

# STAGES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1 John 2:12-14

<sup>12</sup> I am writing to you, little children,  
since your sins have been forgiven  
on account of his name.

<sup>13</sup> I am writing to you, fathers,  
because you have come to know  
the one who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,  
because you have conquered the evil one.

<sup>14</sup> I have written to you, children,  
because you have come to know the Father.

I have written to you, fathers,  
because you have come to know  
the one who is from the beginning.

I have written to you, young men,  
because you are strong,  
God's word remains in you,  
and you have conquered the evil one.

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## THE CHRISTIAN AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

A. "1 John" teaches us about **the Christian life**.

B. One of the main features of the Christian life is **spiritual growth**.

C. The moment a person is "born of God" **spiritual growth** begins.

1. It is clear evidence that something's wrong with a person's spiritual condition when there is no Christian growth.

2. Imagine a 30-year-old man still acting like a 1-year-old baby — there’s something wrong.

D. The Bible teaches us about the importance of spiritual growth, and instructs us to diligently pursue it—

1. **Ephesians 4:15** (ESV), “<sup>15</sup>...we are to **grow** up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...”

2. **2 Peter 3:18** (ESV), “<sup>18</sup>...**grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

E. God wants us to grow from **spiritual infancy** to **Christian maturity**.

F. In **1 John 2:12-14**, attention is on **spiritual growth**.

1. **1 John 2:12-14** addresses three groups of Christians:

- **New Christians**
- **Maturing Christians**
- **Mature Christians**

2. **1 John 2:12-14** describes the general characteristics of each stage of Christian growth and presents truth for personal application.

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## BORN OF GOD

1 John 2:12

**2:12** <sup>12</sup>I am writing to you, **little children**...

A. “**Little children**”

1. The Greek word translated “**little children**” is “**teknia**”. It means, “born ones”.

- a. This Greek word comes from a verb meaning “**to birth**” or “**to bring into existence**”.
  - b. This Greek word is used **7 times** in 1 John.
  - c. “**Teknia**” is a general term of endearment to describe all of **God’s children** — this includes you and me.
2. “**Born ones**” are those that are “**born of God**”.
- a. Being “born of God” is a key theme in 1 John.

The phrase “born of God” appears 7 times in this book; “born of him” appears 2 times.

- b. The Bible also uses the words “born again” and “regeneration” to describe the same experience.

- i. Being “born of God”; “born again”; “regenerated” is a “new birth”; “a spiritual birth into eternal life”.

- ii. These words communicate “conversion”; that is, “a change from one form to another”—

- aa. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** (ESV), “<sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

- bb. **2 Corinthians 5:17**(ESV), “<sup>17</sup> If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

**B.** The New Birth is the starting point of Christian growth.

## C. APPLICATION:

1. First, if you want to go to heaven, you must be “born of God”.

**John 3:3** (ESV), “<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

2. Next, you are “born of God” when you start trusting in Jesus as your one and only Savior.

**John 1:12-13** (ESV), “<sup>12</sup>...to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

3. Are you “born of God”?

[2:12](#) <sup>12</sup>...since your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

1. Everyone Christian has this assurance: “[your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.](#)”

2. God has forgiven us, and cleanses us from all our sins.

**Isaiah 1:18**(ESV), “<sup>18</sup>...though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

3. God forgives us “[...on account of his name.](#)”

a. This means “for God’s glory”.

b. God is glorified when He forgives His people of their sins.

c. **Isaiah 43:25**(ESV), “<sup>25</sup> I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

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## NEW CHRISTIANS

1 John 2:12-13

**2:12, 14** <sup>12</sup>I am writing to you, **little children**, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. ... <sup>14</sup> I have written to you, **children**, because you have come to know the Father.

A. The Greek word translated “**children**” in **verse 13** is “**paidia**”; meaning, “infants”; “small kids”.

B. This applies to **spiritual infants** — **new Christians**.

C. John wants all new Christians to know **two** things:

1. First, “<sup>12</sup> **Your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.**”

a. Knowing this truth is important because one of the biggest issues new Christians struggle with are personal feelings of guilt and condemnation over past and present sins.

b. New Christians need to know this truth: **In Christ, we stand forgiven of all our sins and “in-the-right” before God.**

c. This confidence is based on:

i. First, the **completed atoning work of Christ on the cross**

aa. **Isaiah 53:5-6** (NIV), “<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

**bb. Romans 5:8-11** (NLT), “<sup>8</sup> ...God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. <sup>9</sup> And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. <sup>10</sup> For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. <sup>11</sup> So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.”

**ii. Second, the assurance of God’s word.**

**Romans 8:1** (ESV), “<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

**2. Second,** “<sup>14</sup> You have come to know the Father.”

**a.** Newborn babies do not know much, but they discover quickly to whom they belong.

**b.** In the same way, new Christians do not know much, but they know to whom they belong — “you know the Father”.

**c.** The moment a person becomes a Christian, he or she enters a real, personal relationship with God as his or her “**Father**”.

**i.** The Greek word translated “know” is “gnosko”; this is “knowledge by experience”.

**ii.** Christians know God by experience; not merely in theory.

**iii.** Christianity is not a mere theoretical or abstract religion — it is experiential.

D. One more thought before we move on from this point — *There is a difference between “infant Christians” and “immature Christians”.*

1. “Infant Christians” are “new Christians”.

2. “Immature Christians” are people that have been Christians for a long period of time and still think and act like “infant Christians”.

### 3. APPLICATION:

a. A 3-month-old baby in diapers is cute, but a 30-year-old man still using diapers because he hasn’t been “potty-trained” is abnormal and strange.

b. The same is true in the Christian life.

c. It’s time to grow up in Christ!

d. God’s word commands “immature Christians” to move on to “maturity”—

**Hebrews 5:12-6:1** (NLT), “<sup>12</sup>You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God’s word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. <sup>13</sup>For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn’t know how to do what is right. <sup>14</sup>Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

<sup>1</sup>So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding.”

e. Are you growing in Christ?

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## MATURING CHRISTIANS

1 John 2:13-14

**2:13** <sup>13</sup>I am writing to you, **young men**, because you have conquered the evil one.

**2:14** <sup>14</sup>I have written to you, **young men**, because you are strong, God's word remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one.

**A.** These words address the next stage of spiritual growth – **infants** grow and become **young-adults**.

**B.** There are **three descriptions** of this group of Christians in **1 John 2:13-14**:

1. First, **“you are strong”**

a. This is **spiritual strength**.

b. **“Strong”** means, **“powerful”** and **“durable”**; it is the opposite of **“weak”**.

c. There is clear evidence of **spiritual health and vitality** in his **relationship with Christ**; his **active service for Christ**; his **endurance of faith in Christ**.

d. The **source of his spiritual strength** is found in the next statement...

2. Second, **“God's word remains in you”**

i. **“The word of God”** refers to **all 66 books of the Bible** (39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New). These are called **“The Scriptures”** (“Sacred Writings”). These are **God's breathed-out words**.



**2 Timothy 3:16-17** (ESV), “<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

ii. When God’s word “remains” – “to be at home” – in us, it results in **spiritual strength** – “you are strong”.

iii. Also, when God’s word “remains” in us, it results in **spiritual victory** — “you have conquered the evil one”.

**iv. APPLICATION:**

aa. The most important part of reading the Bible is not us going through the Bible, but the Bible going through us.

cc. Here is a practical way to get the most out of your daily Bible reading:

**cc-I.** First, read the Bible **systematically**.

Start a book of the Bible and read through it until the end.

**cc-II.** Second, read the Bible **conversationally**.

God speaks to us through His word, and we speak to Him in prayer.

**cc-III.** Third, read the Bible **expectantly**.

**cc-III-A.** Read the Bible and expect God to speak to you.

**cc-III-B.** Read the Bible with a pen and highlighter in-hand.

**cc-III-C.** Read the Bible with your SPECS on –

- S | Sin to avoid
- P | Promise to claim
- E | Example to follow
- C | Command to obey
- S | Scripture to ponder

3. Third, “you have conquered the evil one”

a. John repeated this statement two times in 1 John 2:13-14.

b. The “evil one” is Satan.

1. “Evil” is the **opposite of “good” and “virtuous”**.

2. Satan is called the “evil one” 10 times in the New Testament // 4 times in 1 John.

3. “Evil” describes Satan’s nature and character.

a. **John 8:44** (NLT), “<sup>44</sup> [Satan] was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

b. **John 10:10** (NLT), “<sup>10</sup>The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.”

4. He is at war against us, and we are at war against him.

**Ephesians 6:12** (NLT), “<sup>12</sup>...we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.”

c. “You have **conquered the evil one**”

- i. “Conquered” means “defeat, vanquish, beat, triumph over”.
- ii. Christians are not obligated to live in **defeat**; instead, **victory**.
- iii. We stand secure in Christ’s victory over Satan –

**Colossians 2:14-15** (NLT), “<sup>14</sup> [Christ] canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.”

- iv. We fight victoriously against Satan with God’s armor –

**Ephesians 6:10-11; 6:13-18** (NLT), “<sup>10</sup> Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.”

“<sup>13</sup> ... put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. <sup>15</sup> For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. <sup>17</sup> Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.”

- v. The maturing Christian knows and understands this truth, and he or she doesn’t merely fight for victory, but from it.

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## MATURE CHRISTIANS

1 John 2:13-14

**2:13-14** <sup>13</sup>I am writing to you, **fathers**, because you have come to know the one who is from the beginning...<sup>14</sup>I have written to you, **fathers**, because you have come to know the one who is from the beginning.

### A. “Fathers” are mature Christians.

1. These are Christians who have been consistently walking and growing in Christ for many years.
2. These have remained and continue being with Jesus through the years of joy and sorrow; delight and disappointment; sunshine and dark clouds; on mountains and in valleys.

### B. “Fathers” are known for their deep, personal relationship of God.

1. The Greek word translated “know” is “gnosko”.
2. The phrase “you know him who is from the beginning” is literally “you’ve known him and continue to know him”.
3. The real mark of spiritual growth and maturity is a **deeper fellowship with Christ** — “Christianity is all about Jesus!”
4. The more we grow in Christ the deeper we go in our personal relationship with Him.
5. Knowing God is the greatest pursuit in the Christian life —

**Jeremiah 9:23-24**(ESV), “<sup>23</sup> Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am

the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.”

### C. APPLICATION:

1. The desire of every new and young-adult Christian is to grow into a mature Christian.
2. To be the person who knows deeply and keeps on knowing deeply Jesus.

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## CLOSING WORDS

A. Where are you tonight?

B. Are you a “new”, “maturing”, or “mature” Christian?

C. In whichever stage of growth you’re in, press on to “spiritual maturity”.

D. When we get to heaven, we’ll be “full grown” in the same likeness as Jesus.

**Ephesians 4:13** (ESV), “<sup>13</sup>...until we all attain...to **mature manhood**, to the measure of the **stature of the fullness of Christ**...”

E. Let’s finish this message with a verse we started with:

**2 Peter 3:18** (ESV), “<sup>18</sup>...**grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”