

“I’ll Never Grow Up!”  
by Rom A. Pegram (7/23/17)

When I was much younger, one of the ‘cool’ sayings was “I’ll Never Grow Up!” I actually had a (pin-on) button collection and this was one of my favorites. But, that ceased after I realized there was a difference between ‘child-like’ and ‘childish’ ... and unfortunately, some never come to know the difference. I believe God wants us to remain ‘child-like,’ in a sense, all our lives ... but certainly not ‘childish!’ To support that thought, listen to these words of Jesus:

- **Matthew 11:25-26** (NLT) – “At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: ‘O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to *the childlike* [italics mine].<sup>26</sup> Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!’”
- **Matthew 18:1-4** (NLT) - “About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?’<sup>2</sup> Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them.<sup>3</sup> Then he said, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children [‘child-like’ in your faith], you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>4</sup> So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.’”
- **Matthew 19:13-15** (NLT) – “One day some parents brought their children to Jesus ... But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.<sup>14</sup> But Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.’<sup>15</sup> And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.”

There’s a real difference between remaining ‘child-like’ and remaining ‘childish’ and Jesus brings out the importance of ‘child-likeness’ in these verses, doesn’t he? Here’s the gist of where we’re going today, folks.

Folks, God is a God (not unlike earthly parents) whose deepest desire is for his children to grow up and become incredible assets in the world we live in ... and for his kingdom ... which means an eternal legacy (when we grow up spiritually)! Spiritual maturity is God’s desire ... and our theme from Hebrews today. Let these words encourage you to go on to maturity in *your* faith—to be a vital asset to God’s kingdom right now, right here... Listen to our scripture lesson for this morning (Hebrews 5:11-6:3, NLT):

“There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don’t seem to listen.<sup>12</sup> You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God’s word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food.<sup>13</sup> For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn’t know how to do what is right.<sup>14</sup> Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

<sup>1</sup> So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. <sup>2</sup> You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding."

The exhortation is clear: Go on to maturity! The author is saying, "Leave the elementals; go on to maturity; God willing, we will move forward to further understanding." There's the prayer of the author of Hebrews! Folks, here are 3 aspects of the Early Church's understanding of the Christian life and discipleship; it is this understanding that will help us to see the process we all need to go through on our way to spiritual maturity. It can be summarized in this way: "Come," "Get ready," and "Go." Let's begin with the first stage of discipleship...

**PHASE I: COME...** *Phase 1 of going on to spiritual maturity is to 'come'...*

In Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT), Jesus offers us an invitation to a new life in him: "Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.'"

Just like the little children who came to Jesus to be blessed, so too we need to surrender our lives, coming before God humbly, to receive the new life he offers us. And, when we do, *a new birth takes place*, a birth of our spirit from the Holy Spirit, and we become newborn babes in Christ! Metaphors of 'new birth' are found throughout scripture (John 3:1-11, Rev. 3:20, John 14:23); literally, the Spirit of God comes to take up residence in our hearts...

But, we cannot stay 'babes in Christ!' That would be remaining 'childish' in our faith ... and Jesus expects more of us. So, we need to move on to...

**PHASE II: GET READY...** *Phase 2 of going on to spiritual maturity is to 'get ready'...*

This is like the child-hood stage of our faith development; this is also where the Church is so critical to our development—especially, I might add, the Christian Education ministries of the church. *They are not there just to entertain our kids.* No! They have a God-given responsibility to raise up disciples—from the young to the old; the 'going on to perfection,' as John Wesley called it ... is a life-long pursuit. So, Christian Education is for everyone ... for the purpose of spiritual growth and development—to stimulate growth, if you will...

Infants feed on milk; adults feed on more solid food. It's the same spiritually. Paul speaks of this process when he says (1 Cor. 3:1-2, NLT): "Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as

though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. <sup>2</sup>I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready....” And he goes on to tell them why...

We have to grow up in the faith to become disciples of Jesus Christ; this is God's will for your life and for my life—to go on to maturity in every way! And finally we get to Phase III of the discipleship process...

**PHASE III: GO...** This coincides with the 'Serve' part of our Vision here at Trinity! Once we are born of the spirit to a new life in Christ (LOVE GOD & PEOPLE) ... and then take the necessary steps to 'grow up' in the faith (GROW), we then go as disciples to serve God by serving others and, in the process, make other disciples. That's why we're here...

So, folks, what is it that God has done for us ... is doing for us ... and will do for us in the future? Let me remind you, briefly...

- God is a God who so loves you that he wants you to have His Rest—not like the world gives, but a rest that involves physical rest, peace as only God can give, and the gift of contentment...
- God is a God who so loves you that he has given us a High Priest in His Son, Jesus—a go between, so that we can BE Holy/acceptable before our God ... for eternity!
- AND ... God is One who wants—from the bottom of his heart—to place within us a desire to be a part of the discipleship process—to grow up ... and to go on to maturity as followers of his...

In this way, we can be incredible assets to the world in which we live, as well as to the Kingdom of God right here, right now ... and leave an eternal legacy behind us! Do you feel like you know God better already? Let's continue to learn together as we continue to share in a Hebrews Summer...