

# 1 John 2:13-14

Sunday 3/20/2005

SEC: The Purpose of First John and Stages of Spiritual Growth

Your Bibles, I would like to invite you again to turn to the book of 1 John. We have started there almost every week, and it is easy to see now that a lot of the material that we are following here is really based out of the book of 1 John. We have mentioned this before, and the reason for that, or really one of the reasons for that, is because the book of 1 John is probably one of, if not the greatest book in the Bible that really helps to define having a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I do not know any other book in the Bible—there may be books that have more content, that have more doctrine—but I do not know of another book, outside maybe the book of Philippians, that really impacts our lives to show us what we really need as a basis for a relationship with Christ.

We have been coming through now, in preparation for teaching some of you how to really begin to minister to people and help people. We have been coming through a study on the seven stages of spiritual growth that really help you understand how you begin to build a relationship with God, some things to look for, and some things that I look for. The process of growth is never an easy thing, and it is something that can get lost in the shuffle, so to speak, of everything else you try to balance in your life.

We started coming through here talking about it as the Bible talks about it, where the Bible talks about babes, new Christians, little children, Christians that have just gotten saved and are beginning to grow and learning the basic concepts. We looked at young men last week, and today we are going to look at the fathers.

As I said, last week we started looking at two of the most critical aspects of your spiritual growth: the young men and the fathers. I think that those two are the most crucial that you have to really see and understand what they all deal with, because this is where many, many people never go past this point. Not a whole lot ever get to this point in the day and age that we live in today, but certainly not many get past this point. We are going to talk about that today, and I think it will help you understand your own personal relationship with the Lord.

I have said this all along, and I continue to say it, and I will always say it as long as we are together here: my job is to help you wherever you are at in your Christian life. The only thing that I really want from you is to help you grow. I have told you before, when we take up the offering, money is the last thing that I am worried about in this church. I learned a long time ago that if you realize your responsibility and you get fed what you need to get fed and you grow, there are a lot of things I do not have to waste time preaching about.

I am not saying that I will not preach a message on stewardship sometime, or I am not saying that I will not preach a message on some aspect of it, but I am not going to be someone where every other message or every message you hear is going to be focused on things that I know, if you just teach the Bible, they take care of themselves. My philosophy is this: this is your church.

If you do not get fed from it, then do not take care of it, and we will go to do something else. It is as simple as that. God always pays for what He orders. My job as pastor is not to make sure God takes care of everything. My job is to take care of you, and that is helping you grow spiritually.

I have said this before, and I say it again: I will help anybody anytime, no matter where you are at in your spiritual relationship with God, or your marriage, or your family, whatever the case. I am always available to help you put together whatever needs to be done to get you wherever you need to get in your life. That is just the way it needs to be.

We have been coming through here, and all of you at some point in your life will find yourself in one of these areas. Hopefully, you are moving through it all the time, but you are going to find that when you start, you start as a new Christian, as a babe in Christ, and then you work through this process. Today, we are going to talk about fathers.

## I. The Young Men Stage: Responsibility and Discipline

Last week, when we began to get into the young men, I showed you how that young man, that concept, is really the beginning of a Christian taking responsibility in its most basic form. This is where you begin not only in your spiritual world when you become that age, but in your physical world where now you get a job and you begin to take responsibilities. Before, you were just totally dependent on mom and dad. You are moving through the life process, and you are beginning to look ahead. As I said, maybe you just graduated from school, maybe you got your first job, whatever, but you begin to focus on responsibility.

I showed you a couple of weeks ago when we started this that the root word for the word disciple is the word discipline. In fact, I am not much for looking up words in the dictionary. It drives me crazy when pastors get up and say, "Webster defines this as this," and then try to preach a sermon on it, because many times, or most of the time, Webster's definition and the Bible's definition are two different definitions. But in this case, I want to tell you this: if you look up the word discipline and you look up the word disciple, you are going to find that the definition of both of them are the same. To be a disciple simply means that you have accepted a certain discipline that you are going to pattern your life after.

As you grow, you become more focused on the principles of Christ, the discipline, the discipleship, the teachings. I guess it is true of anything in life that you really get into. If you are going to get into the martial arts, you see those guys doing all their little turns, and all that is practicing a form of discipline. Golf is a discipline. You have to make sure you discipline your body, that your body takes the same position every time you hit the golf ball. If you do not, then you golf like I do, and they clear the golf course before you get on it, and you have to rent the whole thing by yourself, or you will kill somebody.

Basketball and football are the same thing. I always liked basketball; I do not know anything about basketball, but I like to watch it. I like to watch it because of the fluid movement that the players have. That fluid movement is based on their discipline. To watch a good team come down and pass the ball around and work the ball in, it is not built on one guy being a great

player. It is built on five guys who are great players working together as a team, or ten guys in football. It produces because they have disciplined themselves to work together.

As a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a Christian, you grow through the discipline in your life. When you enter these two stages, the young men and the fathers, you are fine-tuning three areas in your life that are basically the key to whether you are going to minister to God one-on-one on a great level of responsibility, or you are going to head up ministry. That is why I say that these two are vitally important, and this is where most people really never get to. They are so inconsistent in their own lives. They have got so many things that they have to struggle with, that they never get the help they need, that they never get to this point. Or when they get to this point, they never move out of this point. We will look at some of those reasons why here.

## II. The Father Stage: Fine-Tuning Discipline and Leadership

At this point in your Christian life, you are really fine-tuning three areas in your life. It is as simple as that. There is no great theological, I do not have to use \$55 words to illustrate my point. It is real simple. When you come to this stage, the young men and the fathers, especially the fathers, you are fine-tuning three areas of your life that have to do with discipline.

The first thing that you are fine-tuning and disciplining is your mind. This is what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 10:5:

*2 Corinthians 10:5*

*Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

So you fine-tune your mind. You discipline your mind. You discipline your mind to a discipline that is Christ and that is the Word of God. You cast away the things, the thoughts of the world. I have said it many, many times in many different forms: you now begin to focus on making His viewpoint your viewpoint. All of this comes down to you fine-tuning and disciplining your mind, that you really get your mind disciplined. It is a constant thing that when you enter this stage, it is not, "Well, I am here, so I have arrived." No. It is a constant thing that you understand it is a daily concept.

The second aspect is the disciplining of your flesh. This is found in 1 Corinthians 9:27:

*1 Corinthians 9:27*

*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

You realize that at this point, not only do you discipline your mind by what you think and how you look at things, but you have to keep your body under subjection. There are things that you do not allow your flesh to do. We are going to talk about that a little bit later on.

Then the last one is the discipline of your spirit or your emotion. Proverbs 25:28 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible that you have heard me say many, many times:

*Proverbs 25:28*

*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*

These three areas will finish you as far as the ministry is concerned. It is like that old thing I tell you on Thursday night Bible study. It is like that old concept I lay out where if you draw a line on the board, that line has three parts, and everything in this world has to fit down in a pattern of three. You take one part off there, you do not have the line. Well, you know what? You have to have all three of these in your life. If you lose one of them, you might as well not have any of them. They have to work together.

Basically, ministry on the level of a pastoral level, ministry based on the level where you take large chunks of responsibility, is based on these three things and the continuation of building on these three things. Very frankly, as far as the Bible is concerned, this is the litmus test for leadership. It is as simple as that. It is not hard; it is very basic. This is the litmus test. This is where you find out who has the ability to go to that level or who does not have the ability for whatever reason.

### III. The Problem of Laziness and the Need for Consistent Effort

Young men and young ladies stay right at this level and never move. I will tell you why: because the bottom line problem that every one of us has, every one of us has this affliction, every one of us. I do not care how well you appear to have it together. I do not care how well you know the Bible. I do not care how well you work with people. Everybody in this room has this deficiency, and that is, in the final analysis, at the bottom of everything we are, we are lazy.

I am going to tell you something right now: your human nature will always find the easiest way to do things if you allow it. Until you are willing to understand that fact, that as good as you may be, the bottom line is you still have an old sin nature, and at the bottom of that old sin nature, we are lazy. We are lazy. Because of that reason, people come to a point in their spiritual life where they know the Bible, they have good people skills, and then suddenly they stop growing. They stop growing. They never see that, and it is a very subtle thing, because you think that, "Well, I can survive on what I know, I can survive on this." What happens is, because basically we are lazy, we just kind of coast where we are at.

I will tell you, really focusing on defining and disciplining yourself to this fine degree is a lot of work. It is not easy. I enjoy watching people. I go to the fitness center a couple of times a week, and I am always amazed at people the way they perceive themselves as exercising. I love the people that try to ride the bicycle and read a book. Then they put TVs up there so you can, and I watch them. I have watched them because I go there a lot, and I have been there for a long time, so it is not like I have tested this thesis over the years. This is like a scientific study for me.

I watch them, and they get up there, and they have their little bikes that they pedal on, and I am all for that. Then they open up a book, and then you know what happens? The focus ceases to be exercise, and the focus now becomes to read. You know what you do? I watch them do it. When reading becomes too hard because you are pedaling too fast, you back off pedaling so fast because you want to read. You know what? You have no business reading a book when you are exercising, because your lungs ought to be burning so hard and your legs ought to be jumping out of your muscles and your legs, and you ought to be almost passing out, because to really work out, you have to really work hard.

Did you not watch Rocky 1, 2, 3, and 4 yesterday? What is wrong with you? Do you think he beat Clubber Lang because he was riding a bike reading a book? Do you think he beat that big Russian because he was pedaling? Did you see what happened when he took it easy and he got the big nightclub and he is doing the things in his \$25,000 workout suit? He got whipped! But that is the way we approach the Bible. We keep pedaling, but it does not hurt any longer.

I know my own body, and I think that is something that most Christians do not do. They do not know their own body. That is one thing I think exercise does for you. If it does anything, it teaches you how you like to cheat. Because you know what? I can run two miles where I do not hardly get any winded at all, or I can run two miles where I can hardly stand up when I am done. You know what is just better for me? Not being able to stand up when I am done. But you know what? I will take the easy route because you tell yourself, "Well, I just ran two miles," and "I just ran three miles." But the bottom line is, you took it easy those three miles.

You know what? Your body gets used to anything. Once you get used to something, you have got to step it up a couple notches to make it. Otherwise, you come to a point where it really does, other than just the thing that it does for you, it does not do you any extra. You are not growing anymore. I mean, I know they say it as a cliché, but you know what? No pain, no gain. I do not know what else to tell you. It has got to hurt if it is going to help.

In Christianity, we get to the point where we know the Bible, we have this, we have that. So we begin to coast, and we stop growing. That is why some people never make it out of here. It is one of those things where you have got to realize for it to really work, you have got to constantly in your mind know how much of a cheater you and I are. You have got to constantly discipline yourself not to.

When I go to the gym, I have a rule I follow, and that is this: I never do anything less than I did the day before. If I feel extra good and I am going to burn another half mile or whatever, I tell myself, "Okay, Mr. Macho Man, go ahead and do it. But you know your law. Next time you come back, you have got to do it again." You do not ever cut yourself any slack. You do not ever cut yourself, because the moment you start cutting yourself slack, you will take the slack. You give yourself an inch, next thing you know you are going to have a yard. Next thing you have got a yard, you are going to have a mile. Because that is just the way that we are.

When it comes to the ministry and the Word of God, never cut yourself any slack. That is why when we started this series, I gave you those six things internally that you look at yourself to measure yourself. Because you know what? You turn yourself under the high power

magnification, those six things, and you will see how stupid you and I really are when it comes to discipline about the Word of God. Because we will take every cheap way out we can. That is just the way that we are. When you know that about yourself, then you do not allow yourself that, and then you have something to focus that discipline on. Otherwise, you are just like the ladies and the guys at the fitness center. You are pedaling away, but your workout ceased a long time ago. You are not adding anything to it. You are just maintaining what you already got. You want a comfortable level that appears like you are working out, but you are not working up a sweat anymore.

I will tell you what. When you get off that bike, if your legs are so wobbly you can hardly move, and you are tripping over things and falling down, and you have got blackout spots, you have got a good workout. Or you are going to die of a heart attack, one of the two. But that is the concept. At this stage, it is discipline, and the fine-tuning of discipline.

#### IV. The Father's Increased Responsibility and Understanding

Last week, I gave you Proverbs 20:29, which talked about the glory of young men is their strength. The last part of that verse says, "but the beauty of old men is your gray head."

*Proverbs 20:29*

*The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the grey head.*

That did not help us much when we were there at that restaurant, and they gave us a senior citizen discount. Oh, did it? No, no, no. I slapped that girl so hard, she still is not seeing straight. But that is what the Bible says. The glory of young men is their strength. But the beauty of the old man, as you get older in the Lord, is the fact that you have got a gray head. That gray head shows what you have learned in life and represents, from the Bible standpoint, your walk with God, that there is more to you than strength. But I told you last week, strength without discipline is absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing. Most young men have a lot of strength, but they have no discipline in that strength.

As last week we saw where young men, we see the first steps of taking responsibility, and in the ministry sense, that would be beginning to work with people, discipling people, doing things that need to be done, proving yourself. But it is during this time here where you can really find out who you can depend on. Proverbs 25:19 is another great concept.

*Proverbs 25:19*

*Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.*

This is where you find out who you can depend on and who you cannot. Because in both cases, a broken tooth and a foot out of joint makes you worthless. You cannot do anything. You cannot eat and you cannot walk. This is where, during this period of time, you find out when push comes to shove who you can count on. This is where you find out in the ministry when it all hits the fan, where everybody comes down, and when you look around, who is there and who is not. That is the whole bottom line of disciplining yourself. God allows you to protect you as you go

through the process, but there comes a point where you have to face the ministry and the responsibility of ministry full-face.

This is where, in the father level, your responsibility load is way more than where you were as a young man. In this area, there is no margin for error. In this area, your mind, your flesh, and your spirit have to be fine-tuned all the time. It is a level where, you know what, you have to focus on the things that God wants you to focus on, and there is much more area of responsibility to it.

## V. The Father's Role and the Pastoral Epistles

1 John 2 is where we are going today, not a big verse, but a verse that really sets the tone for where we are going. 1 John 2:13 and 14, he says it two times. It does not say it exactly the same way, but he says it two times.

*1 John 2:13*

*I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.*

*1 John 2:14*

*I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*

Wow, what a great verse. Not a big verse, but a powerful punch verse, because this verse really defines for us the biblical concept of a father, what a father is. Now I know that we think in a time sense that a father is somebody that begins having children, and of course that is not really true. Sometimes it is equated, "Well, when you become a Christian and you win people to Christ, that automatically brings you into the father mode." That may or may not be true. In most cases, I say it was not. Just because a father has children, a wife and a wife have children, does not mean that they are fit parents. Just because you can biologically produce kids does not mean that, "Wow, you are a great father, you are a great mother." No, there is a lot more to it than that, and that is the same aspect in the spiritual side of things.

Now there are two great books, or really four great books in the Bible that accent this, and they would be 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. If you go through your New Testament, barring Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you are going to find that the rest of the books in your Bible are either written to churches or individuals. The books that are written to churches will contain for us church doctrine for the church. The books that are written to individuals will contain doctrine to you and to me to get us ready to be everything that God wants us to be.

Of course, you have got the aspect here of Paul writing these books. He writes them to Timothy. He also writes them to Titus. He also writes them to Philemon. You know the stories: 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul is preparing young Timothy to be a pastor. In Titus, he is preparing him to be a pastor. In the book of Philemon, he is addressing a runaway slave that he is sending back to his

master. But all those books together really focus in a great way on where your life and my life should be and what we need to learn. These books are called the pastoral epistles. Why? Because they prepare you for the pastorate. They prepare you, they deal with the books that Paul is teaching somebody how to pastor.

There is not anything in those books about winning anybody to Christ. No, what is in those books are the megaton responsibility that comes along with being a pastor, which comes along with taking the father side of things where you take mega responsibility into the area of ministry. Of course, there is major, major responsibility that comes on this level. That is why I am saying there are not too many people that ever come to this area and ever survive it or ever get through it.

## VI. The Father's Perspective: Knowing God from the Beginning

There is a great little gem in this verse that really carries with it the impact of the spiritual side of it. He says, "I write unto you fathers because you have known him from the beginning." That verse simply says at this stage of the game, as a person grows to this point, that he has a concept of God and the Bible and the plan of God that really allows him to see the overall picture of things. He sees things from a standpoint, or she does, from a different perspective that the average Christian does not see. Therefore, it settles a lot of things for him.

I think one of the things that keeps people from really growing spiritually is there are so many unsettled things in their lives. It is a lot harder building a church and dealing with people today than it was thirty years ago, probably even twenty years ago. The reason for that is that society and the fabric of society is so fractured even more now than it was thirty years ago. I remember a time back in the late sixties and early seventies where people were really wanting to learn the Bible, that this country still had some quality to it, and there were people out there, but it is hard to find that today. People today have usually waited so long, and there are so many complex problems in their lives that they cannot get over them.

Most of them, truth of the matter is, they could get over, but the problem comes in our society is so undisciplined that young couples today just will not do what they have got to do. I tell people all the time, it is not a matter of what we can do or what we cannot do. It really is not a matter of what your circumstances are. The real issue is, will you do whatever you have got to do? Will you change whatever you have got to change? Are you willing to enter into a discipline that is going to make your family, your life, your family, your wife, your marriage exactly what it needs to be? That is the issue.

The problem is that there are people who understand or are better at martial arts than they are their own family or their own marriage relationship. There are people that are better at baseball. There are people that are better at bowling. There are people that are better at fishing. There are people that are better than everything out there because that is a fun discipline, you see. "Oh, I do not mind getting out on a golf course and working. I do not mind getting out on a basketball

court." That is fun stuff. "Oh, my family, my wife, my ministry, this or that. Oh, no, no, no. That is not fun." You see, there lies the difference.

When you get to this stage, you understand what really is important. Let me tell you something. John MacCeter Christ, God is not going to ask or give a flip about what your bowling average was, or what your golf game was, or how many fish you caught, or how well you could do this or you could do that. He is not going to care about that. When you get to this point, you realize that life has a single purpose. When you get here, because you have known Him from the beginning, not just knowing Him from the beginning, that carries with it the concept that you know the Bible from beginning to end. You see where you fit into it. You recognize the most important thing to God, and everything else is second place.

You realize that where the Word of God is taught, where God's people meet, unless you are down out dying someplace, that this is the place to be. This is where you learn. This is where you grow. You realize that there are things in life that cannot compare with that. But when you switch them over there, it brings the consequences with it. This is why people today have so much baggage in their life that it is hard for them to ever get to this point.

Yet I find within that same statement, men and women who will say, "You know what, I do not care what it takes. I will change whatever I have got to change, Bob. I just want my family. I want my marriage. I want my kids. I have had a life of this. I will do whatever I have got to do." Not many of them, but they are still out there. You know what? This is where you have got to focus, and that is what you have got to do.

At this stage, the man of God or the woman of God understands the plan of God. They have figured it out for themselves. They understand where they fit in. Last week, we talked about the great concept of young men overcoming. In this stage of the fathers, we find that this is where you begin to take your stand on the right issues. This is where you understand, "You know what? Hey, I do not care. I am not going there. No, I am not going to miss Sunday. No, I am not going to miss Thursday night. No, I am not going to be there." This is what is important. This is what is going to make my family. This is what is going to set the example. This is what is going to make the difference. At this point, somebody understands what really is important in life and what is not. You really understand what are the real issues and what are the fabricated issues that only appear to be the main important part.

## VII. The Cost of Fatherhood: Self-Sacrifice and Responsibility

For an understanding comparison, in the physical world, let me provide you with this. Our young man, the Bible talks about the fact that his strength, that is his glory. He begins to learn responsibility. We put this in a worldly sense: he would get a job, got responsibility at home. He is living with his parents where he just moved out, or maybe he just got married. But you know what? He goes where he wants to go, especially if he is not married. He does what he wants to do. He buys what he wants to buy. That is okay. You work hard. You put in long hours. You put in overtime. You do side jobs. The money is yours. You have a right to enjoy it. I am not down

on that. I am trying to make the point here. He goes where he wants to go, does what he wants to do, buys what he wants, works hard, makes money. He wants a new truck. Hey, no problem. You go buy one. He sees a car. "I want that." He buys it. Nothing wrong with that. New shotgun? "Yeah, give me the Browning double side by side." You know what? "I got the money. I am young. I am making good money. Should not I buy what I want?" I have no problem with that. Sure you should. You take care of God and all the things? I have no problem with that. You want a new fishing rod? Fine. "Hey, you know what? I am going to buy a bass boat." What do you think? "Hey, you got the money? You work hard. Enjoy it." That is what a young man does. He has that freedom.

Now when you turn into the father stage, you no longer can think of yourself. In fact, your life is not your own anymore. Because now, you have people dependent on you. You have a wife and kid or kids who depend on you physically, spiritually, and emotionally. If you do not take care of that, your life is going to be hell on earth. You are going to think every night is Halloween, Friday the 13th, and a murder on Elm Street or whatever it is. You know why? I am going to tell you why. You have come to an area of your life now where your life is, I do not know how to tell you this. Hey, I did not like it. But your life is no longer your own. You have made your responsibility now.

Before you could say, "Well, I feel kind of sick today, and I do not think I am going to stay home from work because I just do not feel up to it." You do not have that option anymore. You say now, "Well, I am really sick. Well, I know if I need to, I can throw up here, here, and here. Well, I have got to go to work today because I need money because I have got a wife and kids, and we have got to pay the bills." See how it changes? I mean, the shotgun becomes braces. The fishing rod becomes glasses. The new Ram 6000 turbocharged becomes a minivan with car seats. That big old bass boat, the one you saw yourself down there in the Lake of the Ozark Bass Tournament standing there with a big old bass that long, uh-uh. That is now a down payment on a three-bedroom house. Welcome to the world of responsibility.

When marriages have problems, this is where they usually start because people, for whatever reason, some people do not transition. They think they are married. They can still go do all they want to do. They will go, "Honey, you will take care of it." No. You are going to find out that is not true very quickly. Nobody can meet their spiritual, physical, emotional need better than you because that is the way God designed it. So you have to understand, "You know what? My life is over. Why do I want to go on living?"

It is like when you go to the doctor and he says, "Bob, you are getting fat." "Well, I was not fat when I was 20, but I know you are 50 now, and you are fat. You are ugly too, but you are fat. Now here is this diet I want to put you on." "You are kidding me. Brussels sprouts, 50 fat grams a day, fish. Life is over for me." "Because I like to eat. I am going to go home, and I am going to take four Tylenol and end it all." You know what? Life is not over. You know what you have got to do in every aspect of your life, the older you get? You understand this, Jan, because you are getting older. You have got to discipline yourself.

You know what I liked to do when I was 20, David? You know what I liked to do? Go down to Sonic and get you a 12-inch Coney dog. I love 12-inch hot dogs. Get your Coney dog with the cheese, the onions. I mean, you come home, you could be in a circus and be a breathing fire dragon. You could blow everybody out. You used to get on and eat those things at 10:30 and 11 o'clock at night. If I did it now, I would enjoy it from here to the emergency room. You think the 12-inch hot dog is neat and long when that tube goes down your stomach when they are pumping you. That is what you do not want.

I cannot do it anymore. No, I come up at home at night before I go to bed, and I am hungry. I open the refrigerator. There it is, man. Everything I could want. We have frozen burritos. We have frozen pizzas. We have this. We have that. I could pop them in a microwave. But you know what? I know that if I do that, where I am going to be the rest of the night. So you do not do it. Why? Because you understand. The older you get, you have got to take responsibility not only for the things around you but what you have got to eat. I am with you all. I hate that. But you know what? I do not know what to tell you. It comes with getting older. With getting older comes responsibility.

I am telling you, I mean, I do not know what else to say. When you are a young man, you are footloose and fancy free. You can do whatever you want, whenever you want. You can go where you want. Your wife can have some freedom to go with a girl. But when you get married and you have kids, and those kids demand and they get sick, suddenly your whole life is changed, and you just cannot focus on the fun times that you had because you are a father, and with that comes tremendous responsibility. Your life will never, never, never, never, never be the same. Why? Because you are the leader now, and you are the father now, and self-discipline is the order of the day.

You cannot just think of yourself anymore. You just cannot go. I cannot go wherever I want to go. Their survival, their spiritual well-being, depend on you and me being strong all the time. Now, I wish God would not have made it that way, but that is the way it is. In the ministry, it is exactly the same way. The key word, the watchword, is self-sacrifice. God first, others second, and oh, I hate this, me last. Me. Lovable me. Look at this face. Last. Yes, last.

This can be a great time though in a young man, young lady's life in a spiritual sense, because you begin to realize, if you have grown and you are paying attention and you are perfecting the discipline mode, and you are not quitting and you are not resting through life now spiritually on your spiritual laurels, but you are really fine-tuning and working and doing this because it is time, it shows you what is really important to God. This is when your discipline marries your responsibility, and you are able to take large areas of ministry. You will be able to work with people. You are able to work on a pastoral level where you can really make an impact in their lives.

But the rule of the day, the verse of the day, the verse of your life is Romans 15:1:

*Romans 15:1*

*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*

You are out of it. You personally, in the ministry as in your family, father, from your own standpoint, you cease to be the important one. All that is important now in a physical sense is your family. All that is important in the spiritual world is God's family. You have come above that level now.

You see this in the Bible in Acts 13:2:

*Acts 13:2*

*As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

Here they are in the church, but they are separated as leaders from the rest. Why? God had major responsibility to give them. That is the way it works. We are a small group right now. We are struggling to build a foundation and reach people. It is a process that takes time. But the bottom line is, down the line someday, if Jesus does not come, everybody on the ground floor today has their opportunity to be on a pastoral level where you are running and doing major aspects of the ministry. But it all comes back and depends on what you do with it right now when you are faced with it in your growth process.

I mean, I do not know what else to tell you. You know what it is, guys? This is where at this level you have got to make hard decisions. I had people in my ministry all the time, and I watch things like that. Sometimes I will never say a thing, but I will watch how you, as potential leaders, when you get to that point, I will watch what is important to you. I will watch how you deal with things. All my life I have had young men that I put in charge of ministry.

I am going to tell you something. Sometimes you have got to make some tough decisions. Sometimes you have got to tell people that you really like, "No, you cannot do that." Or, "No, I am not going to do it anymore." "No, you know what? It is not conducive to your spiritual life. I cannot do it anymore." Or, "I cannot allow you to do this anymore." Sometimes those are tough things to say. You know what some of them will do? They will say, "Well, you know what? You cannot do this anymore. And you know, Bob told me that you are the one. He just, he cannot let you do it. You know what? I really love you. But Bob said, Bob said, Bob said." Why, you dirty rascal? That is your ministry. You take the hard calls. You pass it off on me. You take the shot. You know what that difference is? That is a difference of somebody who is ready to handle it and somebody that is not.

You have got to make some tough calls in the ministry. When you get on this level as a father, you have got to look at the situation and you have got to say, "You know what? It is not Bob's call. He put me in charge of this ministry. And I, you know what? This is not right. I cannot do it anymore." You take it. That is the difference. That is the difference. It is the difference of understanding that when you have this responsibility, you have to play the man and take responsibility.

You find it all the time. As I said, in Acts 13, they separated them. They were still part of the church, but their responsibility level, they were getting ready to change the world with missionary endeavors. That was going to shock and change and revolutionize the face of planet

earth. God said, "Within this church, there are some leaders that they are on a point now where they are going to be separated out. And everybody is going to understand who they are for ministry."

That is why the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 4:15:

*1 Corinthians 4:15*

*For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.*

You see, fathers are a rare breed. That is not just winning people to Christ. You should not be able to preach or how well you know the Bible. It is when push comes to shove where you are at and how you respond instead of reacting. During this time, the fathers learn to use great, great, great tactical principles in their people skills of dealing with people. It is a time when you are different than most people, even though you are all the same. The responsibility level dictates it.

I will tell you right up front, somebody gets to that point, brother, I will hold you accountable harder than I will anybody else. No questions about it. You are supposed to know better. You are supposed to do better. You are supposed to look at this church Sunday morning, Thursday night, and everything that is around it. You are supposed to look at it exactly like I look at it. Why? Because you have got part of my ministry, and I will give you part. I will give anybody in here, anybody, anything that I have in this ministry. Brother, you better run it with the same dedication and sincerity as you have seen me run it. You better take the responsibility, and you better love it. You better sacrifice for it. You better prioritize your life by it, because my friend, I will not accept anything less than that. Because anything else will not work. You will not cheat on me. You will keep pedaling, and your lungs will bust, and your leg muscles will break, but you will not cheat. You will not. There are too many people's lives, there is too much at stake, and there is too much spiritual responsibility that goes with it. If you are going to come to that level, be on that level, then be what you have got to be. Simple as that.

You learn principles. You can have whatever you want. I do not have any holds barred. The only thing that stops you from going anywhere is you. It is as simple as that. It is you. It is not me, but I know what the ministry requires. Hey, if you want to stay in those areas below, I do not care. I will use you. Man, there are plenty of things you can do. If you do not want to take that responsibility, that is on you. I will never come to you and say anything. You know why? Because I will always allow you to be whatever you want to be. What I am telling you, there comes a point when you get to a point of spiritual growth in your life, you do not have any rights. I do not. I do not have a right to choose if I want to come Sunday morning or not anymore. I do not have a right to choose if Thursday night is really important to me. I do not have a right. Maybe you do. I am not arguing with that. But you know what? When you get to the point that you say, "Look at me, I am a leader," you do not have the right anymore. Simple as that.

Now, I understand things happen and things come up, and I am not talking about that. I am talking about you need to see the ministry for what it is. You need to understand the importance

of it for what it is. I know things come up. I am not even talking about that. I am talking about your attitude of where you are at and what we are doing. That is what I am talking about.

You learn some great people skills. You know what you learn?

- You need to learn to know your limitations. Nothing will kill you quicker, faster than this ministry, any ministry, and not knowing what your limits are. You have strength and you have weaknesses. Not knowing that will mess you up.
- You cannot help somebody more than they want to. So there come some times in your life when you have to make some hard decisions. There comes a time when you have to say, "You know what? I have met with you for two or three years trying to help you through the Word of God, but you just cannot get it. Church is not as important to you. You do not want to come. You do not want to get involved." You know what? I am not helping you anymore by continuing to teach you the Bible when you are not... In fact, I am adding to your problems by supplementing what God has clearly told you you need to have when you refuse. Why? Because I am coming over on Saturday morning or you are coming over to my house on Saturday morning, and I am filling in the blank so you do not have to bother getting up on a Sunday. You have got to make those decisions at some time of your life.
- Those circumstances will happen. You have people who will do things while you are working with them, and you have got to say, "You know what? I love you to death. I love you with all my heart. But you know what? I cannot want you to do right more than you do," because the moment you do, you become vulnerable, and they will use you and they will take advantage of you.
- You will learn over the period of time to not take things personal. Keep your emotions in check. You know what? Everybody ought to go out and sell stuff door to door for just a month and get as many people to slam doors in your face as you can. Then get a job for another month where you call up and sell people the most obnoxious things over the phone so they will hang up on you. You do that because you have got to learn to enjoy rejection. You have got to learn to take rejection along with everything else. That is tough for everybody. It is hard. But you know what? You have got to discipline yourself that you are in a war, and just like a soldier in combat, you lose buddies along the way who get killed. Though you grieve and it hurts you inside, you still have got to get out of that foxhole the next morning and charge. I do not know how else to tell you.
- You have to know where you are at in Christ. That is really the only thing that will keep you from taking rejection personally. You have to let biblical principle dictate how you respond instead of your react.
- Your rise in this level will be apparent or not apparent to everybody in the church. Everybody will know, "So and so is not got it together." Everybody will know, "Well, she is good here, but boy, look at her family." "Well, look at her. He is good here, but look over here." You cannot hide these things.
- This is where you understand that all things are lawful, but not all things are expedient. You learn how to understand that. 1 Corinthians 6:12

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. You begin to understand your liberty

in Christ. It was not given to you so you can do what you want to do. It was given to you so you could do, without any Old Testament structure, whatever God wanted you to do. He says, "All things are lawful, but not all are expedient." He said, "I will not be brought under the power of any." You control everything in your life. Nothing in your life controls you. That is hard to get to. It really is.

You know, the book of Philippians has always been an incredible book for me. It is a book that I just, it has always been just a great book. It is a book where it really shows me where Paul's heart was at. It is probably the greatest book that, or not the greatest book, but it is probably the most intimate book that Paul writes. It lines up with the Philadelphian church in our overall study. But it is the most intimate and personal book that he writes. There are more great verses on the Christian life in the book of Philippians than any other book in the New Testament. Chapter 4 is a goldmine. But he says in Philippians 4:1:

*Philippians 4:1*

*Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.*

This is where, in your life and my life, discipline and maturity level is at its highest. This is where you learn through the ministry how to deal with people. I am going to tell you, people can be a challenge. The Christian life is a balance. I have said it over and over and over again. The more responsibility and the higher you get, the more balance it becomes. The time you get to the father level, it is a lot like balancing a mean alligator, a bowling ball, and a running chainsaw. Because that is just what it is like. It is never easy. As you get up the spiritual ladder with more responsibility, the balance, that is why you cannot stop. That is why you cannot rest. That is why you cannot continue to grow. That is why you cannot, the Bible says there is no discharge from this war. You cannot take yourself out. You cannot say, "Well, today I really do not have to push it," because "Look where I am at, and I had a good day yesterday." The moment you take that stand, you will start to cheat in other areas of your life. You cannot give yourself that latitude. It is during this time that you learn that ever-changing balance and how to manage it. You learn the different aspects of people and how to deal with them.

## VIII. The 11 Hardest Things to Learn for a Father in Ministry

I am going to give you something, and I am going to be done. I do not know of any other stage of spiritual growth that is more discernible in your own life or in my life than this stage. You know when you are a baby in Christ, it is hard to see where you go from baby to young children or children to young children to children. It can be nebulous there. You could be a mix and match of both a little bit. But when you get to this stage, no. Very clear. It is so clear that it is, and I guess it is the reason why it has to be clear, it is because of the importance of this level.

I am going to give you the 11 hardest things you will ever have to learn of being on this level of what I call a pastoral level where you are able to take large areas of responsibility, or I am able to say to you, "Hey, take this, it is yours. Take this, you are in charge of it." When you understand these 11 things in your life, as far as I am concerned, you are there. You are there. But brother, it

is a process to get these 11 things down because they are like the spiritual guru thing. Remember the story, remember the TV show Kung Fu? The little grasshopper concept, where you are out there and you have got this master Kung Fu guy, and he could, boy, he could kick you in the face. You did not even see his legs move. He could just let you have it.

I have always enjoyed it. My favorite movie, my favorite line in my favorite movie, without a doubt, is Billy Jack. How many of you ever saw Billy Jack? Oh, I love that movie. My favorite spot is where Billy Jack, you know, he is a cool guy. He does not say much. He has got that black hat. He looks kind of goofy, but you never say, "Hey, you look kind of goofy." But he stands out. My favorite line in the whole movie is when these big bullies in town, and I hate bullies, these big bullies in town, they are pushing everybody around, and Billy Jack comes to town, and Billy Jack is not going to be pushed around by anybody because he is Billy Jack. Billy Jack is tough. My favorite line in the whole movie is when this big old bully comes around and he starts giving Billy Jack some lip. Billy Jack just stands there, got a big old smile on his face. And he says, "Why do you think so funny there?" And Billy Jack says this, "Because I am going to kick you right in the face as hard as you have ever been kicked, and you are not going to do a thing about it." Oh, I love that. Then he proceeds to swing around and take that guy's head off at the nose level. He was right. He never did a thing about it because he was Billy Jack.

I know a Kung Fu story. All those guys. It starts out, he is a little kid, and he is breaking boards, kicking things, and their old master is there. The old master holds out the little hand with three pebbles in it, and it starts out. He grabs them, focus on the hand. Pebbles are still there. He gets to be 12 years old. Now he can kick a lot of boards, kick people too. He comes in for his test, and the test is not, "Show me how he can kick." The test is not, "Show me what he can break." The test is, "I got three pebbles in my hand, little grasshopper." Still there. And one day he comes in, he is 20 years old, 21. He has to get them now because the movie is about to start. He walks in there, and the old man stands there, no expression. That old Kung Fu guy goes, hand close it, just like a thousand of the time before, this time they are gone. And he says, "Little grasshopper, tear them up, go get them. Kick some Yamagong." That is Japanese. And off they go.

You know what? Hey, little grasshopper, this is where it is at for you. You get these 11, you have got the rocks. These are the 11 hardest things you ever have to do in your life. But when you get them and you really understand them, you are there. This is the result of discipline and responsibility. Never quit fine-tuning these things to the point where in your Christian life you become:

1. Self-reliant, but never self-sufficient.
2. Steadfast, but never stubborn.
3. Tactful, but never timid.
4. Serious, but you never become dismal or gloomy.
5. Unmovable, but you never become stationary.
6. Tender, but never becoming emotional.
7. Generous, but never becoming gullible.
8. Weak and humble, but never being weak.
9. Gentle and compassionate, but never hypersensitive.

10. A strong leader, but never a tyrant or a dictator.

11. You learn to preach the truth, but you never forget the grace that brought you the truth.

Oh, you find Christians that have the truth, but they have no grace. You find Christians that have grace, but they have no truth. Oh, you find some that have neither, but it is hard to find a man or a woman who have grace and truth. The truth, but the grace to use that truth the way God's Holy Spirit shows you.

Self-reliant, not sufficient. Steadfast, not stubborn. Tactful, but not timid. Serious, but not dismal. Unmovable, yet not stationary. Tender, but not emotional. Generous, but not gullible. Weak and humble, but not weak. Gentle and compassionate, never hypersensitive. Strong leader, but not a tyrant or a dictator.

You know what? These are the things that I cannot teach you. I wish I could. These are the things that only come about internally, as I teach you the things externally that I can. That I force you to look at self-discipline, force you to look at responsibility, force you to look at discipline, force you to look at your own marriage, your own life, all the things in your life. Taking the children that you have and fashioning them into a model of an example of responsibility. Making the parallels between back and forth that you can see and understand. Showing you how, as a young man, before you were married or right after you married, you could do and go wherever you wanted, but now it changes. Now you are no longer your own. You have a couple little ones, and a wife that depends on you for everything that they get physically, emotionally, and spiritually. You now have to become the leader. You now have to incorporate the principles or get the help you need to make it happen. That alone is when you become the Bible's definition of a father.

Oh, there are lots of people that have kids, lots of people that get married and have kids, but that does not make you a good father. The Bible says he that does not take care of his own household is worse than an infidel, and he is not just talking about getting the job and providing physically, financially. He is talking about all the areas that we have to discipline, and it is part of growth.

## IX. Conclusion and Application

I had to do it. I am certainly not the best husband in the world today. My wife, you can ask her, but I hope that I probably love her more now than I did when we got married. I have had to learn some things the hard way. I always have. I have never learned things easy. My claim to fame was never to be the smartest man in the world. My claim to fame is to be the fastest one in the slow class. That is all I got. I may make the mistake once, but very rarely will I make it twice. You know why? Because I understand that sometimes you do not get a second chance. Sometimes you do not. Sometimes you do. Sometimes God is good to you, but sometimes you do not. I also learned this: there are some mistakes you can make in life that you can get away with, and there are some that you cannot, that you will bear the rest of your life, so best not making any or as little as you can.

I am telling you, I am not in no way, shape, or form. I hope you do not take from the position that I am blowing myself up. I have not used me other than in the same state that I use you, despicable and lazy. I am not setting myself up as a model. I am setting this book up as the

model, and everything in it. I have the same problems you have got. I have the same tendency. I am just as lazy as the laziest person you have ever saw in your life, and I can cheat on myself and do this and do that and lie to myself and tell me, "Yeah, that is okay," when I know it is not. I can do everything everybody else does. You know what? There are times that I do, but I am telling you this. It takes discipline, and it takes balance, and it takes you understanding what you see around you and understanding that these seven stages of spiritual growth are just like growing up as a young man, a young child, into adulthood, into fatherhood, right on down the line of the golden years of your life. There is no difference.

When you get to this point, you take your stand. You take your stand. You have looked at your family, good, bad, or indifferent, and you have decided, "You know what? Wherever I am at, I can make it better." You never get to the point where you say, "You know what? I am satisfied with the way I am." The moment you get to that point, you are in trouble. The door is already open to you going downhill.

I will say it again. I do not care where you are at. The exciting thing to me, the only thing I care about, I do not care where you are at. I do not care what you have done. I do not care, you could be the dumbest person in all the world. It does not matter to me. I am the dumbest person right next to you. It does not matter to me. All that matters to me is, "Bob, I want the Word of God to change my life." That is all I have got to hear. Three words. "I want the Word of God to change my life." That is all I care about. If you can say that, we can get something done.

Do you not like how I blend humor with beating you over the head really hard? After a while, it is like you walk out here and you say, "Could you hit me again? I really liked it." Hey, God called us together for a reason. There is a job to be done. We will lose people along the way, people who come in who you think are leaders. We will not be leaders all the time. Ones who you never think will be leaders will rise to the fore and be leaders. You know what? It is all about your commitment to what you want to do with what the Word of God says. It is the greatest way to do it in the world. Your statement of being here today makes a statement. We work through the concepts of the Word of God of helping you grow. You come, you grow. You do not come, you do not grow. It is as easy as that. I will help you along the way do whatever you need to do. It is as simple as that.

Let us pray. We thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus. We love you.