

Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“What are some of the characteristics of growth in the various stages of our physical development? What are some of the characteristics of growth in the various stages of our faith/spiritual development?”

“Did you/do you have someone in your life that you would consider a spiritual “father”? What has been their influence in your life? How have you felt its absence?”

“What do you think about the ‘aside’ listed concerning the pronounced attacks on ‘young men’? Do you think there is any validity to that proposition?”

“Where would you locate yourself in the growth process? Is it appropriate, given the space and availability of knowledge and grace? Did you anticipate that you would be further along by now?”

“How would you describe the present season? Where/how are you attempting to interrupt that season? Accelerate the season? What do you sense it’s trying to ‘complete’ in you?”

“How much of your activity (pursuits) would you say is motivated by your fear of not being loved? How much of it is motivated by the fact that you already are?”

Teaching Notes...

I find John’s writings compelling because...

... arguably, he knew Jesus better than anyone (and if we hold to the mystery of the incarnation, he knew “God” as well as anyone!).

... he left the security of what he knew, for the uncertainty of what he was yet to discover. He would one day likely be the C.O.O. of “*Sons of Thunder Fisheries*”, but he, as others before him, was willing to “go somewhere that could only be shown (revealed)

to him" (Genesis 12). It's not that he is abandoning his family, but that he is determined to find his identity, his security, his significance in his relationship *to* and relationship *with* God.

... he's not simply "old", he's "wise". The two are not always congruent. John writes from perspective (between 80 & 100 y.o.a.) He has watched all his friends die. He's the only one left. He's in a place where he could be really confident or really cynical.

You can hear John's father-heart coming out when he says things like, "*I don't want you to sin, but if you do*".

The Story offers a portrait of life with God that is like a journey, or like human development, with people at varying stages of growth.

When referring to these second and third generation Christ-followers as "*little children*," "*young men*," and "*fathers*," John is speaking about them in varying stages of spiritual development (see also 1Corinthians 2,3; Hebrews 5; Ephesians 4:14-16; Philippians 1:6)

None of us gets to maturity without the season of immaturity, but no healthy person will remain there.

You were created for reason and meaning and curiosity, but you were also created for dependence and trust.

Birth always pre-supposes growth. It's the objective of all human life. It is "**becoming**" more fully the person that we are.

Most of our discussions concerning human growth and development emphasize the process of becoming more "independent": how to "make it" on your own. The biblical narrative offers us an image of maturity that is growing into a more complete "dependence" which necessitates surrender and obedience--- both compelled by love.

"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him."
Jeremiah 17

Here's the progression: child, childish, childlike.

"Dear children"...

Their place in the family is no 'accident of birth' or 'late season surprise', but an intentional "choosing".

Your sins are forgiven and you have a father.

Forgiveness--- addresses our issues with "shame" (inadequacy).

Father--- addresses our fears of “abandonment” (left to ourselves; on our own: our own strategies and creativity; our own capacity for making life work).

Romans 8 begins with “*no condemnation*” (nothing inhibiting the love of God for us) and ends with “*nothing separating*”. Our **place** and **posture**. In his steadfast love (covenant love), he pledges that he will actively be working in and working out of us his good intentions, because he loves us.

A word to ‘young men’...

Paul describes his own development in Philippians 3: thoroughbred (circumcised); driven (Pharisee of the Pharisees; peeked w/ company); zealous; faultless.

Luke 9 “... *he gave them power and authority*”. We’re learning how to handle it; how to direct our energies toward serving others, versus leveraging them.

The Samaritans opposed Jesus and his followers. They didn’t like you cutting through their yard! “*Let’s call down fire and smoke these jokers!*” (2 Kings 1, Elijah: they had precedent). They are attempting to establish themselves. I love Jesus’ response. “*He turned and rebuked (re-evaluate; to show honor; to correct) them.*” “John, I love that about you!”, then help John re-direct his passions without exasperating him.

aside: “*Is there any other demographic more vulnerable--- more at risk, more susceptible--- than “young men”?*

I believe that the attacks toward you are particularly strategic. You’re the demographic that our culture is after--- the demographic the enemy is targeting.

You are distractible. You are easily entertained. You have yet to feel the weight of the decisions that you are making. Your life is at risk. Your marriage is at risk. Your children are vulnerable.

You’re “*strong*”. The enemy is committed to find ways to “waste” your strength. Create “impotence”. It’s not just the failure to make babies. It’s the inability to produce life.

The “*word of God live(-ing) in you*”, is the key to overcoming. God’s will, God’s ways, God’s desires alive in you, and allowing you to ‘pivot’ to establish a better legacy.

A word for “fathers”... older men.

They “*know him who is from the beginning...*”

In Hebrews 4, “rest” is used as a metaphor for the ‘shalom’ which characterizes God and is promised to his people.

“**rest**”- quietness; repose/calm; permanence

Fathers seem to be “**at rest**”, with God and themselves, which makes them wonderfully self-unaware and available for others. Fathers are able to appreciate the unique qualities of each stage of development; therefore, they are less critical and more tolerant. Fathers observe and await someone to appeal to their wisdom.

Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders. Deuteronomy 33:12

This posture merely reinforces the deficit we experience in our development:
Fatherlessness.

There are “father-factors” in suicide rates, educational achievements, emotional and behavioral issues, incarceration rates, violent crime and likelihood of involvement in some religious pursuit.

Fatherlessness manifests itself in “striving”, “resentment”, and “fear”.

Striving... the assumption that if you won’t affirm me--- simply for who I am--- then I must “accel” to get you to notice me.

Striving prevents us from being able to celebrate the success of others (we deserve it). Striving makes us less compassionate for those experiencing adversity (they deserve it). Striving fails to establish and maintain close relationships because “to know me” will be to “not love me”.

“... stop striving and know that I am God...” Psalm 46:10 It’s something we’re supposed to ‘cease’/‘stop’ because we “know God”.

Resentment... under-appreciated; un-noticed. We will eventually begin to resent everything and everyone to which we had looked for validation.

Here’s what it sounds like from the older brother in the parable of the prodigal: “*For all of these years, I have been working like a slave for you! I have never taken a day off. I have never disobeyed.*” Notice the volatility. The one, usually so controlled and composed, spews a lifetime of suppressed resentment.

Fear...

“...perfect love dispels all fear”. 1 John 4:18

Any area of your life that demands that you perform, that you posture, that you achieve is being motivated by fear, not love. Completed love leaves no space for such insecurity.

You can truly only find pleasure in your life-pursuits as you know that the pleasure of your Father is not dependent upon them.

You desire to be at your best, but **only** for the *delight* of the Father and not the Father’s delight!

We can only rest in what we have come to trust. Our activity is no longer ‘guilt-motivated’. It’s not for the Father’s delight, but because of the Father’s delight. It is the heart-response of one who is confident in love.