

1 John 2:12-14

Throughout his letter, the apostle John refers to his audience generally as “little children” (see for example 2:1; 3:7) – that is, as God’s children through their faith in Jesus (see 3:1,2). But in this passage, he speaks to them more specifically as “little children,” “young men,” and “fathers.” These three designations refer not to Christians’ biological age, but rather to three different stages of spiritual development. By noting what John commends each of these three groups for, we can learn important ingredients of spiritual health in each stage of development.

2:12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake . . . ¹³ . . . I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

Here John refers to spiritual infancy and early childhood. When you receive Jesus as your Savior (at whatever biological age), you become a newborn child of God. Notice what John emphasizes for this stage of spiritual development:

- *“You know the Father”* – You can develop spiritually only if you can relate to God confident of His Fatherly acceptance – that His love and acceptance do not waver, and that you are always welcome to come to Him to enjoy His love and to ask Him to meet your needs. Just as young children thrive only with this kind of healthy attachment to their parents, so we thrive spiritually only with this kind of healthy attachment to God. But how can God relate to us in this way even though He condemns sin and we still sin every day? Because . . .
- *“Your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake”* – Jesus’ death on the cross has fully satisfied God’s righteous



condemnation of all of our sins (see 1 John 2:2). He forgives us, *not* on account of what we do for Him or how we vow to change, but “for Jesus’ name’s sake” – on account of what Jesus has done for us. This is why we need never worry that God will condemn or reject us no matter what we do. True, He will discipline us for our good, but His discipline will always be within the sphere of His acceptance.

- Tragically, many Christians never develop past spiritual infancy because they are taught that God accepts them only if they quit sinning, if they ask daily for forgiveness, etc. Even more tragically, many Christians *are* taught this truth about God’s complete acceptance – but they refuse to really believe it. Instead, they continue to base their relationship with God on their own standards of performance rather than solely on Jesus’ finished work on their behalf. Take the time to be grounded in God’s unconditional love! Learn to draw near to God regardless of your recent spiritual failures! This is the essential foundation for growing into the next stage of spiritual development.

2:13 . . . I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one . . .¹⁴ . . . I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Here John refers to a second stage of spiritual development – that of young adulthood. In this stage (which covers many years), John emphasizes engagement in the spiritual battle against Satan – overcoming him both by resisting his attacks on our own lives and by helping others to escape his control. John names two provisions God has given us for this stage of our development. These provisions also imply a responsibility on our part to use them.

- “*You are strong*” – Young adult Christians depend on the power of the Holy Spirit in daily life. “Strong” refers not to our



own native strength, but to the power of the Holy Spirit, who is greater than Satan (1 Jn. 4:4). This is why Paul tells us to “be strong in the strength of God’s might” in order to stand firm against Satan’s attacks (Ephesians 6:10,11). As we learn to live by depending on the power of the Spirit, we can tear down Satan’s fortresses of deception (2 Corinthians 10:3,4) rather than get taken captive by them. Every Christian has this power – but many do not wield it consistently.

- “*The word of God abides in you*” – Young adult Christians know and use God’s Word in battle. Satan’s main tactic is deception – lies about who God is, who we are, what life’s purpose is, etc. Therefore, our main weapon is the truth – what God says in His Word. Ephesians 6:17 calls us to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In order to flourish in spiritual young adulthood, we must be grounded in God’s Word so that we can counter Satan’s lies about us and others. We have access to God’s Word – more access than any Christians in the history of the church. But is it true that the Word of God *abides* in you? Are you growing more familiar with it, and do you regularly use it to recognize and overcome the lies of the evil one? How tragic when Christians have such access to God’s Word – yet live as prisoners of war!

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning . . . ¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning . . .

Here John refers to substantially mature Christians. Their years of relating to God, their tested confidence in His faithfulness, and their combat-knowledge of His Word make them seasoned leaders and mentors (“fathers”) for others in the church. This is not to say that “young men” do not mentor other Christians; John is simply emphasizing the special mentoring role that “fathers” can play.



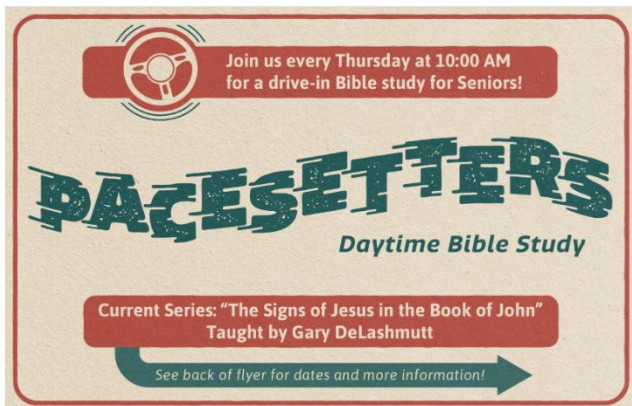
What is it that characterizes substantially mature Christians? John says simply that they “know Him who has been from the beginning.” The “Him” here probably refers to Jesus (see 1 John 1:1). Like Paul, they have made the number one goal of their lives to know Christ:

Philippians 3:8 I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings . . .

When you suffer with someone, you come to know them more deeply. In the same way, following Jesus into and through many sufferings deepens our intimacy with Him. Perhaps the greatest spiritual help that older Christians give to others is their testimony of Jesus’ faithfulness through all kinds of suffering, and their joy in Him despite their many battle scars.

Lord Jesus, thank You for dying for all of my sins so that I can know God as my loving Father. Thank You for making me strong through God’s Word so that I can overcome the evil one. Work through my sufferings to help me to know You better, so that I may encourage others in their relationship with You.

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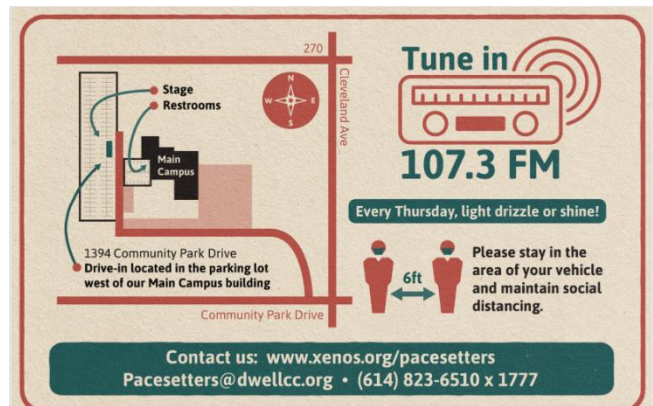


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