

Marks of the Father of the Faith

When my wife and I were in our twenties, we were attending a Young Married's Sunday School class at our church. One day a man and his wife started attending our class. As the Sundays went by, my wife and I slowly become friends with them. After a while I noticed that he was very knowledgeable about the Bible and theology. He was a humble man with a great amount of biblical knowledge. He knew much, much more about the Bible than I did. He was not a pastor. He had not gone to a Bible College or attended a seminary. He had Bible commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and systematic theologies in his library. His grasp of Scripture convicted me that I needed to personally study the Word of God.

Marks of Spiritual Maturity. The next important event in my walk with Christ occurred when I learned a principle about spiritual growth from 1 John 2:12-14. As I studied the passage, I learned the marks of spiritual maturity. I discovered that I was an immature Christian. What I knew about the Bible came from my parents, my professors at BIOLA, my pastor, and our Sunday School teacher. One day I told my wife that if someone asked me a question about the Bible I would probably tell the person what my pastor said. I did not know where to find verses, except for a small group. At that point, I realized that if my pastor was wrong about salvation, I would

go to hell. What if he was wrong about eternal security?

So, I invite you to turn to 1 John 2:12-14. Here is 1 John 2:12-14. It says,

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been 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 evil one. 1 John 2:12-14 (NASB)

These verses draw from our experience in this physical world

in order to teach us a spiritual principle. In this world we are born as babies. Then the normal pattern of growth is that we become little children. Next, we grow into young men, and eventually become fathers or adults. In the spiritual world, every believer is either a spiritual child, a spiritual



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young man, or a spiritual father.

Every Believer Is Forgiven. In verse 12, the Holy Spirit gives us an introduction to these verses. Verse 12 says,

“I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake.” 1 John 2:12 (NASB)

The Greek word that is translated as “little children” is *teknion*. It is an expression of endearment. It is not a description of a person’s age. It is a diminutive Greek word that appears only in John 13:33 and 1 John. In John 13:33, we discover that Jesus used it like a nickname for the disciples in the Upper Room. He called them “little children.” Obviously, they were not little children. I can relate to this nickname. My name is John, but my father and mother lovingly called me Skeeter. So, the apostle John used “*teknion*” to lovingly refer to all true believers. Then he tells us that the sins of every true believer have been forgiven. The Holy Spirit uses the perfect tense for forgiven, to teach us that at the moment of saving faith, the past sins of every true believer were forgiven. That includes our present and future sins. This occurs because God the Father imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says,

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB)

Stages of Spiritual Maturity. Then in verse 13, the Holy Spirit describes three levels of spiritual maturity among the brethren in the church.

Spiritual Children. First, notice that at the end of verse 13, we are told that some believers are children. The Greek word for “children” in this verse is *paidia*. He does not repeat *teknion* from verse 12. The Greek language has different words for the various stages of physical maturity. *Paidia* does not refer to a newborn. That Greek word *brepheos* and *napios* refers to an infant. *Paidia* refers to a young child and in this illustration refers to an immature believer. This spiritual child is just beginning to know God the Father.

So, all the Holy Spirit says about them is that they know God the Father.

Spiritual Young Man. The second stage in spiritual growth is the young man. In verse 13, we are given only one characteristic of this believer. He has overcome the evil one. But in verse 14, he is described as having three characteristics. I will begin with the second characteristic, which is the Word of God is abiding in him. He is like my friend laboring to understand Scripture. He seeks to know the Scriptures and it affects how he thinks, his attitudes, and his behavior. He is a serious student of the Bible.

His diet is not the milk of the Word of God. His diet is not just the biblical stories and heart-felt encouragements. Rather, he or she has a spiritual diet of steak and fries and milk. That is the message of Hebrews 5:11-14. Verses 13-14 reveal that a diet of only milk is for infants and not the mature. They say,

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Hebrews 5:13-14 (NASB)

Notice that solid food is for the spiritually mature. In 1 John 2:12-14, the spiritually mature are called spiritual young men and spiritual fathers. They are chewing on the difficult parts of the Word of God. Notice that one of the benefits is that they know the difference between good and evil.

John MacArthur adds this about the spiritual young man,

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 it.¹

We are also told that the young man is strong in every way. First, he is strong in the Scriptures. Without a strong grasp of the Old and New Testaments, a young man would have zeal without knowledge. Without a strong grasp of Scripture,

¹ John MacArthur. 1-3 John. The MacArthur new Testament Commentary. Moody Publishers. 2007. p. 75.

he cannot have a strong grip on doctrine. Without a strong understanding of Scripture, he will tend to only repeat what others have taught him—his mentor, a seminary professor, or some Bible teacher.

Second, the spiritual young man is also strong in faith. Romans 4:20 tells us that Abraham was strong in faith. The book of Genesis teaches us that when he was seventy-five years of age, God gave Abraham a promise that he would become a great nation. Then Abraham waited and waited for twenty-five years before his son Issac was born. Most of us would have concluded that God was not going to fulfill His promise. But that was not true of Abraham. He had strong faith. Listen to what Romans 4:18-21 says about Abraham,

In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God. Romans 4:18-20 (NASB)

So, the spiritual young man is strong in faith and in the Scriptures!

The third characteristic of a spiritual young man is that he is overcoming the evil one. This suggests his normal pattern of life is 1) one of victory over Satan’s temptation to sin and 2) the evil one’s doctrinal deceptions. Ephesians 6:10-17 describes the armor of God which enables us to resist Satan’s temptations to sin and deceptions about biblical truth. Why is victory over sin so very important? Jesus gives us the answer in John 14:21. He said,

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” John 14:21 (NASB)

Notice what Jesus said in this verse. He said that if we keep His commandments and love Him, then He will disclose Himself to us. He will disclose Himself if we are pursuing righteousness. Habits of sin will hinder us from becoming a spiritual young man.

Spiritual Father. The third stage of spiritual maturity is the father. Verse 13 says this about the father,

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. 1 John 2:13 (NASB)

Verse 14 repeats the same characteristic about the father. This is the only thing that is ever said about the spiritual father. He knows “Him who has been from the beginning.” The Greek word for “know” is *ginosko*. The word means “to know” or “to have knowledge.” The message of this passage is that the spiritual father knows God the Father and is continuing to have a very deep knowledge of God the Father. This will include Christ. But this is not true of the spiritual child or young man.

From this passage of Scripture, you and I can determine how spiritually mature we are as a believer. It is important to realize that our spiritual maturity is not determined by how old we are, how many Bible studies we have attended, or how many sermons we have heard. We could be 80 years of age and still be a spiritual child. A man or woman’s position as a leader in a church or ministry in or outside the church does not mean that he or she is spiritually mature. Why do I say that? Because I do not see those things listed here in 1 John 2:12-14 as characteristics of spiritual maturity. I do not see a church leader or ministry leader mentioned in these verses. So, the Holy Spirit has given us our. . .

1st Important-Principle — Some believers think that knowing the Bible is the goal in the Christian life. But this passage teaches us that knowing God is the goal of the Christian life.

2nd Important Principle — We cannot leap from being a spiritual child to being a spiritual father. Why?

Because we are told we must first become a spiritual young man before we can become a spiritual father.

Examples of Spiritual Fathers. As I have thought about 1 John 2:12-14, I realized that there a number of Old and New Testament saints who were spiritual fathers such as Enoch, Abraham, Moses, King David, the prophet Daniel, and Paul.

So, I will begin with Moses. We have discussed him previously. But he was more than God's servant in the desert. Numbers 12:1-3 says he was the humblest man on the earth. He was a descendant of Levi. Deuteronomy 34:10 says this about Moses,

Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. Deuteronomy 34:10 (NASB)

In Hebrews 3:1-5 he is compared to Christ. He also appears in Hebrews 11, the Hallmark of Faith. Moses was truly a spiritual father of the faith.

Now please turn in your Bibles to Exodus 33:7. In verses 7-11 we are told that Moses was visited by God in a tent that Moses called the "Tent of Meeting." Here are verses 7-11a,

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. Exodus 33:7-11a (NASB)

Here we are told God and Moses would meet at a tent

which was outside the camp of the Israelites. When God appeared they would talk "as a man speaks with his friend." What an incredible relationship Moses had with God. Then in verse 12, Moses was on Mount Sinai. We read,

Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.' Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people." And He said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here." Exodus 33:12-15 (NASB)

When I first read this, I was amazed. Moses is complaining in verse 12. Then in verse 15, Moses tells God that he did not want to continue his ministry if God would not go with him. He did not want to do the ministry that God had given him if God would not go with Him. In addition, notice verse 13. Moses said, "Please show me now Your ways, that I may know You!" When I read this, I realized that Moses was not happy being God's minister in the desert. He was not satisfied with just talking with God at the tent. He was not satisfied with just doing miracles. He wanted to know God in a much deeper way! He wanted to know God — to please Him. Verse 13 says,

Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You. Now I have a question for you! What did Moses mean "by Your ways?" Exodus 33:113 (NASB)

The answer is found in Psalm 103:7,

He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the sons of Israel. Psalm 103:7 (NASB)

This verse contrasts Moses to the sons of Israel. In the first

line, we are told that God revealed His ways to Moses. Then in the second line, we discover that the Israelites only knew the acts of God. The Hebrew word that is translated as “acts” can also be translated as “deeds.” That is, the Israelites saw the acts of God. They saw the ten plagues in Egypt, the pillar of cloud during the day, the pillar of fire at night, the parting of the Red Sea, the bitter water of Marah turned sweet, the manna in the desert, the water flowing from a rock in the Wilderness of Sin, the defeat of the Amalekites and Moses on Mount Sinai with all the fire and lightning. They saw the acts of God—the things God did, His deeds, but Moses was allowed to discover the ways of God. The “ways of God” refers to how God operates, and why He does what He does. Moses wanted to know God!

Seek For Me With All Your Heart. Now why did God do this for Moses and not for all the people of Israel? The answer is that Moses wanted a deeper relationship than the people did. God revealed Himself to Moses. Why? It is important to see Jeremiah 29:13-14 for it describes Moses. There we are told,

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. ‘I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD . . . Jeremiah 29:13-14 (NASB)

Now what does this verse tell us? Does it tell us that if we will seek the Lord and search for Him, God will let us find Him? Let me repeat the question. Does it tell us that if we will seek the Lord and search for Him, God will let us find Him? The answer is no! The answer is no because I left out the words “with all your heart.” You see, if you search for God with all your heart, then He will let you find Him! God’s point is if we are serious, then He will let you find Him. Do you remember what happened to Moses? He asked God to let him know His ways, and God revealed Himself. Exodus 33:17-20 says,

The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.” Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” And He said, “I

Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” Exodus 33:17-20 (NASB)

Enoch Walked With God. Enoch is another Old Testament saint who touches me emotionally. Listen to Genesis 5:22-24.

Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. Genesis 5:22-24 (NASB)

Here we are told that Enoch walked with God for three hundred years before God just took him. He never died. The Hebrew word for “not” means “not.” He was just gone! Why was he gone? He was walking with God. Now do you remember that God said He would go with Moses? Do you remember that the Hebrew word God used for “go” also means “walk”? The Hebrew word that God used is the same word that occurs here. This means that Enoch walked with God just as Moses and God walked together. Hebrews 11:5 gives us more to think about. The passage says,

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Hebrews 11:5-6 (NASB)

Here we are told Enoch’s faith is the reason he was taken up. We are also told that Enoch believed God rewarded those who seek Him. It is also important to know that the Greek

word for “seek” is a present participle. A present participle refers to ongoing activity. This means Enoch believed God rewards those who are actively seeking Him. Stop to think. Why do two friends seek one another? The answer is they want to be together. So, if we combine everything together, we discover that Enoch’s walk with God included actively seeking Him and faith was the glue. You see, one who is walking with God is also seeking the Lord. Walking with God includes seeking God to know more of Him and about Him.

Abraham Was A Friend of God. Another great saint is Abraham who was called the friend of God three times in Scripture. I am amazed that two of those times God tells us that Abraham was His friend (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). Imagine God telling everyone that Abraham was His friend.

David Sought After God. David is another favorite saint. In Psalm 27:7-8 he wrote,

Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice,
And be gracious to me and answer me.
When You said, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You,
“Your face, O LORD, I shall seek.” Psalm 27:7-8
(NASB)

I am thrilled at David’s response. God urged David to seek Him, and David said, “I shall seek your face.” He expressed his desire to know God. In 1 Chronicles 28:9, David said to Solomon,

As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your
father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing
mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and under-
stands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him,
He will let you find Him . . . 1 Chronicles 28:9 (NASB)

David said that God knows if we are really seeking Him. He is no fool. In Psalm 119:10, David said,

With all my heart I have sought You;. . . Psalm 119:10
(ESV)

Just Enoch and Moses did, David sought after God with his whole heart. I was also thrilled to read that King Josiah loved the Lord with all his heart more than any king before him or after him. I love the fact that the prophet Daniel is called esteemed or precious by an angel in Daniel 9:23.

The great saints in the Old Testament are great because they wanted to know more than facts about God. They wanted to know God as a friend knows a friend, and God rewarded their seeking to know Him. Now I will move to the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul Wanted To Know God. In the New Testament, I want to focus on the apostle Paul as an example of a spiritual father. Listen to what he wrote in Philippians 3:7-8,

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I
have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than
that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpass-
ing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I
have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but
rubbish so that I may gain Christ . . . Philippians 3:7-8
(NASB)

In verse 8, Paul says that he counted everything as loss—as rubbish, as excrement, or as dung for the surpassing knowl-
edge of Christ.

Now when Paul said that, he was already a Christian—a believer. He was not desiring to be saved. What he wanted, was to know Christ. That was his greatest desire. Remember that Paul was an apostle. He wrote almost half the New Testament. Yet, that was not enough. Just as Moses, the apostle Paul was seeking to know more about God, about Christ.

Remember that Jeremiah 29:13-14 says God has promised,

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me
with all your heart. ‘I will be found by you,’ declares
the LORD . . . Jeremiah 29:13-14 (NASB)

God says, “If you seek Me and search for Me with all your

heart, I will let you find Me.” He wants you and me to seek to know Him. This truth is repeated throughout Scripture that He will reward those who seek Him. We were seeking Him when we became a Christian. But our seeking should not have ended there. Listen to God’s great desire in Jeremiah 9:23-24.

Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD. Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NASB)

God says that of all the things a man can desire, His greatest desire is that we would want to know Him. When I read that, my heart cried out, “Lord, I want to know and understand you more!” May I ask you, is that your desire?”

Conclusion. Today, God has given us the Scriptures to study. In them, God is speaking to us. He is revealing Himself to us. As we study the various books of the Bible, we will learn more facts about the Scriptures. As we seek to know God more, the Holy Spirit helps us connect these facts together so that we learn more about the ways of God. As we dig into the Scriptures, we will have some wonderful moments of discovery. I urge you to faithfully seek to know God. God wrote 1 John 2:12-14 to motivate us to desire to become a spiritual young man and eventually a father of the faith. Attend the services at the church. Get up early and attend the adult Sunday School class, the home Bible studies, and other classes offered here at our church. Plan to study the Bible. God wrote all sixty-six books for us!

As you do, seek to find God in the pages of Scripture. Learn how to study the Bible so that you can accurately know about Him. It is a life-long process of digging and seeking to know more and more about our God. As you do this, you will move toward becoming a father of the faith and more like Christ.

So, I pray that the passion of your heart is to dig into the Scriptures, be strong in faith and in the Scriptures, and

to pursue righteousness. Strive to become a father of the faith who knows Him who is from the beginning. Know His character. Know His ways. Know Him! The psalmist wrote in Psalm 42:1-2a,

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
Psalm 42:1-2a (NASB)