

# Title: THE THREE STAGES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Text: I John 2:12-14

**Intro:** Three stages of spiritual development are given: "children," "young men" or teenagers and "fathers" or adults. These stages have no relation to the physical age or gender of a person. A Christian who is 70 years old in the flesh may still be a spiritual baby. A Christian lady of 30 years old may have the maturity to be a spiritual "father." In the **Parable of the Sower**, Jesus describes 3 types of harvest. Of the seed that fell on "good ground, and brought forth fruit" some yielded "an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold." (Matt. 13:8)

## I. SPIRITUAL CHILDREN (vv. 12-13c).

### A. All Believers are God's Spiritual Children (v. 12).

- This refers to all true Christians. Before we can have fellowship with God we must first be born again (**John 3:3**).
- We are all God's children because our "sins are forgiven for His name's sake." It is by Jesus and God's word that our spiritual birth is made possible (**I Pet. 1:23**).

### B. Some Believers are Little Children (v. 13c).

- They have "known the Father." The first expression of a child is the recognition of his parents. The Spirit causes all of God's children to know Him (**Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-16**).

### C. Some Characteristics of Little Children:

- They are NEEDY; CAREFREE; SELFISH; IGNORANT; DEMANDING; SIMPLE-MINDED. (Make spir. application)

## II. SPIRITUAL FATHERS (vv. 13a, 14a).

### A. Spir. Fathers Have Taken Time to Walk with God.

- In both vv. 13-14, John says "fathers" are those who "have known him that is from the beginning." Children "have known Him," but fathers have "known Him... from the beginning." The difference between a young and an adult Christian is TIME and OBEDIENCE.
- Mature Christians have walked with God long enough that they consistently bring God in their every day living.

- A physical child is usually considered an adult after 18 to 21 years of growth. How long does it take for a baby Christian to become a mature Christian?
- Paul first came to Corinth in **A.D. 50**. About 5 years later see what Paul wrote to the Corinthians (**I Cor. 3:2-3**). If you have been saved 5 years, you should be a **"father."**

### **B. Characteristics of Spiritual Fathers:**

- *They REPRODUCE; INSTRUCT; LOVE; PROVIDE; PROTECT; SET EXAMPLE.* (Make spir. application)

## **III. SPIRITUAL YOUNG MEN (vv. 13b, 14b).**

### **A. Spiritual Young Men Know Conflicts (v. 13b).**

- Young men are at war with the enemy. Little children don't know how to fight and resist Satan. Spiritual fathers have already won these battles since they have learned to live in dependence upon the Father (**Eph. 6:10**).

### **B. Spiritual Young Men Abide in the Word (v. 14b).**

- Putting the word to work in our lives enables us to defeat Satan (**Psa. 119:11, 105**). This is why Satan will always fight serious Bible study. You cannot become a mature Christian without spending time and learning your Bible!
- Jesus used the word to defeat Satan at His temptation. Each time He said, **"It is written."** (**Jas. 4:7; Eph. 6:17**)

## **IV. THREE STEPS FOR MOVING TO SPIR. MATURITY.**

If a healthy baby is cared for it will grow. A teenager with proper provision and training will grow. Growth is automatic both physically and spiritually when we are healthy.

- **STEP #1: EAT!** Feed on the word of God.
- **STEP #2: REST!** Rest in Jesus. Learn to rely on His strength. Learn to live in total dependence on Him.
- **STEP #3: EXERCISE!** Trust and obey God. Get busy.

**ILLUSTRATION:** The Chinese bamboo doesn't seem to grow at all for the first 4 years after it is planted. However, during a 60-day period in its **5th year**, it shoots up to **90 feet** high! Brethren, isn't it time to grow in the Lord by now?