

The title of this morning's sermon is "*Progressive Sanctification for Children and Fathers.*"<sup>i</sup>

I told you I had a few sermons on my heart that I wanted to preach before returning to my verse-by-verse study through Luke's Gospel, and this is one of them.

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Some of you might remember when we moved to WA in 2010 that Johnny was only a few months old, but he wasn't growing. He was classified as "failure to thrive." First picture.

It was scary because his skin was hanging from his face and arms, he couldn't tell us what was wrong, and the doctors couldn't figure out what to do. I think it was particularly hard on Katie, who tried to nurse him around-the-clock, but couldn't get him to gain any weight.

Many of you prayed for him, and he started growing. Picture two. He grew so much his belly is sticking out of his shirt. Actually, his T-shirt is too small.

Now we are no longer concerned about Johnny being failure to thrive, but we are concerned about some of the friends he chooses. Picture three.

Just kidding. We love you Austin, and we're glad God brought you to WCC, and I'm thankful Johnny has friends like you in his life.

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As concerning as it is when people do not grow physically, it is even more concerning when they do not grow spiritually. Listen to these verses from Ephesians 4 and the strong emphasis on spiritual growth:

**Ephesians 4:13 until we all attain...TO MATURE MANHOOD, to the MEASURE OF THE STATURE of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may NO LONGER BE CHILDREN...15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to GROW UP IN EVERY WAY into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes THE BODY GROW SO THAT IT BUILDS ITSELF UP in love.**

These verses describe progressive sanctification, which is the process of becoming more like Jesus.

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This morning's verses are fascinating because they divide our progressive sanctification into three stages: children, young men, and fathers. God's spiritual family is like human families, with members at different maturity levels.

We will look at children and fathers this morning, but there was too much for young men to fit in this sermon. The young men will get their own sermon next week. If you're a young man, I want to highly encourage you to be here, and if there's a young man in your life you want to see grow, I highly encourage you to invite him.

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Before we jump into the verses, let me draw your attention to the unique way they are written:

- There are two sets of three addresses.
- The three addresses are for children, fathers, and young men.
- In the first set, the address begins with, "I am writing to you," and in the second set, the address begins with, "I write to you."
- The verses are written TO US instead of ABOUT US. In other words, they don't say, "Children know their sins are forgiven, fathers know him who is from the beginning, and young men have overcome the evil one." Instead, the verses say, "I am writing to you, or I write you children, young men, fathers." This makes it personal and shows John's desire to assure us of these truths.

Last point: these verses are not about biological children, young men, and fathers. They are about spiritual children, young men, and fathers.

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So, let's see what's said to children:

**1 John 2:12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.**

Now skip to the end of verse 13 to see the other thing said to children:

**1 John 2:13c I write to you, children, because you know the Father.**

And this brings us to Lesson One:

**Lesson One: Children's progressive sanctification begins with (Part One) Gospel basics.**

Because children, or baby Christians, only have a basic understanding of the gospel, these are two wonderful, yet simple truths to share with them.

First, John assured them their sins were forgiven. Sometimes new believers need to be reassured of this truth.

If you're a new Christian, or you remember being a new Christian, you probably remember being amazed at God's grace and mercy in forgiving and saving you.

When I was Catholic, I thought I was saved by my works, so there wasn't much amazement. But after hearing the gospel and believing, I was in awe of what God did for me.<sup>ii</sup>

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Second, John told them God was their Father, which is fitting to say to children because children have a Father.

Children, or baby Christians, learn to see God as our caring Father and see ourselves as his dependent children. I'm still learning to apply this truth, so in this way, I'm still a child.

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Now let's talk about what it means that children KNOW God is their father, and this brings us to the next part of lesson one:

**Lesson One: Children's progressive sanctification begins with (Part Two) moving from knowledge to relationship.**

We've talked before about some of the weaknesses of the English language. One of the other weaker words is the word "know." For example, I say, "I know my wife and kids" and I say, "I know of Bill Gates." Obviously, I know my kids much differently than I know Bill Gates, but I use the same word. We distinguish between the two ways of knowing by adding the word "of."

In Greek, there is one word for "knowing" and another word for "knowing of."

The Greek word *epistamai* refers to knowing of something or knowing, the way I know Bill Gates.

The Greek word *ginōskō* refers to knowing something through relationship, the way I know my wife and children.

Here's another example. I have never played rugby, so I have no experience with it, but I know what it is, so I have an *epistamai* knowledge. But I wrestled for years, so I have a *ginōskō* knowledge of wrestling.

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Let me show you a passage in the New Testament that illustrates this. Mark your spot in 1 John 2 and turn to Acts 19:13.

I like to use this passage because it has *epistamai* and *ginosko* in the same verse.

This is when Paul encountered the Sons of Sceva. They were a group of men who considered themselves exorcists, but they weren't believers, so they didn't have any power or authority over demons:

**Acts 19:13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.**

They were trying to cast out demons when something happened that they never expected:

**Acts 19:15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" 16 And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.**

A demon they were trying to cast out answered them, and then the man possessed by the demon jumped on them, stripped them of their clothes, and beat them up.

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The reason I'm having you look at this is when the demon said, "Jesus I know" it used the word *ginosko*, because before Lucifer's rebellion this demon would have been in heaven with the other angels worshipping the Lord, or knowing the Lord through a relationship with him.

When the demon said, "Paul I know" it used the word *epistamai*, because it knew of Paul, but never had any relationship with him.

We can guess why the demon would have known of Paul: he was a dramatic instrument for the Lord's Kingdom. He had apostolic authority that allowed him to cast out demons, putting himself on the demonic realm's radar.

But the demon looked at the Sons of Sceva and said, "*I have no idea who you guys are. You have no power or authority over me, so I am going to teach you a lesson, by ripping off your clothes and beating you up.*"

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Go ahead and turn back to 1 John 2.

I explained this because the word *ginōskō* is used in verse 13 where it says "children KNOW the father." It means they have moved from *epistamai*, a simple knowledge of the father, to *ginōskō*, a relationship with the Father.<sup>iii</sup>

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Two more points about these verses.

First, we should appreciate they're written to "little children." If they were written to young men or fathers we would think we had to be mature enough to have our sins forgiven or know the Father.

But to say this to little children who have only recently been saved and done nothing for Christ shows that:

- The youngest Christian is completely forgiven. More forgiveness is not available or needed.
- The youngest Christian has access to the Father. No further access is available or needed.

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Second, we've been talking about children, and I referred to them as baby Christians and said they only have a basic knowledge of God. Let's be honest: this almost sounds insulting. Nobody wants to be told they're a baby Christian, and nobody wants to be told they don't know much spiritually.

But here's the truth: Baby Christians are still Christians, which makes them so much greater than unbelievers; they can't even be compared: one spends eternity in heaven, and the other spends eternity in hell.

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Listen to this:

**Matthew 11:11a Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.**

I can't imagine a much greater commendation than this. Jesus said John was the greatest man born from a woman.

Now listen to this:

**Matthew 11:11b Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than [John].**

This statement is made even more dramatic by its placement. It would be a big deal no matter when Jesus said it, but to say it after saying how great John is highlights the greatness of the least person in the kingdom of God. That person is *STILL* greater than the greatest person born of a woman!

How can we understand this?

John came before Jesus brought the kingdom of God, so even though he was a believer and preached the kingdom of God, he still preceded it and isn't viewed as part of it.

So, here's my point:

If believers who are part of the kingdom of God by faith in Christ are greater than John the Baptist, a man Jesus said is greater than all other men, imagine how much greater baby Christians are, who are part of the kingdom of God, than unbelievers.

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So, where do we put unbelievers? These verses describe the stages of spiritual growth. What stage are they in?

Unbelievers are not in a stage of spiritual life, because they are spiritually dead:

**Ephesians 2:1 You were dead in the trespasses and sins...5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ.**

**Colossians 2:13 You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,**

Unbelievers can't grow spiritually, or be sanctified, because they aren't justified yet:

- Justification is the once-for-all time moment God declares us righteous by faith in Christ.
- Sanctification is the process that begins after justification and continues throughout our Christian lives until we receive our glorified bodies.

Unbelievers can't participate in step two because they haven't taken step one.

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Now, I don't think I have OCD, but I like things to be in order. I would not say that it bothers me John writes to children and then fathers, versus children and then young men, but I would not have done it this way. I would write to children, then young men, then fathers.

But knowing there must be some reason God did it in this order, we will stick with this order and look at fathers next:

**1 John 2:13a I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.**

And then again at the beginning of verse fourteen:

**1 John 2:14a I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.**

To say fathers know him who is from the beginning is to say they have a deep knowledge and understanding of God.

Fathers are the most mature. They are advanced in years. They are like great oak trees of the faith that have grown big and strong.

Two things have produced their maturity, or progressive sanctification, and this brings us to lesson two:

**Lesson Two: A father's progressive sanctification comes from (Part One) the Word.**

We know fathers have spent time in the Word because fathers are mature or sanctified, and maturity, or sanctification, comes from the Word:

**John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.**

**Ephesians 5:26 [Jesus] might sanctify [the church], having cleansed her by THE WASHING OF WATER WITH THE WORD.**

**1 Peter 2:2 [NKJV] As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that YOU MAY GROW THEREBY.**

Nobody can become a father, or be sanctified, without spending time in the word. If you ever talk to a father, or a spiritually mature person, you're talking to someone who has spent lots of time in God's Word.

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Follow me for a moment...

We know there is a God because of creation:

**Romans 1:20 [God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.**

But this is not a deep knowledge of God. This is simply knowing there is a Creator without having a relationship with the Creator. It's *epistamai* versus *ginosko*. That's why this knowledge condemns, or leaves man without excuse, versus saves.

To have a deep understanding of God requires time in the Word, because that's where God reveals himself deeply.

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You can almost always tell when people don't know God, or haven't spent time in the word, because they say things like, "I think God is like..." and then whatever they say about him is heretical. They only have the revelation of God in creation. They haven't spent time in the Word to know him deeply.

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The second thing fathers have, or I should say have experienced, that allows them to be mature, or sanctified is the other thing that produces maturity: trials.

**Lesson Two: A father's progressive sanctification comes from (Part Two) trials.**

We don't have to wonder why David was so confident going up against Goliath. He tells us:

**1 Samuel 17:37 David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."**

Talk about confidence. David said, "The Lord...WILL deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

He was confident because lions and bears prepared him for Goliath. David had these earlier trials that prepared him for future trials.

There is no substitute for years of experiences with the Lord, and many of the experiences are trials. It wouldn't be too much to say that trials are the experiences that produce the most maturity for us:

**James 1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, LACKING IN NOTHING.**

These are three ways to refer to maturing, and it all happens from trials.

**Romans 5:3 We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.**

We are talking about progressive sanctification, or spiritual maturity, and trials mature us. Because fathers are the most mature, there are no fathers who have NOT experienced trials...lots of them.

We can't become fathers without the trials, because they allow us to know God and understand how he works.

Speaking of knowing and understanding God, there's something else I want you to notice about fathers that I think has incredible application for us, and this brings us to lesson three:

### Lesson Three: Knowing God is the height of progressive sanctification.

When these verses address children and young men, they are each told multiple things:

- Children are told their sins are forgiven, and they know the Father.
- We will talk about young men next week, and they're told they have overcome the evil one, they are strong, and the word of God abides in them.

But fathers are only told one thing, and it is so important it is said twice: they know him who is from the beginning.

I have always told you that God repeats himself when he wants to emphasize something or highlight its importance, and it seems that God wants us to know that the greatest maturity is shown in knowing and understanding God.

Think about this for a moment...

The fact that fathers are the most mature and they are applauded for knowing God tells us there is nothing more mature than this. We can't go beyond this to something better. There is no other level to attain that involves something different.

God talks about the pinnacle of progressive sanctification, or spiritual maturity, and it is knowing him:

- It isn't performing miracles.
- It isn't preaching or teaching.
- As important as prayer is, it isn't being a prayer warrior.
- As important as serving is, it isn't being a servant.

Listen to the way Paul describes maturity:

**1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man (when I matured), I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (when we receive our glorified bodies and see God face to face). Now I know in part; then I SHALL KNOW FULLY, even as I HAVE BEEN FULLY KNOWN.**

Paul defined maturity as knowing God as well as he knows us...which is perfectly!

Listen to these quotes about the importance of knowing God:

A.W. Tozer wrote in *Delighting in God*, “It is simply not enough to know about God. We must know God in increasing levels of intimacy that lifts us up above all reason and into the world of adoration and praise and worship.”

George Muller said, “What will make us so exceedingly happy in heaven? It will be the fuller knowledge of God. We shall know him then far better than we now do.”

J.I. Packer wrote in *Knowing God*, “Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord.”

Turn to Jeremiah 9:23. We won't turn back to 1 John. Second prophet. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel.

**Jeremiah 9:23 Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,<sup>iv</sup>**

We learn three things that we shouldn't boast about.

First, wisdom. Wisdom's great. We're to pursue wisdom:

**Proverbs 4:7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.**

But as great as wisdom is, it's still not something to boast about.

Second, might, or power. Many people want to be mighty or powerful, but no matter how mighty or powerful people are, it's nothing to boast about.

Third, riches. People might pursue riches more than anything else in the world, but no matter how much wealth people have, it's nothing to boast about.

Ironically, these seem to be the three things people are proudest of. If you think about people boasting, it is usually about one of these things:

- “I'm so wise or smart. Look at all the degrees, or credentials, or education I have.”
- “I'm so powerful. I'm over so many people in my job. I'm in charge of numerous departments at my work. I get to tell lots of people what to do.”
- “I'm so rich. My house is so big. Look at all the cars and boats I have.”

But God says not to boast in any of these.

We know we're not supposed to boast:

**Psalm 75:44 I say to the boastful, ‘Do not boast,’**

But there is one thing we can boast about:

**Jeremiah 9:24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.”**

You might recognize this verse because it’s quoted twice in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 1:31 and 2 Corinthians 10:17.

So, this is the one thing we can boast about: that we understand and know God.

So, if you want to know when you have met a father, or spiritually mature person, look for someone who understands and knows God...versus someone who boasts about their wisdom, might, or riches.

Let me conclude with this...

The sermon is about progressive sanctification that begins with gospel basics such as knowing our sins are forgiven and knowing God is our Father. Then we grow in sanctification from the Word, trials, and knowing God.

I’ve shared before that the Christian life often involves trying to find the middle ground that prevents us from swinging the pendulum to extremes, and that’s the case with sanctification:

One extreme is we do everything. It’s all about how hard we try, and if we’re not growing, it’s because we’re not trying hard enough, or doing enough, and we need to try harder or do more.

This extreme is problematic, because it can lead to discouragement and even despair, legalism, pride, and a joyless Christian life.

The other extreme is God does everything. If we aren’t growing, it’s not our fault. It’s God’s fault. We don’t need to change anything. We just need to wait for God to change us.

This extreme leads to immaturity, spiritual laziness, and license to sin.

The balance regarding our sanctification is:

- There’s an active component that involves us.
- And there’s a passive component that God handles.

Listen to these verses:

**Colossians 1:29a I toil, struggling**

This is active. Paul is talking about toiling and struggling. He’s working hard!

**Colossians 1:29b with all [God’s] energy that he powerfully works within me.**

This is passive. He’s using God’s energy while God powerfully works in him.

Or these familiar verses:

**Philippians 2:12b Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,**

This is active: Working so hard we fear and tremble whether we’re doing enough.

But then:



**Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**

This is passive: God is working in us for his good pleasure or purposes.

Actively, we engage in spiritual disciplines such as praying, resisting temptation, worshiping, and fellowshiping. Passively, we trust God to sanctify us.

Be encouraged that if you are a Christian, the gospel is at work in your life to help you become more like Christ.

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If you have any questions, or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service, and I'd consider it a privilege to speak with you.

**Psalm 105:4 Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!**

Let's pray.

<sup>i</sup> Done:

- John MacArthur
- Moody
- Nelson
- ESV commentary
- Life application
- EW

<sup>ii</sup> Think about children: their father is their hero.

- They get upset with other kids who criticize their father
- They brag about their father being better or stronger than other kid's fathers

As Spurgeon said, "And do you not glory in him? Little children when they begin to talk, and go to school, how proud they are of their father! Their father is the greatest man that ever lived: there never was the like of him. You may talk to them of great statesmen, or great warriors, or great princes, but these are all nobodies: their father fills the whole horizon of their being. Well, so it certainly is with us and our Father God."

<sup>iii</sup> **Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'**

These people thought they knew God, but they had an *epistamai* knowledge. Jesus said, "I never knew you," and that's the word *ginosko*, or never had a relationship with you.

<sup>iv</sup> Want to hear a bad joke about boasting? Remember I told you ahead of time it's bad! Here goes: A group of chess enthusiasts had checked into a hotel and were standing in the lobby discussing their recent tournament victories. After about an hour, the manager came out of the office and asked them to disperse. They asked him why he wanted them to leave and he replied, "I can't stand chess nuts boasting in an open foyer."