

Over the past several months, we have followed the progression of spiritual development from newborn to mature son. As we arrive at the final stage in this series, we discover that God's goal was never simply to produce mature believers in isolation. Spiritual maturity ultimately finds its highest expression when it begins to reproduce itself in the lives of others. This final stage is described by the Greek word **Strong's 3962 – πατήρ (patēr)**, meaning **father**.

If you recall, in my first newsletter on this subject back in October of 2025, in the series I titled **As Time Marches On**, I encouraged all of us to “settle ourselves under our spiritual fathers—those who can lead us into the spiritual truths of God’s Word.”

When we speak of fathers and mothers in the faith, we are referring to those who have remained consistently grounded in the Word and active within His church. They have progressed beyond the stage of a mature son or daughter and have developed the ability to parent and mentor other leaders.

Attending Bible school, holding a position or title, or even being used in the Gifts of the Spirit does not automatically make one mature. Maturity is knowing God's heart and His ways so well that we can be trusted to walk the fine line between His justice and His grace as an example for others.

This kind of maturity can only be proven through time and tribulation. It is often observed that you never really know someone until you have gone through a few fires with them. One of the marks of spiritual fathers in the New Testament is that they have walked with people long enough through trials, failures, victories, and seasons of growth that they can genuinely speak into their lives. In that sense, the saying captures a truth that Paul demonstrated with Timothy. Paul was not merely another person in Timothy's life; he was his **patēr**—his spiritual father, mentor, and parent in the faith.

Was Paul perfect? Certainly not. Even when speaking of himself near the end of his ministry, he was careful to remember where he came from. Consider what he writes in **1 Timothy 1:15-17**:

- 15** This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.
- 16** However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.
- 17** Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” Paul pulls no punches here. Even at this stage of his life, he never forgot what he had been saved from. This level of humility seems to be a trademark of each of the apostles we have discussed throughout this series. Paul, Peter, and John all arrived at the level of “father,” yet none of them forgot what they had been delivered from or by whom they had been delivered.

Let us take a closer look at the Apostle John as we conclude this series. In **1 John**, we find the term “father” mentioned several times. John understood what it meant to be a father, and he seems to have fully understood the cost required to become one. Like Paul, he does not soften the requirements.

Consider what he writes in **1 John chapter 2**, where we find one of the most concise progressions from little children to fathers. **1 John 2:12-14:**

12 I write to you, little children,
Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

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 wicked one.
I write to you, little children,
Because you have known the Father.

14 I have written to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.
I have written to you, young men,
Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you,
And you have overcome the wicked one.

What is the hallmark of a father? “Because you have **known** Him who is from the beginning.” This statement carries tremendous significance, especially when considered within the broader context of **1 John**. The phrase “you have **known** Him” is built upon the Greek word **Strong's 1097 – γινώσκω (ginōskō)**. In this context, the meaning is especially important to our discussion of spiritual fatherhood. It highlights a person who has arrived at a fellowship approved by God and whose witness provides a proper example for those who are spiritually younger. This is precisely what John is emphasizing as he addresses the fathers, little children, and young men. The direction John is taking becomes even clearer when we continue reading in **chapter 2:**

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The role of the spiritual father within the church is clear. He must serve as an example to those who are younger in the faith, helping them take their eyes off the glitter of the world and focus instead on the love of God. This can only be accomplished by those who have themselves matured.

Natural leadership books and leadership training are valuable. I am fully supportive of the practical application of these principles in personal growth. However, natural leadership alone will never produce spiritual maturity. The reason is simple: **natural success, apart from genuine fellowship with God, can camouflage spiritual immaturity** and quickly redirect our focus toward “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”

This is why spiritual fathers must remain equally committed to expressing the heart of God. Notice where John goes next. **1 John 2:20-21**

20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.

21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

This is an interesting turn in John's writing. After addressing fathers, young men, and little children—and emphasizing the responsibility of **fathers to model proper fellowship with God**—he immediately points everyone back to the abiding strength available within them: “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” The word translated “**know**” here is different. John uses **Strong’s 1492 – εἶδω (eidō)**, which conveys the idea of perceiving and understanding with complete clarity. It speaks of a settled awareness or confident understanding rather than simply possessing information. John now shifts the focus to the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes how blessed every believer is to have intimate fellowship with the One who “knows all things”, allowing us to trust this anointing to bear witness to the truth.

Perhaps you are saying to yourself, “I do not have a strong spiritual example in my life. I do not have someone who can lead me into the deeper things of God.” John would answer that we have the Holy One and **therefore, we are without excuse.**

“My pastor is not spiritual enough.”

“My leaders are not spiritual enough.”

“My spouse is not spiritual enough.”

“My workplace is not spiritual.”

“My friends are not spiritual.”

John reminds us that we have access to the Holy Spirit Himself.

“I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it.”

Who is John addressing here? The answer is found in **verse 18**: “Little children.” We discussed this stage earlier in the series as the **paidion** stage. As we have said repeatedly throughout these letters, spiritual maturity is not determined by titles, positions, or worldly accomplishments. It is measured by fruit. This means every believer has the ability to grow, regardless of where they came from or what their life looked like before Christ. **The real question is whether we are willing to do what is necessary to make that growth happen.** Notice how John continues in **1 John chapter 3, verses 1-3**:

1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

These verses are remarkable in light of everything we have discussed. John says, “Behold what manner of love...that we should be called children of God!” Notice that he includes himself; He says “we.” He then adds, “It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.” This is truly the defining characteristic of spiritual maturity: we shall be like Him.

To become like Him, we must know Him through ***consistent and intimate fellowship***. Regardless of how you view yourself, regardless of how others view you, your growth will ultimately be determined by where you place your focus. Keep your eyes on Him. Spend time with Him daily. No amount of time invested in any other pursuit can replace genuine fellowship with the Lord.

Love you all, and have a blessed month,

JANN T. BUTLER

