

## Nourishing, Protecting, Upholding

Spiritual fathers and mothers nourish, protect, and uphold others in their faith.

Read: I Corinthians 4:14-17, 10:33-11:1

Spiritual fathers train others to know God's Word.

Training requires that we *show* others how to walk with God, and help them model that behavior. This is similar to someone who trains an apprentice for a career, but in this case, we train others to become intimate with God and His Word.

Has anyone mentored you in your walk with God? Do you know someone who can help you?

Spiritual fathers invest their spiritual experience into others so they can also become personally intimate with the person, Jesus Christ.

Investing your spiritual experience means that you have shared, common spiritual experiences with those whom you are raising in the faith. This includes experiences in studying God's Word, as well as applying it in real life.

Have you had shared spiritual experiences with others that you can build upon for your own growth, and theirs?

Spiritual fathers are primarily concerned with the person of Jesus Christ and the spiritual welfare of others.

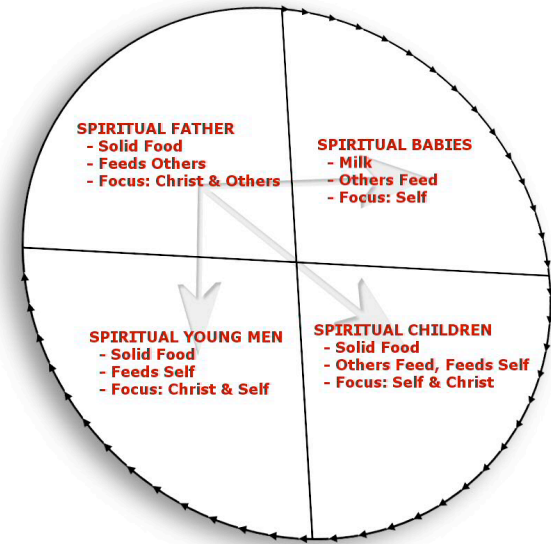
Spiritual fathers have left behind the concerns for most of their own lives. They look to the future and adopt God's concerns and passions for their own. God's concern is always for others.

Can you think of others around you who might need your spiritual attention more than you might need to take care of your own needs?

### Application:

Review the five studies in this series of the Stages of Spiritual Growth. Evaluate yourself. Are you a spiritual infant, child, young man, or father? What steps can you take to ensure your spiritual growth continues to the next stage?

## The Stages of Spiritual Growth: Becoming a Spiritual Father



The ultimate goal of the Christian life is to become just like Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). John the Apostle referred to those who had become like Christ as spiritual fathers.

As we grow in our faith from spiritual infancy to adulthood, we should be developing characteristics like Jesus Christ. In addition to his ethical character traits, there are characteristics of attitude and action that we should also adopt. Look at these examples: Jesus forgave sin (an attitude and an action). Jesus extended mercy (an attitude and an action). Jesus encouraged others (an attitude and an action). Jesus also spent time helping others grow to become like Him – He spent three years teaching His disciples.

Becoming a spiritual father means developing the ethical characteristics of Jesus Christ, becoming like Him in attitude and actions, and finally, helping others becoming like Him. Let's look at the characteristics of spiritual fathers.

## Spiritual Intimacy

Spiritual fathers and mothers are personally intimate with the person, Jesus Christ.

Read: I John 2:13-14, Philippians 3:8

Spiritual fathers have known God for a long time, and are intimate with His Word.

Some people are considered wise or mature beyond their years. Others never grow to spiritual maturity. In the process of spiritual growth, nothing can take the place of time. Getting to know God and His Word better over many years is a critical part of becoming like Jesus.

Intimacy in anything requires time, attention, and application. How can you become more intimate with God's Word, and Jesus?

Spiritual fathers have known God for a long time, through experience. The experience of knowing God requires not only time, but application of our knowledge about Him and the Bible through life. We will make many mistakes, and through a process of trial and error, endurance and ease, we will experience God's love and characteristics in many ways.

Name some ways you have experienced God's love and characteristics recently.

Spiritual fathers have all the characteristics of Spiritual Young Men, but to a greater degree, seasoned by personal intimacy with God's Word, and the wisdom of experience.

(I John 2:12-14)

Spiritual young men are strong (in character), they abide in the Word of God, and they have overcome the Evil One. One grows to further maturity by continuing the practice of these things through many years, in many different experiences.

What experiences do you have that you have not yet discovered Biblical principles to guide you? How can you begin applying the Bible to those areas?

Discuss or write your personal reflections.

## Spiritual Reproduction

Spiritual fathers and mothers reproduce themselves in others.

Read: I Corinthians 4:15-16, Philippians 3:17, 4:9

Spiritual fathers tell others about Jesus Christ and His Word.

Telling others about Jesus Christ, His identity, what He did for us, why He did it, and how we can know Him personally, is the responsibility of all Christians (Matthew 28:18-20). Those with the attitude of a Spiritual Father want to naturally do what a father does – reproduce. Telling others is the first step.

Spiritual fathers teach others about Jesus Christ and His Word.

Just as Jesus commanded us to tell others about Him, He also commanded that we "make disciples." This means that we must teach others His Word, and how to know Him; just as we were taught.

Spiritual fathers use God's word and the wisdom of their experiences with Jesus Christ to reproduce themselves spiritually.

Jesus did two things in training His disciples.

- (1) He spoke God's Word, and
- (2) He modeled His relationship with God to others.

The Apostle Paul used the same method to reproduce others:

- (1) He spoke God's Word, and
- (2) He related and modeled His experiences with God (testimony) to build up others.

It has been said that an expert is someone who knows more than you do. What do you know about God and His word that you can share with someone else? Also, what experience have you had in applying God's Word in your life that might be helpful to others?

Discuss or write your personal reflections: