

The Mature–Stage #3

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John insightfully describes this third and last stage as that of “fathers.” Although there might be some vagueness when one becomes a “young man”, fatherhood is much more clear. Fathers have children.

Our modern world has destroyed the ease and pleasure of discussing life as God has organized it due to political correctness. If we can get beyond this and just think about our own families, we can gain much understanding about God’s goals for every believer because each of us has had a father. Our fathers were not necessarily good

fathers. In fact, at the seminars I conduct, I find there are not many people who have had good fathers. And even if they claim they had a good father, they do not have a clear understanding of what a good father is.

God's goals for us

There are three distinctive aspects about the mature believer stage:

(1) God wants to move all of us forward to this third and final stage of spiritual development.

(2) God wants each of us to lead others into a new spiritual life.

(3) The Lord desires that we responsibly care for those that gain spiritual life around us.

The design

Firstly, the Lord desires and has so designed it that each of us is to move ahead to spiritual maturity. "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

The "child" stage is a cute stage, but it is not the goal, nor is the teen stage. They are still in training for what God has for them. The Apostle Paul defines this 'father' stage as a mature person (not pudgy, but spiritually mature) with the fullness of Christ. The marks of Jesus Christ should be clearly seen in our lives.

Although Paul uses fathers here, it is obvious that he, just like John, is not speaking only of the spiritual development of men, but women too. All believers, from every country and culture, are expected to grow to Christ's likeness in this age.

In order to grow, we must gain the vision of what God has for us. This requires faith. Our reasoning might go like this, 'If the Lord wants us to grow, then it means that He has made it so that we can grow.' These are faith-building truths (actually all truth, rightly learned, is faith-building). Once we know that all believers are meant to grow into Christ's image while on earth, then we must agree to the fact that God has made it so that we can grow—no matter what obstacles we might face.

Thinking about others

Second, the Lord has designed it so that the mature bring forth new life. These are the facts of life, are they not? Our world has rejected life and wretchedly distorted this picture of procreation. But think about a person who upon growing up, finds a great person to marry and then aspires to have children. These desires are built into us.

Spiritually speaking, we must never forget our responsibility to share the gospel and lead others into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When we bring them into this new relationship, it becomes our responsibility to care for them. We are not all preachers or teachers of God's Word,

but each person, is to take up the charge to seek the salvation and growth of those around them.



Spiritual care

Lastly, we are to exercise spiritual care for those around us. We are to aid those we lead to the Lord but are also responsible to minister to those that God brings into our lives.

In this mobile world with people regularly changing jobs, Christians are moving around the world at a dizzying pace. Believers from other parts of the country or world might be located near us. We need to deliberately look out for opportunities to serve others. We don't do this out of pride, for this is God's means of caring for His sheep. He uses more mature believers to care for those around us.

In many countries disease and disasters are creating uncounted orphans. It is humbling to see how so many churches and pastors have stepped in to adopt these children—even though they

themselves do not have sufficient food for their own families.

In a similar way, we need to do our job as the church to make sure everyone is being ‘fathered,’ that is, someone is spiritually caring for them. This is the spirit giving rise to God’s charge to make disciples—God’s love and care for believers’ development. The development of small groups in many churches can greatly help in this process, but there will always be some that do not fit into our programs. Let’s be alert to their needs.

What a shame if a father, who because he seeks to be comfortable, ignores the need of his children. That is wrong.

In a positive light, caring for others is God’s great opportunity to transfer His love and wisdom to others. For men this will include their willingness to step up to church leadership positions in the church. This will also include special mentoring between one couple and another, a sister with a sister, a man with another man. Pay attention to the needs of those around you. God just might want to use you to help them grow.

Lesson

- The ‘fathers’ are mature believers who have stepped beyond the struggles of the young believer and are able to focus his or her care on others.

- God's people can and should grow into full maturity in Christ.
- We are responsible to pass God's truth of life on to others and care for their spiritual development.

Memorize & Meditate

Ephesians 4:13

Assignment

- ➔ How long have you been a follower of Jesus?
Are you a spiritual 'father'?
- ➔ Have you taken care of younger believers in Christ? How has that gone? How could it have been better?
- ➔ Is there anyone around you that you are now caring for?