



Sermon Notes:

Preacher: Di Timberlake

Text: 1 John 2: 12 - 14

Title: Moving Forward

Introduction:

We have just had Christmas where most of us have spent time with friends and family. I hope that you took some photos and even some selfies with your loved ones. Let us look at these photos in more detail.

How many generations do you have in your photo?

What are the different types of personalities and relationships you can see here?

How many have just had new babies added to the family?

If we were to look at the different generations, we have the grandparents. They are the wise ones, who have lived a long life and worked hard at raising the family and now are able to enjoy the fruit of their labour. They give advice, comfort and are secure in the knowledge of who they are and the journey of growth they have been on. They know what it is like to live life and have walked the walk.

The next generation, the parents, are raising their children, in the thick of earning a living, teaching their kids and busy with endless chores and responsibilities. They have learnt from their parents and through experience, they are the guardians of their children in all aspects of their lives.

The youngest generation are the grandkids. They are young, energetic and have no worries about the future. They fully trust their parents and grandparents for all their needs.

All these generations are at different stages in their lives, with different needs, playing different roles in the family.

In church, don't we find the same thing? There are different people at different stages of their spiritual lives with different needs and who play different roles. If we were to take a church family picture, we would still have the grandparents, parents and children.

What we are going to explore this morning though is not the age differences we have (as in grandparent or child), but at the different stages of our spiritual growth with the diversity we have in our church family that makes us a true Acts 2 church.

With regard to your own spiritual growth, on a scale of 1 (meaning small) and 10 (meaning the best), where would you put yourself? Why do you rate yourself at that level?

Are there distinct stages we can identify and what are the milestones or characteristics for each stage?

John gives us good guidelines in 1 John 2:12-14.

12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

14 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

First of all, when John talks about men and fathers, the Greek word actually includes both men and women. Secondly, you may have noticed that John repeats himself. This was a common poetic way of writing that you can see most clearly in Psalms. But, when we see something repeated like this, it can either give more information or it is clearly important for us to take note of.

John writes of three types of people in this passage. Children, young men and fathers. These are not three specific age groups that he was talking about, but three different stages of Christian development or spiritual growth as we advance to maturity.

The first category is...

Children

12: I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

13: I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. (1 John 2:12)

There are 2 types of children John is talking about here.

Verse 12. Refers to spiritual **new born babies**. The first step in our Christian walk is to be born again.

Accepting Jesus as our Lord and saviour, confessing our sins and being forgiven. It is a new birth so we are babies in our Christian walk.

What characterises a baby when they're born?

Helpless

Hungry

Thirsty

They do not know anything and are fully reliant on their mom and dad for all their needs. They don't think, perceive, or reason well. They don't focus well nor know what their hands and feet are for. So we protect them, feed them and care for them.

This is how we are as new born Christians. The first thing a baby Christian learns is that their sins are forgiven. A very important truth. With this truth, they can move forward and not look into the past. New believers may be especially discouraged with their struggle with sin. So, John encourages them and tells

them that when we have truly received Christ as Saviour, their sins have been forgiven, they are no longer chained to the past sins they have committed.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. This means that you not only didn't do anything to earn your salvation, but also having received it by Grace through faith, there is nothing you can do to lose your salvation once you have truly trusted in Jesus. He died for your sins, past, present and future and it is an entirely free gift. But that doesn't mean either that God is done with us after having saved us.

The second type of children is referred to in verse 13. This means little children. They have moved away from being babies to becoming toddlers and young children. They are in training pants, learning their ABCs, counting, and learning primary colours. These are children who are learning to make sentences that make sense! No more grunts, whines, and two syllable words that you can say without teeth. They learn to dress themselves and do simple tasks.

What characterises this stage of the Spiritual walk?

In verse 13, John says that little children know the father. They now nurture their love relationship with the Father as their provider and leader, getting to know Him, his character and standards. Knowing that they are in a family with all the privileges that come with being in a relationship with the Father.

This person learns the basic necessities in Bible doctrine, the foundation of what we believe. It's the ABCs of God's word such as creation, holiness, the virgin birth, sin, the trinity, salvation, baptism, heaven and hell.

The ignorance of spiritual children makes them prone to weaknesses and highly susceptible to dangers. They are all too often motivated by fleshly desires and lack discernment to avoid what is harmful and pursue what is beneficial. They often naively attach themselves to their spiritual heroes or favourite teachers. They can easily be led by false teaching. This is where they need much guidance and nurturing.

The second type of person is where **John addresses young men (and women)**

Verse 13: *"I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one."*

Verse 14: *I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one."*

The second stage of spiritual growth takes believers from a basic relationship with the Father to biblical revelation of His truth. In contrast to spiritual children, who are primarily focused on devotion to God, spiritual young men have advanced to be concerned with clarity of the scriptural truth of God.

They have outgrown the childish self-absorption with feelings and moved beyond the struggles often associated with new Christians. They have a biblical worldview, their theology is largely in place, and they have a mature love for the truth and a desire to proclaim and defend it. From this they start to put this knowledge into practice. They find their place of service in the church family by practicing their gifts. The Word of God is now coming alive for them personally and they are growing daily faith.

John highlights 3 characteristics of this stage of growth

1. They have overcome the wicked one
2. They are strong
3. They have the word of God living in them.

Overcoming the wicked one

There is a deepening in their knowledge, prayers and personal understanding of the word. It's starting to take shape and speak to them like never before. Armed with the sound doctrine they have been taught, they are able to discern between truth and lies. They realize that temptation does not make them weaker, but it makes them stronger. They see trials as a blessing that is not an enemy but a friend. They don't back down but persevere and stay in there, being strengthened by God through prayer. Overcoming the temptations of Satan is an evidence of the Lord's work in their lives, that they are no longer slaves to sin.

The second characteristic is that they are strong

They understand the central truth that they have not overcome the devil in their own strength, but that their strength comes from the Lord. Knowing and experiencing this, they have persevered and faced trials and tests with strength. Their faith is anchored in to Him and Him alone. In their weakness, God's power is made perfect.

The third characteristic is having the Word living in them.

It is through soaking yourself in the word, reading it, studying it, living it, that the Holy Spirit strengthens newer believers into mature believers. As mature believers we have grown in our knowledge of the word of God but also growing deeper and deeper. We then see these mature and maturing believers sacrifice and take on roles of leading and serving in the various ministries and able to be used in training up the new believers through discipleship.

One of the presents we gave to our boys were small punching bags which looked like a large balloon. We filled the base with water and placed it on the ground. The children hit the punching bag every which way, but it would always pop back up into the right standing position. They would slam it to the ground and BOOM! it would come right back up. They kicked and jumped on it but it would come right back up. The reason it would come back up is because of its base, the water. When the weight of Christ through His word is our base, then no matter what force comes against us, it cannot keep us down.

The last type of Christian are the fathers

13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

14 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

John repeats the same words here. Why? The key words are to know him.

The third stage of spiritual growth is when believers do not merely understand doctrine intellectually, but have come to know Him and worship Him intimately. This is why John repeats the same words to fathers. They have meditated on the depths of God's character, experienced a walk with Jesus with victory and know deep in their hearts who God really is. They have been through the good and the bad and have many testimonies on how faithful He is. The only way believers can grow spiritually from children, to young men, to fathers is through the life-giving, life-transforming application of the Word of God in their lives and becoming more like Jesus every day.

John's description of the stages of spiritual growth challenges us as believers to grow and move forward in our Christian walk. Spiritual children must move beyond their initial delight in the Father's love to a sound knowledge of biblical truth. Young men must not rest in their knowledge of biblical truth, but press on to know God deeply and intimately. And even fathers must continue to expand and deepen their relationship with and walk with God but also by disciple others.

Which level of maturity are you?

A child just learning the basics

A young adult learning and applying their faith

A father deepening their intimacy with God

We are starting a new year and with that, we strive for this year to be better than last. It may not be easier but we certainly want to grow and learn and become more like Jesus.

So, what areas in your spiritual life do you want to improve on this year?

What has the Holy Spirit revealed to you on what to focus on this year?

A non-growing Christian is the easiest to influence.

There may be areas of your Christian walk where you are still a little child or not as mature as you would like. What are these areas? You could be very strong and mature in your prayer life and praying for others, but you may be less mature in your forgiveness of others. What about your understanding of false teaching? Are you still tempted by the things of this world? What idols do you have in your life?

Decide today to move forward.

Spend time with the Lord and ask Him to reveal where you are in your maturity walk.

Be brutally honest with yourself and explore every aspect of your life.

Now move!