

The Life: Growing Up Together in Christ (I John 2:12-14)

Very few Christians would disagree with the belief that God intends for His children to grow up. What many have a harder time accepting is that He intends to do so... in a family! His family - a strange mix of quirky, peculiar, eccentric "sheep"! Sons and daughters of His, who, like any family, are listening, learning and loving together. The personal nature, the family atmosphere, the looking out for one another are all critical to our maturity. (I know what you're thinking: "But it seems so much easier when I don't have to deal with 'church' people!" Two operative words there - "seems" and "easier". #1 - There is a way that 'SEEMS' right to a man, but the end of that way is destruction. What seems best and what God says is best are often two very different things. #2 - Who said anything about 'EASIER'? If God wanted or needed 'easier' to grow us up there would be no devil, no temptation, no struggle for us to deal with.)

In the context of a covenant family God intends to fix in us and bring out of us the very contents of godly life already within us. There are no stages or steps to follow, no models or methods to imitate. We are simply moved by the Spirit from immaturity to maturity as we increasingly transfer the source of our lives from ourselves to God. John likens the journey to that of an obedient child who grows into a responsible young adult who eventually becomes a mature mother or father. (A self-for-self becomes a self-for-others.)

Little children are quite needy. They need protection, boundaries, instruction... loving limits that will keep them safe and prepare them for a future. There is a lot they do not yet know. They need mature guidance. They know about the work of the cross "for" them - that their sins are forgiven and that they are born again into God's forever family - making Him their Forever Father. And, like natural children, they are alive to receiving. They are always looking for blessings. All very age appropriate, in natural and spiritual children... but not so much so for adults! They need to grow up.

Young men and women need adventure - conquest and romance. As they grow up in God's family, they become strong in the strength of the Lord, ready for service. Whether it is a mission objective, a call to stomp on the darkness, a deep search into the ways of God, because they are learning about the work of the cross "in" them, they are alive to "doing" out of their new creation "being". They are more interested in

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giving blessings than receiving them. And the evil one himself cannot stop them from doing these things because they have believed and come to know that they are more than conquerors in Christ and His love for them.

What about spiritual fathers - what do they need? Basically... nothing! Spiritual fathers know they have Him, and with the Lord Himself as their moment-by-moment Shepherd "they shall not want." In them, Christ has come to have the pre-eminence. The Lord is not just part of their life (as with the children), He is not the most important part of their life (as with the young adults)... HE IS THEIR LIFE! They have never forgotten the work of the cross "for" them and "in" them. But they know the way of the cross "through" them. They have, by faith, gained the eternal perspective... life out of death, the freedom to be for others, a holy passion for oneness... the very character expressions of the One Who has always been and always will be. Spiritual fathers are alive to being givers. They are a blessing wherever they go.

All Christians in the family of God are to have the simplicity and innocence of a child - never forget to celebrate and enjoy the "stuff" you freely received in Christ. All are to have the strength and the fearlessness of the young adult - be ever ready to take on the "Goliaths" of the fallen world because of the Victor Who lives in you. But our churches, our covenant fellowships, our forever family are definitely in need of spiritual parents - those who have the eternal perspective and the wisdom that comes with it, those for whom God is the "Stuff". God will not grace us with such gifts in isolation. They are to be used, employed, put into the service of others in the family of God. Take your "not I, but Christ" revelation and translate it into "not I, but you" expressions within the covenant family of God. Not occasionally, but regularly. Not haphazardly, but strategically. Not for self-glorification, but for God's glory!

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