

# GROWING TOWARD *Spiritual* MATURITY

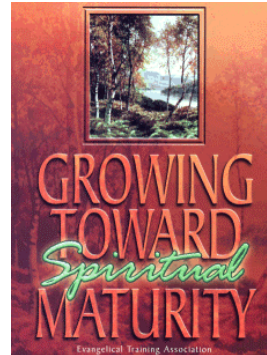
HANDOUT B

## Fruitfulness and Reaching Others for Christ

Chapter 7 of *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*

By Gary C. Newton

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Christ's strategy for making disciples of all nations involves the church, as a body of believers, infiltrating every corner of the world with the love of Christ. The call to be loving witnesses to an unbelieving world should be the passion of every true follower of Christ. What does it mean to be a witness? A witness, in New Testament use, is simply a person who shares what he has experienced. A poignant example is found in John 9, where Jesus heals a man blind from birth. Jesus leaves the scene before the blind man can thank him. The blind man is surrounded by Pharisees who encouraged him to denounce Jesus. They even went so far as to involve his parents, threatening to kick them out of the synagogue if they acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. What was the blind man's response? "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (Jn 9:25). The blind man was simply sharing what he experienced. That is what it means to be a witness.

Jesus has chosen every believer to bear lasting fruit through our lives and ministry in the world (John 15:16, 17). Yet this outward expression of our faith is only as good as our intimacy and obedience to Jesus Christ.

### The Responsibility of Every Believer

Just as every believer is called into a relationship with Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8), so every believer is called to express the love of Christ to others. There are many ways to show the love of Christ to others. Paul affirms this point in Ephesians 4:12 when he states that the job of church leaders is to prepare all God's people to minister to, or serve, other people. One of the responsibilities of every Christian is to share the experience of their faith in Jesus Christ with others.

For this reason, we need to be careful not to focus too much on how much fruit we are producing. It would be a wiser investment of our energy to focus on deepening our relationship with Christ and to leave the results up to God. Just when it seems that God is finished with us

(during times of pruning), God could, in fact, be preparing us for an even greater harvest. The fruit that comes from the life of a disciple of Jesus reflects the character, love, and productivity of Jesus Christ (Matt 7:17-20).

### **The Love of Christ**

Love is the highest reflection of the character of God. Paul puts love at the top of his list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Again in 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul emphasizes that love is the greatest of all of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love is the very core of all ministry gifts and abilities.

Jesus states that the way the world will know His disciples is by their love (John 13:35). Jesus puts love as the supreme test of discipleship (Matt. 25:31-46). Since God is love, and God expressed His love through Christ in us, it seems logical to assume that people who follow Jesus will be known for their love (1 John 4:7-21).

### **The Call to All Believers**

As we will discuss more fully in the next chapter, spiritual gifts provide the distinctive focus of each believer’s ministry. For example, while some believers will focus on teaching, others will emphasize evangelism or hospitality. All believers are called to helping a needy world with a loving witness. It is also true that some believers have been given the gift of evangelism but all believers are to be like salt and light to a decaying and dark world (Matt. 5:13-16). The church’s witness in the world will only be as strong as its ability to infiltrate the world with the love and message of Christ.

### **Where to Start**

The apostolic pattern for reaching others is seen in Acts 1:8 when the Lord said, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” This pattern is likened to ever increasing circles when you drop a pebble in a pool. The beginning point is always the area closest to the point of impact. That usually means family, friends, and those one sees on a regular basis.

### **Developing Relationships within the Family**

The family is the laboratory we learn to relate to others. The interpersonal skills and behaviors learned in the home are carried over into other areas of a person’s life, the church, and world. The Christian’s first priority is a loving witness at home.

### **Husbands and Wives**

Married believers must work diligently to develop submissive and loving relationships with their spouses. Such relationships model the organic relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. Couples need to plan mutually enjoyable activities with each other—regular Friday night dates, occasional mini vacations for two, quiet evenings at home, regular times of prayer, and occasional rendezvous for lunch. Special times like these are essential in building warmth and trust.

## Parents and Children

Many Christians are tempted to get so involved in ministry that the result is neglect of their family. Children and parents alike need to be challenged to be more sensitive to each other's needs. Relationships take time to build. Children need to have plenty of time to spend with their parents if they are to assimilate the biblical values the parents hold. The quality of the parent-child relationship often determines whether or not the child follows the biblical values held by the parents.

## Laborers in the Harvest

When the Acts 1:8 strategy is accepted as a biblical pattern for outreach, many priorities immediately become clearer. For example, missions on the home front becomes the beginning point of ministry and then it branches out to foreign missions. Today this pattern often becomes distorted and the thrust of evangelism efforts get reversed.

Jesus' ministry in the world was so radical that the Pharisees criticized Jesus for befriending tax gatherers and sinners (Luke 7:34). In fact, Jesus Himself said that His mission was not to the so-called "righteous" but to the sinners (Matt. 9:13). Jesus spent a great deal of His time building relationships with people who were considered the worst of sinners. Yet He was able to develop relationships with sinners without being affected by their ungodly values.

We need to guard against excessive committees, projects, programs, and meetings with church people that we have no time or energy left to develop close relationships with non Christians. We must maintain a balance in our personal relationships between Christians and non Christians.

Robert Coleman, in *The Great Commission Life-style*, writes:

Many churchmen have such an all-inclusive view of discipleship that the specific work of rescuing perishing souls from hell scarcely receives attention. Seeking to avoid this confusion of priorities ... when I wrote my book on principles of discipling in the life of Christ, it was entitled *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. I wanted to emphasize that evangelism is the cutting edge of the Great Commission and that invariably it will flow out of a Christian life-style.<sup>1</sup>

## Friendship Evangelism

God uses many evangelistic approaches to draw people into His kingdom. Friendship evangelism is an approach based simply on building relationships with non Christians in normal daily contacts. Christians applying this method look for opportunities to demonstrate love and share their faith.

As growing and maturing Christians, we must be able to ask appropriate questions, listen, empathize, and tactfully bring in the gospel message at the right time. We must be able to maintain friendships with non Christians in spite of their apparent apathy toward spiritual things.

James 4:4 warns Christians that "friendship with the world is hatred toward God." Here James makes a distinction between friendship with "worldly people" and friendship with

“worldly values.” We are commanded to develop loving relationships with people in the world but we must not become seduced by their worldly values. We must keep our distinctions as salt and light in a needy world.

As a single candle of light can illumine a dark pathway, so the light of the Gospel bathes a lost world with the hope of Christ. The book of Romans contains the basics of this Gospel message.

There are a multitude of systems, formulas, or laws available to believers. A simple, yet tremendously powerful tool, often called the “Romans Road” is found in the book of Romans. Each of the verses is sequential and beautifully designed to help believers present Christ’s plan of salvation to unbelievers.

The “Romans Road” begins with Romans 3:10 and its declaration that “there is none righteous, no not one.” Supporting this first step is 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This first step strips unbelievers of any self-righteousness before God.

A second step is the need to identify unbelievers with Adam’s sin found in 5:1, “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” This confirms that everyone has inherited Adam’s sinful nature.

In 6:23 unbelievers are challenged with the gift that is theirs if they accept it by faith, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” This is the third step.

From that passage, the evangelist can take unbelievers to 10:9, 10, the fourth step, which reads, “that if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

### **Developing a Passion to Reach People in all Nations for Christ**

The Great Commission ultimately calls the church to make disciples of all nations. While the Acts 1:8 strategy begins in Jerusalem, it ends up touching people at the far corners of the globe. Christ’s desire was that all the great peoples of the world would come to know Him. The church will be fruitful in fulfilling its commission to the degree that it fulfills Christ’s passion to see all the nations come to know Him. The church must continually set before its people the ultimate challenge of the Great Commission.

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### Summary

The call of the church to make disciples of people from every nation means that every Christian must use his or her God-given gifts and abilities to be a witness to a needy world. Regardless of the diversity of special gifts within the body of Christ, all believers are called to be fruitful witnesses of Christ's love to others. Our witness begins with those we are the closest to, like family and friends. It then extends to our community and eventually to the far ends of the earth. Fruitfulness in ministry depends on God and our connection to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. For this reason intimacy with Christ is the key to our witness to other people. The ultimate challenge for the church today is to renew its commitment to share Christ's love to people in various parts of the globe who as yet have not heard the Good News.

### For Further Discussion

1. In what way is the gift of evangelism different than the responsibility that every believer has to reach out to the lost and needy around them?
2. Why do you think that Jesus gave His disciples the strategy to begin reaching out close to home, then to move further away to the more remote areas?
3. Why is it so important for a person to establish a successful ministry in their family before investing a lot of time in ministry with people outside?

### Notes

1. Coleman, Robert E., *Evangelism on the Cutting Edge*. (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1986), 137.

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