in 1987. He sent me a copy of this book two years ago to remind me of what the spiritual life is all about. I'm sure you'll be challenged when you read it like I was.