

Seeking the Lord

#6 – To Know Him

Can you honestly say that you know Him? This is the eternal goal of maturity in the faith.

"I have written to you fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning..." - 1 John 2:14

"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." - Philippians 3:10

"And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

- John 17:3

Scriptures: 1 John 2:12-14 | James 2:20-24 | John 13:21-25 & 17:1-5 | Phil. 3:3-11 | Heb. 11

Stages of Growth

As with a newborn child, so each of us begins our spiritual journey when we are "born again." It is a great mystery that God in his unsearchable wisdom has chosen that this world operate by the seed principle. Everything has a cycle. Everything begins small and if given the right conditions for growth, will eventually reach maturity.

There are numerous places in Scripture where we see the pathway of maturity. Hebrews talks about it (Heb. 5:12-6:3) as does virtually every life study in both Testaments. The apostle John when writing his letter to the church of Jesus Christ, mentions the stages of growth. As a spiritual father, he knows that each one is in a different place and so writes to address each of their spiritual needs.

(Read 1 John passage now).

This passage feels poetic doesn't it? We see here three general stages: little children, young men, and fathers.

The primary concern of little children is to be nourished. They are quite helpless and fragile. Yet in them is all the DNA necessary to become mature. Do you remember when you were first born again? How real the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins was? And by the way, Jesus tells us that we must become like little children. We should never lose the awe of this. One thing that I pondered when studying the text is that the apostle John repeats the same thing twice... sort of. Interestingly, when speaking of the little children he changes it up whereas the other two stages are similar. The second time he says that the little children have known the Father. You see before our sins were washed away, we had no Heavenly Father. Our iniquities separated us from him. We were under wrath and judgment. The child phase is to understand that we are forgiven and adopted. We are loved. We have a Heavenly Father! What a glorious and unchanging reality.

The second stage is that of the young men. The focus becomes to grow strong and overcome the enemy and the world. Once we have become mature enough to feed ourselves, go to the bathroom on our own,

and clean up our messes, we enter a new stage. For most Christians this should take a couple of years to mature out of infancy. If it is taking longer, that is evidence of bad teaching, lukewarmness, or stubborn resistance. It is important also to note that there's a shift in perception that happens when one reaches the young man phase. As a child, we are completely self focused (and selfish). We reach the young man phase when we understand that it isn't about us anymore. I believe that this is a much more prolonged phase. Some never reach spiritual fatherhood. The conditions for growth in this phase are that the Word of God abides in us. The more we devour and obey the Word of God, the stronger we become and the more we overcome the enemy and the present world system with all of its temptations and distractions. The more the Word abides in us, the more we disappear and Christ shines through us.

The final stage is that of the father. The apostle John tells us that the fathers have known him who is from the beginning. After many years of training and suffering as a young man, we eventually progress to the stage of being a father. Again, there is a paradigm shift. The shift is on raising others up and on knowledge. What is one obvious condition of being a father? ... *you must have children and be willing to raise them.*

Spiritual fathers are aware that they must pass on the baton and that they are heading into the realm of eternity where this world is no more. Thus, their eggs are in two baskets: passing on what they have received, and knowing him who is from the beginning. The first part is for the benefit of others, the second is for their benefit. This is why the apostle Paul writes that he is torn between death and staying alive. On the one hand him staying alive is better for the church, but death is better for him... that he may be with him who is from the beginning. The spiritual father phase is where we come to the end of ourselves and are simply in awe of the wisdom, power, glory, and majesty of God. We desire a depth of love and intimacy that is not of this world. There is hidden wisdom and things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard. This is the pursuit of a father. David writes in his psalm that he simply wants to dwell in the temple of the Lord to gaze upon his beauty. He desires to know him who is from the beginning...

What an incredible journey! My prayer is that where ever you are, that you will stay the course and grow in your current stage until you reach maturity.

Now that we have covered the general stages of growth for the believer, let's look at a few examples.

Father Abraham | Friend of God

Just like each of us, God chose Abraham. It began with God speaking a word to Abram when he was doing his own thing, living his own life. God knows and sees the end from the beginning. Here is yet another mystery *that many are called but few are chosen.* We will never know until eternity but I personally believe that many other men heard God's voice but didn't listen. They weren't willing to leave the land of their comfort and their familiarity in order to pursue the call of God. Perhaps someone else could have been the father of nations instead of Abraham. (read James passages now)

The life of Abraham is worthy of months of study on its own so I will only mention a few keys here. Focus on this idea of being a friend of God. This is Abram's journey. He hears the voice and goes even though he doesn't know where. He is given a promise and it is severely delayed. He has to fight battles, deal with his nephew, and simply live a lot of life in between the fulfillment of God's plan. He could have given up many times. He could have returned to the land of comfort. He then intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah, two of the most perverse and wicked cities on earth. He meets three strangers on the road, two of them angels, and the other God himself. His final test is to offer up Isaac, the son he loved. The son God promised him! Wow. Could you imagine God giving you a promise that took your whole life to fulfill and then telling you

to give it up? It wouldn't make sense. Yet Abraham believed God and his actions matched his belief.

In fact, our actions are the proof of our belief.

Can you just picture father Abraham after it is all said and done, sitting underneath the trees with a gentle breeze reminiscing of the time he sat with God face to face? And then as he bows his aged head, he begins to commune in the spirit with his best friend. He was a friend of God.

The Apostle John | Lover of Jesus

Next, we look at John. He was a fisherman along with his brother James and their father Zebedee. He was one of the Three, the closest human companions Jesus had while on earth. Why did Jesus welcome him into such a close communion? What made John different than the others? (read John passages now)

If you read John's gospel and compare it to the other three of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there is something very intimate about it. We get insight into conversations that none of the other gospels have. Teachings about the vine and the branches, the working and coming of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus' famous prayer in the garden of Gethsemane in John 17. It's like a best friend was following Jesus around and inviting us into the most intimate of conversations and the deepest depths of love.

John was the one who lay his head on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper. He refers to himself in the gospel as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." There is something so precious about this love. It makes me think also of the bond between Jonathan and David where they wept on each other and would have done anything for the other.

Of all the disciples, John was the only one who remained alive after the others were martyred. Extra biblical sources state that John was plunged into boiling oil in an attempt to kill him, but he walked away unharmed! He was then exiled to the Isle of Patmos.

It is here on this lonely island that John receives the most glorious revelation of Jesus Christ and the things to come. He records the prophecy of Revelation. It is in this prophecy that we hear of the glories of Heaven and the judgments to come. The final climax is with the wedding supper of the Lamb of God who will marry his bride, the Church. Why does John get such a clear revelation of the bride of Christ?

Because John was a lover of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul | Losing All Things

Last, we look at Paul. What a story of God's redemption! A man who once hated and even persecuted the Church became one of its pillars. Paul was a highly educated Jew who in his knowledge didn't know God. But after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he is forever changed. He then learns the high price that we must pay for our faith in this world. He had mighty victories and many sufferings and disappointments. He was attacked, rejected, and abandoned even by men who claimed to be believers. He has written more to the churches in the New Testament than any of the other apostles. He comes to the end of his life after being stoned, beaten, shipwrecked, put in prison, surviving riots and even being delivered from the mouths of lions! Like Abraham and John, Paul sits there in his prison cell and cries out for the one who is from the beginning. (read Philippians passage now.)

Can you feel the depth of Paul's longing? His pursuit to know Jesus Christ made all other things nothing in comparison. Paul was willing to lose all things that he might gain Christ.

The Divine Pursuit

And now we have come to the end of this study on *Seeking the Lord*. But it is actually just the beginning for you into the endless pursuit of the heart of God. Will you become a father or a mother in the Lord? Like so many men and women of faith throughout the ages, there will be a high price to pay. There will be trials, moments of doubt, and attacks from the world and the enemy. But be assured of this, Jesus Christ promises to be with us always to the very end of the age.

Are you willing to press on through spiritual infancy and youth until you too can say, *"I have known Him who is from the beginning?"* Will you become a friend, intimate lover, and willing to forsake all for Jesus?

Pray this prayer with me:

Father,

I don't want a convenient Christianity. I am not interested in games or man's fickle praise. I want to truly know you. Give me the grace daily to seek your face, to turn away from worthless things, and to endure any hardship for your name's sake. Above all else, I must know you... the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

By the power of the Holy Spirit and the sanctifying work of the blood of Jesus,

Amen

Questions and putting it into practice

1. Read Hebrews chapter 11. Pick one of those mentioned and tell how they too sought to know Him. Can you take something from the example and apply it to your own life?

2. Where are you in your stage of growth? What have you learned from this study about the path of maturity?

3. If you were having a face to face conversation with God, what would you ask him?