

Growing in the Light

I John 2:12-13, 28: "I write to you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write to you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because ye have known the Father... And now, children, abide in him, that if he be manifested we may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before him at his coming.

Let's pray together:

Lord, we trust in You, we worship You, and we look away to You right now, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Leader and the Completer of our faith. Lord, we pray as we have the Word open that You will meet with us and speak to us. We pray that You would reveal Yourself to us. In Jesus 'name. Amen.

We are going to continue on in I John as we just inch along. Now we are at this section on growing. We are growing in the light, and you can obviously see in the verses we just read that there are fathers, young men and little children. Actually, all of us are children of God, but all of us are not really children with the Lord. However, there are these stages of growth that we are going to get into. Just as a reminder, we are to get the larger picture, keep it, and hold it in our heart because as we dive into individual verses we can get lost in the weeds and forget the bigger picture. In this section we will be covering now, it really matters. Most of the time, some of these verses are just pulled out for the goodness within them, and we really do get helped. For example, "love not the world." This is a wonderful section of verses and really useful for sharing about worldliness and not loving the world. But in its section on growing, it has much more help for us to see it as it is written and is actually a lot more useful.

We are on this subject of fellowship in the whole book of I John, and we are fellowshiping eternal life. He began the letter by just letting you know that he wants to share his fellowship. "The One that was from the beginning, the eternal life that has been manifested and we have seen, and we want to report to you and share with you that you also can have fellowship with us because our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son." This is the excitement of John the apostle. He has joy if we can join into his fellowship. He has no greater joy than the experience of us coming in and walking with the Lord, and then the response of fellowship where it is life to life, eternal life shared with each other.

We have these sections that will say, "God is light." So this is to do with the eternal life, and then we experience the eternal life by walking in the light. That is the part that we are in right now. We have talked about being cleansed in the light, confessing our sins, and then we get on the path of walking in the light, and we stay here. We bounce off of the dirt of sin that we have stepped in, the shame that we step in, and we bounce right back on to this path and stay cleansed by the precious blood. This is part of walking in the light.

The other thing we talked about before was abiding in the light where we are actually responding. Abiding is not just sleep abiding; it is obeying His commands also. So abiding is really the steps that you take as you are walking in the light. Being cleansed is staying on the path of walking, staying in the race, but abiding is where we are actually taking those steps where we are at with the Lord, and we are walking in the light; we are remaining in the Lord.

This time we are in the growing in the light section. Now that we are on this path, we are staying on the path, we are walking, and something happens. Something happens to you as you stay cleansed. This really does not happen much if we do not stay cleansed. If we do not stay right with the Lord, it stunts our growth. That seems kind of obvious, but we are not in the spiritual spot, so the spiritual growth does not happen. Other growths can happen physically but not spiritually. It does not just happen, but as we stay cleansed, we will grow. As we abide in the Lord, as we respond to His commands, as we stay close to Him, we worship Him and fellowship with His people, we will grow. We do not have to stretch our necks to grow. We do not have to try to grow; we just be who we are in Christ right now, and growing is going to happen. This is the spot we are at right now, and for this time I would like to try something a little different.

I John 2:12: "I write to you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." (Darby)

We finished the abiding talk, we finished the being cleansed talk, and now we are in this new spot. However, we are still walking in the light. He says, "I write to you, children." This 'children' here in this Scripture is just a general term for all of God's people, even though we are going to be talking about growing and fathers, young men and little children. This time when he says children, it is for everybody, including the fathers.

If you have ever been in a place where people are older than you, they might call you young, and they might talk about young people. I was in a place one time and heard them talking about young people who are in their fifties. And to the apostle John I think everyone is a young person. This elderly brother, who is writing this letter, can see them all including the fathers in the place where the people were reading this to him. Even those fathers in the Lord who are mature are still children. Definitely, to God we are all children of God. We can surely take that stance.

He writes with this term of endearment when he said in the beginning of chapter 2, "My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin." That is to everybody. Actually, everywhere in I John, except for the few verses we are going to talk about today, when we see children mentioned, it is always the big children which includes all of us no matter what our age is. It is always talking about us, everybody.

There is a new word mentioned in here that is for the little children. But to begin with, this is how we start out. Actually at the end of this section in chapter 2:28: "And now, children, abide in him, (this again is the big word children *teknia* which is everybody) that if he be manifested we may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before him at his coming." This is how it concludes. If you can think of these two spots like two bookends or two pieces of bread on a nice sandwich, these hold this section together. When you consider it, the first one says,

“Your sins are forgiven.” That should remind us of all that we talked about with being cleansed. Your sins are forgiven. The foundational stance with growing is that you are cleansed. That is how we stay on the path.

The other one that we just looked at, which is his exhortation at the end of his talk about growing, is abide in Him. That should remind us of the whole section on abiding. So up unto this point two major sections have happened, being cleansed and abiding. And now that we are talking about growing, it is packaged within that realm, being cleansed at the beginning and abiding at the end. These are the two things that keep you in the place of growing. If you take this stance of your sins being forgiven, not only in the past my sins have been forgiven which have made me a child of God, but I am in the good of having my sins forgiven right now. I am in the light. Then we can grow.

At the end, with all of the exhortations, there are some specific things to do even according to your spiritual age group. But at the very end it all sums up with just abiding in Him. If you are abiding in Him now where you are in the Lord, if He shows up or if you go to be with the Lord, you will have boldness before Him. You will not be put to shame because you are in Christ, and you are fellowshiping with Him now. You know Him now, and you will know Him when you see Him face to face. There will be a familiar fellowship; I was just fellowshiping with You before. Thus if you abide with Him you will grow, and you will also not be ashamed.

In this next section he begins by just sharing with us the three spiritual age groups, and he uses this phrase, “I write to you.” It is important to keep this in mind. He will say “I write” or “I have written” throughout I John. But in this section on growing he makes a distinction between, “I write to you” and “I have written to you.” Here in this spot he says, “I write to you, fathers, I write to young men, and I write to little children.” Each one has a short, very brief description explaining their spiritual spot. For example, with the fathers, “They have known him that is from the beginning.” That description at the very beginning of I John says, “That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard.” He actually goes on to say, “We have seen with our eyes that which we have contemplated, and our hands handled concerning the Word of life, and the life has been manifested.” That which was from the beginning is Christ Himself who was manifested on the earth, who showed up. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. It is also in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” That Word actually shows up on this earth.

The fathers have known Him that is from the beginning. Actually, every child of God knows the Lord Jesus. In a sense, we all do, but when he is saying, “You have known Him that is from the beginning,” he is especially thinking about you knowing the life of Christ living inside of you. You know Him in a more intimate way than just being born again, than just meeting Him. You actually know Him. It should bring you back to the way that John himself talked in the first four verses of chapter 1: I am in this fellowship with eternal life, and I just want to share this with you. I know Him who is from the beginning. I know Him, and you need to know Him.

So that is the case with the fathers. They are also called fathers which give you a parental description; a father is only a father because there are children. So their father is taking care of children, and that is part of this concept with fathers. They have a concern and a heart's care for

the little ones, for those who are brand new believers or those who are struggling. They have that type of heart.

The young men are described as, “you have overcome the wicked one.” That is their spiritual growth spot here that is described. They have learned how to not only be forgiven of their sins, staying cleansed, but they have discovered overcoming the power of sin. If you think about Revelation 12, the wicked one, the great dragon, the serpent of old is the accuser of the brethren, accusing them day and night. It is what he wanted to do in Job chapter 1. He is roaming around the earth seeking who he can accuse, and he would have liked to accuse Job, and he would like to accuse us. And there is an accusation that comes when you stumble and fail all of the time, but to overcome the wicked one especially has to do with learning how to live by the life of Christ. You have entered into a threshold not only of giving back to the Lord, but of discovering: “Wait a second, I can overcome sin. In this moment, I can live by the life of Christ. There is a little difference with my soul and spirit. The soul has started to dissect and split up inside of me. The double-edged sword has exposed my soul and spirit, and now I can distinguish a little, and I can see that there is a way to overcome. There is a life that can conquer sin.” So the young men have entered into this spiritual spot.

The little children are described as, “you have known the father.” Once we are born again, we have received the Holy Spirit inside of us whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.” We enter into spiritual life. At the very basic spot of spiritual life, we know the Father, that shepherding Father, that caring Father, who will make sure we are protected. This is a little different from knowing Him who is from the beginning. The knowing Him who is from the beginning has to do with sharing His very life as you are living your life together with Him. It has to do with the closeness of living by His life of fellowship.

But knowing the Father has to do with how the Father is almost like a Shepherd who keeps you in the right spot. You know that the Father is taking care of you. You know that you can go to One who will meet your very needs. You know that you are cared for. You have known the Father. When you are first born again, automatically you get to know the Father right then. Even if some who did not really have a father type of relationship, they find the fulfillment of that with God Himself. Even though they never had one who cared for them like that, with God the Father, it is all replaced, and they know they are cared for, and they know the love of the Father is watching over them. It is like with David, “Though my own parents would forsake me, God would not.” That is the love of the Father. You know nothing will separate you from the love of God. That is the love of the Father. It is a type of assurance: “I am His and He is caring for me. No one can take me out of the hands of the Lord Jesus. The Father is making sure this is going to work.” That is the love of the Father.

This is just to let us know the spiritual stages. All of these are just very briefly mentioned in this fellowship he is writing to them about. He is writing to all of these categories of believers in their maturity stages—fathers, young men, little children.

Some of the translations that we have for this word little children might say children. Maybe the first mention of children in verse 12 would say little children. Some of them make a distinction. Some of them will say my children to make a distinction. Unfortunately, there are a

few that do not make any distinction, and this is one of the rare cases where I think it is super important to pencil it in if you have a translation that skips that and did not make a difference. If we were reading the letter as the Greek speaking people read it, they would see a whole other word like paidion. It sounds totally different from teknia because it is just a whole other word. But to us, it is children, little children; it is the same thing. In English it is hard to make a distinction, so we just kind of have to make a distinction. Most of the time, we do not need to know much. Most of the time if somebody is getting into a greater knowing of Greek, they usually get more confused, but this is one of those rare cases. It is like at the end of the gospel of John where you find that love and love are a little bit different in what Peter said and what the Lord Jesus said. It changes the meaning.

And this is a case that will affect our reading of these passages. So whatever the translation is, there are a lot of benefits to all of the different translations, but we should pencil in this 'little children' in v. 13 and v. 18 as those are kids versus young adults versus parents. It has to do with age. It does not have to do with stance as a child of God. Not everybody is a little child. So you may have matured beyond that stage. When you are first born again, everybody has been a paidion, everybody has been a little child. Let's keep that in mind.

Then this next spot happens: "I have written to you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning."

That sounds very similar to what we just read; it is the same thing. If you go back to this: "I write you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning."

What is the big difference? "I have written to you, fathers, you have known him who is from the beginning." The only difference is, "I write to you, or I am writing, and I have written, or I wrote to you." There is a difference here. He makes a distinction out of this. I write, and I have written. In all of these old texts in the original language there is a difference. If you look at the word, there are some attachments to the word 'write' which makes it, "I did it in the past." So it is different, and we should notice this difference because now he is changing his tone. When he says, "I write to you," he is just saying, "I am writing this to you guys, here is your spiritual spot." But now he is beginning to exhort. It is a little confusing with the fathers, and we will get back to them because the exhortation to the fathers is mysteriously hidden.

But it is not mysterious with the young men. "I have written to you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."

So to overcome the wicked one is what we read before, "I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one."

Now he adds some extra things. They are strong and the Word of God abides in them. This has to do with the young men. We will not get into much of it this time. The rest of these verses are for young men. It is a specific exhortation to them. What is the exhortation for? It is to help them grow to become fathers. So even though the exhortation is "love not the world, nor the things in the world," The exhortation is also, "If any one love the world, the love of the father is not in him." For example, at the end of verse 15 he says, "Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone love the world, the love of the father is not in him."

What you are looking at in dealing with worldliness is not just looking at it as a specific package. We are looking at it as it relates to being a young man. For a young man to grow to become a father, if worldliness remains a things that would distract you, then the love of the father is not in you. Remember what the love of the father is. The love of the father is that shepherding love, that caring love, that parental love. The love of the father to be inside of us is what happens when we mature from young men to fathers. You gain the love of the Father which means you are praying for his children, and you are caring about his children. You are caring about more than your own personal growth in the Lord. You are caring for others. But you have no room in your life for that type of love if you love the world. That is the issue.

The love of the world removes the time that you would spend caring for God's people. You do not have enough time because you work a job, and you have your own family. However, there is some time, the hidden time that we forget about. It is those odd times when we are feeling a little cloudy in our mind, a little tired, and we end up loving the world a little bit. It is those minor distractions. Maybe we would do better just to take a nap instead and wake up ready to pray for somebody. If you want to take a nap, the best way to fall asleep is to pray for people. I do not know why, but if I want to sleep, I just start praying for people, and I am out. I do not know if that is spiritual or not. However, there is something about the world taking away our time, and it also zaps out any spiritual growth. I am not even thinking of sinful worldliness. Is it sinful if the Lord Jesus should turn a stone into bread? That may be debatable. Could He turn a stone into bread? He brought water out of a rock in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, He had His own temptations to show that He is coming as a Man instead of the Son of God in the sense of taking His stance as a Man. But we may be tempted in things that even seem okay and nothing is wrong with them, but the question is, "Can I serve the Lord?" If you are at the young men's stage, I am saying that means the Word of God is already abiding in you somewhat, going on in there. You have some memorized, and you have read through it. The Holy Spirit has materials to bring out from the depths of your heart because the Word of God is abiding in you. You are strong like the young men would be strong, the young men of war that can go out and fight fights. You are not worn out and tired and ready to retire. You are actually strong, meaning that you have strength to go on, to serve in God's house, and to do things with the Lord. You are strong in that you have overcome the wicked one. You can actually be delivered from sin, and you are learning to deal with your flesh, and other things like this. That strength is there, but the stunt of our growth as young men is worldliness. Therefore, if we do not love the world, then the love of the father can develop, and there is room to replace that with the love of the father.

As far as that has to do with growth, the young men are called to discover the love of the father. Now it is automatically discovered when you lay down some of the things of the world. I think for me a lot of help in dealing with the world though was with the love of the Father, meaning that as the Lord calls us to care for His people, that replaces your sense of need for those worldly things, the sense of those extra attractions. It gets replaced. You are too busy for it now. I do not have enough time to watch all of that or do all of that or whatever it is. I actually have run out of time. It is not just about concentrating and saying, "I am going to not love the world, not love the world, not love the world, not love the world." Instead, it is like all of my eggs are in this basket. All of my joy is in seeing somebody come through. When you start to work with a new believer who is struggling, it zaps up all your free time. Then, if they do not make it, you are

broken-hearted, and you are praying for them again. It is like the apostle Paul who said in the letter of Galatians, "I am again travailing for you all that Christ would be formed in you." That is the type of love of the father, just travailing and travailing, wanting to see this type of thing happen. That really replaces a lot of those worldly temptations. However, I would not recommend that you take the fight against worldliness head-on with nothing to replace it. It is almost like a demon possessed person who has the demon cast out, but nothing replaces it, and seven more return to enter into the person, (as the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 12:43-45). If you get clean swept of the world, it will just come right back unless you get filled with the love of the Father and caring for His people. That will catapult you into maturing as fathers in the faith to move on into something else.

The next thing is the little children. This is the paidion again, this is the little children as compared to fathers, as to compared to young men. Something looks wrong here. It does not say, "I have written to you, little children." If it had said this, everybody would get what I am talking about today. It would be so easy, and even our translations would not add those subheadings here and there in the way. Now we are talking about worldliness; we are not talking about the antichrist, not quite. Now we are talking to little children. There is an exhortation for them. They are little children, so they need a few extra words, and he starts out a little more gentle with them. The fathers need very few words, just a reminder of something secret that all of those mature know about Him who is from the beginning. There is something packaged in that. But for the little children, let us explain something. Therefore, he goes on in this section, which is the largest amount and is dedicated to the baby Christians. There are a lot of words because when you are explaining something to someone who is just getting started, you have to explain it really well and tell them a couple of times, and it is actually what happens here. He is writing to these little children. "This is the last hour; there are these people acting like the antichrist, in the spirit of the antichrist, and there are many deceivers coming around with these false truths. It does say in verse 21: "I have not written to you because you do not know the truth."

Verse 26: "These things I have written to you ..." So here is our phrase "I have written to you, fathers," "I have written to you, young men," "I have written to you, little children." It does not begin by saying that, but it does say, "I have written to you," or it says, "I have not written to you because you do not know the truth but because you do." You have the unction; you have the anointing.

Why is this emphasized to the paidion, to the little baby Christians as they are getting started? Those who bring in a false teaching, those who come in with all of these odd things really can deceive. In the book of Ephesians, he mentions growing up so that we would not be tossed back and forth by every wind of that teaching. Being tossed back and forth by incorrect teachings has something to do with not growing up. It has something to do with being immature in the faith. Even as a church it is an immature spot, but as with an individual it is an immature spot. With them they do not yet have the Word of God abiding in them strongly. They may only know a few verses because they have not yet read through all of the Scriptures. However, they do have an equipment built into them that the Father has provided in giving them the Holy Spirit. This is not an exhortation such as, "love not the world," but it is like an encouragement or a comfort

saying that you have the anointing, you have the unction. No one needs to deceive you, for you can recognize when it is false. You do not need somebody that you always go to and say, "Is that true? Is that not right?" You can kind of sense it. You have a spiritual sensitivity as a brand-new believer that you have to tap into or else you will be tossed back and forth by whatever people suggest because they are definitely more mature than you. They have read more of the Scriptures than you, especially those that come in the spirit of the antichrist. They are going to be antichrist style, knowing a lot and being very powerful. They are going to have the ability to out argue you, but you are equipped for something that they cannot mess with. You have the light of life inside and that intuitive ability to know this is just not right. I cannot explain it, but this is not right, this is incorrect.

I remember one time being very tossed around, and I was around some people who were accidentally in the spirit of the antichrist. They were false, but they were so correct. I was somewhat immature spiritually, and I could not put my finger on it nor could I figure out a Scripture, but I just knew this was off; something is wrong. I had to go with that spiritual sensing and say, "I just cannot gather with you guys this week. I feel something strange." And all the responses I got back exposed the spirit of the antichrist. It was the non-focus of Christ, the things that would take me away from Christ, the focus on something else to distract me from worshiping, from the purity and devotion, the simplicity of Christ. It was there, and I could only sense it, but I could not explain it. Later, maybe I could have explained it, but at the time I could not. Nevertheless, I was equipped.

All of us are equipped as brand-new believers with this sensitivity, the unction or the anointing it might say, or the Holy Spirit. It is talking about having the Holy Spirit inside which is such a comfort, such a help for the little children. If you read this knowing that he is talking to the little children, it all makes sense. If you read it thinking this is talking to the young men or just the most mature believers, it does not quite make sense. What I mean is if someone comes to you with some very false teaching, and the Word of God abides in you, you just pull out the Word of God and say, "What are you talking about? Here is what the Word of God says." If you are pretty mature in the Lord also, there is even more to talk about, and you can even refer to many things with your own experience. It is not quite the temptation. You are no longer tossed back and forth by every wind of that teaching. But with a little child, it is very easy to be deceived, but we are equipped. So these are exhortations in this whole section on growing up. It is a large section for the little children, but it is because they need that strong encouragement, that strong comfort to know that they are equipped. And they are exhorted to abide in what they have; they are exhorted to stay in tune with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This is where they are, but If they do that, they will grow to be young men. As little paidion children they are reading the Word, they are in that fellowship, and they are abiding. The Lord will show them that they need to crave after the purest spiritual milk of the Word, that by it they may grow up into Your salvation. Now that they have tasted that the Lord is good like Peter says, they will grow in that sense. The growing is not a new concept to us, for it is an exhortation we find in the Scriptures many times.

For example, in I Corinthians, chapters 1-3, he mentions a lot about growing and how they should have grown by now. "You all are acting carnal. It was okay before when you were new believers, when you were paidion, when you were little children. You were fleshy, and it was kind

of cute, it was okay. But by now you ought to be spiritual.” So they were encouraging them that they should be mature by now and living by the spirit and not by their flesh.

In Hebrews chapter 5-6 he says, “I would like to talk about more mature teachings, things that are for the mature, but you all are immature. You cannot handle it; you still need milk; you cannot handle the meat. You still need some grace, some of that father’s love, that shepherding-knowing assurance because you do not have the foundational teachings down. You keep thinking that you can lose your salvation. We have to get this solid and understand the love of the Father; no one can snatch you out of His hand. And now let’s go on to talk about the word of righteousness; now let’s go on to the talk about living this life of Christ.”

These exhortations on growing, always calling us on, and then there is this no excuse stance in the Scriptures. You have been a believer for a year; what are you waiting on? You have been a believer for three years? You ought to be teaching some others by now. You ought to be taking care of some new believers right now. You have been a believer for five years? Ten years? Stop approaching gains for what you are getting out of it yourself. Start to be concerned about the people of God and lay down your life for them. You should be grown by now. You should be a parent by now. A lot of us when we physically grow, discover, “Oh, I am that age; I should act that way now.”

I have had the opportunity to see some dear brothers and sisters grow physically while they are growing spiritually, and it is kind of neat to watch because of their certain stance when they are twelve or thirteen. It is a little different when they are seventeen or eighteen, but at some point there is this click that happens. It is different with each one, but it happens somewhere between seventeen to twenty-five: “Wait a minute, I am an adult.” Then suddenly, all of this mature thinking like an adult just clicks, and I think part of it is, “Hey, I should act more grown-up now.” It was taking you so long to mature, but then it almost happened very quickly. You realize it is like a renewing of the mind, “I should be more mature right now. I should be acting more adult.”

This also happens when someone has children. You are on an adventure in life, and everything is exciting. It is exciting to have a child, and it is wonderful. But suddenly, almost every dad and mom when the child shows up is like: “What am I doing? I am a parent now.” Suddenly, you have to mature, stop being so selfish, and lay down your life for somebody else.

This sometimes happens to us when, spiritually speaking, it has been some years, and we begin to mature in our minds. We realize, “I need to grow up.”

But it also happens when a new believer comes around, and you are involved somehow. Maybe it is your friend from work or your friend from school or your relative that you helped to come to the Lord or a stranger on the street. They get born again and because you care about how they are doing, you are invested, you have to also walk in everything that the Lord is showing you. Therefore, you begin to mature a little more than maybe you would have otherwise. If it is just me and for my benefit in the church’s gatherings and me doing my requirements, I am going to grow a certain way as long as I am abiding and cleansed, but it increases as the Lord brings

these things into our lives. He may bring a struggling brother or sister along our path whom he calls us to pray for, and when we get out of ourselves, it actually helps us to grow.

For this time I would like to focus on this experience of the fathers. It says, "I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning."

In verse 14: "I have written to you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning."

The fathers may read this section on scriptural growing and think: "That's all you have for me? Where is my exhortation? Where is my spot?" Now to be clear, it does not mean that fathers are the most mature people you have ever seen in your life. We might be thinking of grandfathers or great grandfathers. It actually seems like in the Scriptures there are no great-grandfathers going on or no grandfathers, but there are very mature fathers. For example, grandparents get the kids just occasionally or maybe some of them get them a lot, but their labor of love and dying to self and sleepless nights have really calmed down. However, in the church in this time period, we never get past the parental spot if you are in that fatherly stage. You always have these little children to take care of.

Just imagine Adam and Eve being parents for hundreds of years. Back in those days they could have babies even beyond the age of a hundred without much of a problem, and so they had many sons and daughters. Adam is the dad, and this child is three hundred years younger than another child, but you are still a father even if you are very mature. Some have entered into this spot as fathers, but they are just barely there. They are just touching on it and getting a taste of it just for a moment. They are beginning to shepherd some and realizing regularly that they can live by the life of Christ. This is the first thing to notice. The exhortation to them is that they have known Him who is from the beginning, and what they would think about that which is from the beginning is the eternal life-One who showed up, the Lord Jesus. If you have known Christ, do you want to know Him? As in John 10: "My sheep know me; they hear my voice; they know me, all of my sheep."

But there is this other way of thinking as you go on to know the Lord and you discover the life of Christ in you. This is what is mentioned in Philippians 3:10 when Paul said, "I want to know Him, I want to know the power of His resurrection; I want to fellowship with Him in His sufferings; I want to be so conformed with Him into His death, so I can arrive in that resurrection from among the dead. I want to know Him. This is the mindset of the fathers. This is the mindset of realizing he is unsearchable, he is undiscoverable. I discovered something new of Him today, and I know there is more. It is a glorious thing as you are growing in the Lord to say, "There is so much more of Christ; there is so much more." As a brand-new believer, you may say, "I know the Lord and I am happy in Jesus, and you keep on growing. But when you discover the life of Christ living inside of you, and you begin to see some vision or insight into who He really is, you find, "I cannot discover enough of Him, and I want to know Him." Therefore, all that John needs to say to the fathers is, "You have known him who is from the beginning," and that means before creation started.

In the gospel of John chapter 1:1, he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word is God.” But he also says, “It was through the Word that everything was created.” In the beginning that which was from the beginning is the beginning before creation. You have known Him who is from eternity. You have known Him who began all of this, and that should give us that largeness of Christ where we begin to see He is unsearchable, and I want to know Him. It is enough of an exhortation for Paul to say, “I want to know Him.” And he also says right after that as he shares how he is on this pursuit. “I have not attained everything; I have not attained that for which He has called me to, but I am pursuing; I am after this prize” (see vs. 12-14). There is this great high calling, and I am running this race.”

He says, “As many as are perfect or are mature, think this way, have this mind” (Philippians 3:15). If you have a different mindset, that is okay, just walk in what you have attained. Walk in what you have received, and the Lord will show you. Does that sound familiar? That sounds like this sharing where if you abide where you are, you will grow. If you do not have the mindset that can say, “I want to know Him,” if that does not make sense, that is okay if you have a different mindset, just walk in what you have. The Lord will develop this mindset because this is the mindset of the fathers in the faith. We may touch on it very early on, so it does not mean we have to begin labeling ourselves as young men or fathers. This is just to understand how growth works in general. Actually, it may be something like my arms are growing, but my right leg has not grown yet. We are all kind of weirdly developed, spiritually speaking. Therefore, we might be very mature in one area but not so mature in other areas. You might find that you are kind of like a father in the faith sometimes, and other times you are like a brand-new believer unfortunately.

The first thing that is going on with these fathers in the faith is the exhortation for them to grow, and to know Him who is from the beginning, to know Him more, to be conformed to His death, to fellowship in His sufferings. That is how you get to grow more. How much do you know the abiding life of Christ in you? And the amount that you know, if you compare it to where you have come from, could you imagine that there is that much more to come? If you think of the best moments when you know: “I am abiding in Christ, and Christ is abiding in me, and this is amazing!” Is that happening all of the time? Is that our lot all of the time? I want to know Him; I want that experience in the more difficult moments. I want that experience here and here and here. I am willing to share in His sufferings if it means I can know Him more. I do not want sufferings for no reason, but if I can share in the little bit of the cross and I can know Him more, then it is amazing. If you can see Him who is from the beginning or if you hear that phrase and you remember that you have His life inside of you, and there is such a closeness of fellowship that you have developed with Him. Or you remember that time when you fellowshiped in His suffering, and He was near to you, and His very life was inside of you, you knew the Lord was with you; all forsook me, but the Lord is with me. Or that time when you could not overcome but the life of Christ rose up and you knew the power of His resurrection living through you. You will say, “Hallelujah, that is the Lord! I know Him who is from the beginning. He has every single thing I need, and He has all of the growth ahead of me.” This growth experience is like what John the Baptist said, “I must decrease, and He must increase.” In a way we are growing down, we are going down as we are growing, we are stepping downwards into the depth. But in another way,

these are stairs that we are climbing up. In that, I know Christ more. I see Christ more. I know Him more; His life in me is living more. So that is part of the exhortation to the fathers.

The other part of it is really in the stance of being a father. They really do not need to be told this, but I think we should bring this up as it is said to the young men. The love of the father will keep that growth steady. Now the love of the father to the young men is talking about the love of God the Father. But that love of God the Father needs to be brought into us, so we do not love the world. The love of God the Father develops in us, and that is what brings us into being fathers in the faith. As that is happening, as we have been brought into this spot, it is kind of the balance in our growth. I am pursuing to know Him, but I am not a monk pursuing to know Him because the love of the father has been placed into our hearts. Now we also get to be part of the growth of others. We are seeing others come along. Yes, I know that truth, but how much more joy there is when I see someone else come into that truth. Yes, I have been through this experience, but what great joy I have when I see someone else come into this experience.

If you have been there when someone first gets saved, you could probably say sometimes that experience brought you more joy than when you got saved. This might sound wrong, as far as it feels or as far as our understanding. When I first got saved, I only knew a little bit of what I was getting into, but when you see someone else get saved, you know what they are getting into. You know who they belong to, you know who they are discovering, and you experience so much joy. You almost have more joy than them, but there is a lot of joy going on. I have no greater joy than to see my children walking in the truth. The joy just abounds; it is the joy of fellowship.

Part of the growth of these fathers is other people's growth. Your growth is not meant to be by yourself. We are called to full growth, but we are called to full growth together. This is the way of the church. This is why those fathers and mothers in Israel, those fathers in the house of God have the growth connected to all of us. If we do not all grow, it is almost like they have the sense that there is no growing going on. There is a frustration of growth if others do not grow. It is not enough for me to just know the Lord more. It is almost like I could show it off or something. If this brother or if this broken-down sister does not grow also and does not rise up, I am not satisfied; my joy is not fulfilled. Before that you were in the pursuit of growing; you were trying to grow to stop sinning. You were trying to stop being in the flesh all the time and get over worldliness. But now you want to help this person stop sinning, you want to help this person come through the world, and by helping others it actually maintains all of that stuff you have grown into. If you are not helping other people, you will find yourself falling back into worldliness. You fall back into sins; you fall back into stages that you have already come through. Part of it is that you are starting to forget your spiritual life because you are not helping anyone, so you get duller and dumber spiritually.

If you help people with education, maybe you were educated in college. You learned a lot of things and did well in math, English, and history, but you are not going to use it with your job. You end up working a job that you do not use any of those things. However, later on you are helping the children with their homework and with their learning. It kind of brings back all of that stuff you knew, and it keeps your mind that much sharper. You remember the dates of the Revolutionary War, you remember what happened over here, there. You remember how to do algebra. Otherwise, you might forget, but you are helping other people through it. I do not know

if that is a good illustration of not, but spiritually speaking, I know it really works that our growth is connected with everyone else's growth.

I want to mention something that has to do with skipping stages of growth. We want to grow into being mature, into this threshold of maturity. It does not mean you are very mature. So when I am talking about fathers in the faith, I am talking about you are barely a father, and you are not really qualified to be a father. Nevertheless, you are there; you have discovered eternal life to live by. This is like a lot of people who get to be a parent and have kids. Many times people are parents, but they are not worthy of the child they had. They are not equipped yet nor do they know how to raise kids. Most everybody could say this when they began being parents—physical parents of physical kids, but the same is true spiritually. You are barely in the door, but you have grown to this spot, and there is much more to grow into.

That is what I am talking about when I am thinking of fathers, but I think there is so much more to grow into which is why we normally think of fathers as very mature fathers. And those mature fathers actually see the brand-new fathers as 'my children,' the ones they are also caring for. So there is still that shepherding of the more mature ones helping the barely mature ones, those that have discovered eternal life, Him that is from the beginning, those who are starting to take care of people. They do not quite know what they are doing which is why I think the grandparent experience comes in now in a sense, if we can borrow that. I am not saying God has grandparents in the house of God. I am saying there is an experience like that where somebody has been a parent before. They have actually helped someone get through the teenage years, and they have seen them get established as adults in a good way. They have seen them grow up. Those people are helping the other ones who are just getting started. You are helping somebody, but you do not really know how to help them. Therefore, it is great to grab somebody who seems to know what they are doing to help you help somebody. To tag team is really useful in the way of shepherding and in the way of caring for others. It is of course useful with gospel preaching and new believers, but it is useful just in caring for the slower ones also. If you are really good at this, do not do it alone because the rest of us need your help to teach us what we are doing. If you are really good at helping somebody to overcome the world, grab a buddy when you are helping somebody if possible because I am sure that most of us do not know how to help somebody. And we need to come alongside and do some of these things together.

While we are seeing this spot with fathers and young men and little children, we are very tempted to kind of skip stages. And it is what we have seen in the church which is kind of what has made a mess of spiritual growth. It is like a little child, for example, the paidion child, in the growth stage of a little child. They end up if they skip the spot of discovering the unction, the anointing, the intuitive ability to just know things because the Holy Spirit knows it because it is just known. I know it; I cannot explain it with the Scripture, but I know it. If you do not develop that spiritually sensitive spot, and instead you just start to get strong in the Word of God, which abides in you at least mentally and not spiritually. The Word of God abiding in you is not really like it should be spiritually. Spiritually, the Word of God should abide in us in that it deals with us, we react to it, we do learn it and memorize it, but we also know it in experience. We have people who are born again that know the Word of God really well, but you would not quite say, as it says in Colossians, "let the Word of the Christ dwell in you richly." You cannot quite say that the Word

of God dwells in them richly, meaning it has been experienced and brought them into a lot of spiritual things. It is because they did not start out with that spiritual intuition experience, trying to develop: Hey, I have the Holy Spirit and I can know some things intuitively. It is for protection, especially to begin with those who are kind of young.

It is like when somebody comes to your house, maybe a mean adult that smiles and looks friendly, but the kids kind of back away. The dog kind of tucks its tail and leaves. Little children know that he is a mean person. Even if they do not put on a mean face, they just kind of know.

I was at a conference, and an adult man wanted to sit and have lunch, and you could tell that he was not used to kids. As he was talking, I could sense that all the kids were scared of him. As he looked at me I could not quickly, intuitively tell if this guy was a creep or not, but my kids could tell right away. It reminded me that I needed some discernment as I was talking to this man, and he ended up to be kind of like that. But it is something with kids that they just kind of know. So if you do not develop that, it stunts your growth, and you become a little abnormal. You feel like you are mature because you can out-Scripture some people, and you can join in a Bible study and explain things and have the answer for something, but you are just a baby spiritually. You are skipping something. Even your use of the Word of God is not the Holy Spirit wielding the sword of the Spirit. So when you share the Word of God, it does not affect anybody. Even if you have a long talk and you go through verses and you dissect them and explain them, it is not the sword of the Spirit of God because you did not touch into the Spirit of God when you were a baby Christian. So you do not want to skip that. You do not want to skip discovering that you have the Holy Spirit.

For example, in I Corinthians when the apostle Paul is talking to those carnal Christians who are acting like baby Christians and sinning, one thing he tells them: "Don't you know that you have the Holy Spirit inside of you? Your very body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." Do you know why he is reminding them of that? It is like they skipped that spot as a baby Christian, and if they skip it they will not have the sensitivity to sin when the Holy Spirit says, "No, we do not want to do that." Or when the Holy Spirit convicts you after you have sinned because they forget that the Holy Spirit is inside. Don't you know that you have the Holy Spirit? And your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? That is almost all you have to say to a brand-new believer for them to begin to discover: "Wait a second; I have the Holy Spirit inside; I have the anointing inside. I have protection. I have sensitivity now, and I can work with this. I can walk this way. If you skip that, even if you are strong in the Word, if you feel like, "Okay, but I never actually did all of that." You just have to go back to those basics and say, "Lord, reveal in me that I have eternal life. Lord, show me, strengthen me spiritually so I can develop this. Make me sensitive to these things. Help me, Lord." Come back to Him as a child with the Father. How will the Father not give us the Holy Spirit even if we ask for the wrong thing? You do not know what you are asking for sometimes, but He will give us the Holy Spirit, that connection, that anointing experience.

Or you might be young men starting to experience Him who is from the beginning. I have experienced the eternal life living in me, and I want to grow and know Him and know Him, and I am off on this path. It is almost like if you skip the love of the Father being developed in you, then you run off from that path all alone. You find yourself on a spiritual path and no one is running with you. It is supposed to be like in the Song of Songs, "Draw me and we will run after You." If

the Lord draws you, there is a 'we' experience. If you are touching Him as a young man, you have gotten strong in the Word, you have started to overcome, and it is kind of a catapult from overcoming sin. If I overcome the flesh by the eternal life inside of me, I can live by that life. It is all wrapped up in the person of Christ. I found the secret; it is all in Him and I fix my eyes on Him, and now I can live by that life. As you are doing that, it is such joy, and such a pursuit. Maybe you find some good books that you want to read, and you are pursuing and pursuing. If you do not care for anybody else, if you throw away your prayer list for others, it will be an abnormal growth. You will actually, accidentally stunt the growth. What happens at the same time as that type of growth, even though outwardly you begin to overcome some of the more carnal experiences of sin, you overcome the flesh, you overcome the works of the flesh that are more obvious, but inwardly you are not dealing with your self-life very much. Yes, you are getting to know the Lord a little bit, but what is rising up is the pride of life. That is the aspect of worldliness.

It mentions the three things of the world—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh. You can overcome these just in the personal pursuit, but you cannot overcome the third one without bringing some others with you—the pride of life. It will just rise up right there with you. When you run after the Lord, pride of life will be right there with you because you are awesome. You are not really awesome at all, only Christ is awesome, and you are living by the awesome life of Christ. But you accidentally forget because you have never dealt with the world, you have never had the love of the Father developed in you. You have never stuck around with those who are struggling enough to continuously have mercy on others. You have never gotten selfless enough to care for others, so the pride of life rises up. That is the third temptation of the world—and the pride of life. Those are the three things of the world. So we have a lot of fathers in the faith that are not very fatherly. The pride of life has entrapped them, and because they do not seem like fathers, they kind of fall back a little bit.

Another thing ones can skip is being strong in the Word. Some of us are very mature, but we cannot skip the stage of letting the Word of God abide in us richly. For example, the mystics back in the old dark ages, time period were not very strong in the Word. Some of them did not even have the Word very much; it was not like it was translated everywhere. However, they were very strong spiritually. If you read their stories, they know Him who is from the beginning, and some of the more famous ones really did have the love of the Father in them. But without being strong in the Word, they got into some errors and confusion, because the Word of God was not abiding or dwelling in them richly. So it is not something to skip.

Our growth is going to happen. It is nice to see this, to see the path of growing, but it is going to happen if we will maintain those two steps or essentials. One is in verse 12: "... our sins are forgiven for His name's sake." Our sins are forgiven. If you are cleansed today, you are growing today.

The other one is in verse 28: "My children (the teknia children) abide in Him. If you abide in Him, you have boldness when He is manifested. When He shows up, you will not be put to shame." I think this is an encouragement for us because you see a father in the faith or you even see a young man in the faith, and you are thinking, "They are doing well. If the Lord returns, they are going to hear, "Well done," but for me I am just getting started and I do not know what I am doing. I keep failing and falling and everything." No, you can have boldness before Him at His

coming and not be put to shame. If only you will abide where you are right now because you are just at your spot. We take the step where we are right now. If we would ask the Lord: "What is my full measure? Who am I in Christ right now? Where is my walk right now?" Do not downgrade it, but do not upgrade it either. Do not try to match up to somebody else and reach and stretch your neck to grow. Just rest in who you are right now, what the Lord has you doing, and the Lord has us on this path growing. He is the Father shepherding us and keeping us, and He will see us raised up into maturity.

Let's pray together:

Lord, we bring our very lives before You and lay down our hearts before You. Lord, we just say that we are willing, that we want to know You. We want to know Him who is from the beginning. We pray for all of us that You would develop in us right where we are right now. Cleanse us from any unnecessary shame, Lord. And also reveal to us the steps, the place where You have us right now. Strengthen those things in our hearts. We pray for spiritual strengthening if there has been a lack in that area. Lord, we pray that You would also renew in us that hunger for the Word of God, that it would dwell in us richly, that we would be usable in Your hands. And Lord, place Your people on our hearts. We pray for each other right now that we can grow together. In Jesus name. Amen.