

YOU ARE STRONG

Children grow up quickly don't they? As soon as they celebrate their birthday, they are counting down to the next one! Even young people can't wait to finish their studies and get on with their lives! However when you get to your 60's things change. You wonder where the years have gone and wish they would slow down. We are going to look at some verses in 1 John that speak about children, young men and fathers.

Scripture Reading: 1 John 2:12-14

John was the youngest of Jesus' disciples, and he lived the longest. Towards the end of his life, while he lived in Ephesus, he wrote these letters. The words we have just read almost sound like a poem. They could be showing the progression of our growth as believers, but it could also be a declaration as to who we are in Christ. Let's look at these verses now. It begins with John speaking about children.

1. CHILDREN

Throughout his letter John addresses the believers as 'dear' – either dear children or dear friends.

Here in New Zealand older people often address younger people with the title 'dear'. Rather convenient, especially if you can't remember the name of the person you are speaking with.

John doesn't only address the believers as 'dear children' because he is now an old man, but because they are children of God. He repeats the phrase 'I am writing to you dear children' two times, in verses 12 & 13. Then he gives two different things that identify children of God.

a) Your sins are forgiven on account of his name v12

First of all he says, 'I am writing to you dear children because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.' A child of God is someone who has acknowledged they need God's forgiveness and accepted the sacrifice Jesus made by dying on the cross, for his sin. John is affirming to these believers, 'yes, your sins are forgiven because you have put your trust in Jesus'.

b) You have known the Father v13

Then John repeats the same expression in the next verse, 'I write to you dear children because you have known the Father.' So the second mark that identifies a child of God is that they know the Father. This time the word 'children' that John uses is one for a baby or small child and signifies the relationship with the parent.

In 1 John 3:9 it says that believers have God's seed living in them – that seed is the Holy Spirit. The moment a person truly turns to Christ, a new birth takes place and they are born again and receive God's Spirit. They are now God's children. Every person has been created in God's image, but the Bible is clear that it is only those who have received his Spirit, who are born into his family, who can call him Father.

1 John 3:1

How great is the love our Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!

The word 'father' means one who nourishes, protects and upholds. We all have an earthly father, but sadly some have abused their children, or neglected them. But when we are born into God's family, we have a heavenly Father who is perfect in all his ways, and he will nourish, protect and uphold us always.

William and I have three children. It is hard to believe they are now in their late 30's, yet we still call them our children, because they are, and they always will be. The same is true in our relationship with God – once we belong to him, we always will be his children, unless we willfully turned from him.

So first of all John is declaring that we are children of God and the two things that identify us are:

- We have been forgiven
- We have a relationship with God as our Father

2. FATHERS

Secondly, John goes on to address fathers. It is interesting that he doesn't say young men first, as that would seem a natural progression.

So he says, 'I am writing to you fathers because you know him who is from the beginning.' This is repeated two times once again – in v13 & 14. This time however he only gives one mark that identifies fathers, and that is that they know him who is from the beginning.

Everyone who has been born of God has a relationship with him as their Father. But God wants us to grow to know him in a deeper way, who he is, how he feels, his ways and personality.

When our children were small they knew their father as the one who went to work to provide for them, who stood up for them, took them fishing and prayed for them. But as they grew up, their relationship with him changed – related to him as adults, more like friends, and yet they were still his children.

However our children, and your children have only known you from the time they were born. You lived some years before you had children – they only know a little about what your life was like before that. But how much more is that true of God!

We have known God as our Heavenly Father for perhaps 5, 10 or even 50 years, but God has been from the beginning – he is eternal. We can continue to grow knowing him forever.

I have discovered that one of the ways to grow to know God, who is from the beginning, is to study and read, not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament too. This is where we can understand his dealings with men and women down through the ages and his amazing plans and purposes that he has for us.

But why does John address them as fathers? He had just said that one of the marks of children of God is that they know God as their Father – and now he addresses them as fathers.

- A child – is one who receives, takes provision and protection from the father
- A father – is one who gives provision and protection to others.

God wants us to be like fathers, or mothers. In the natural not everyone becomes a parent, but as believers we are all to be those who give to others. We do that in different ways, depending on our gifts and abilities. We have received from our Heavenly Father – his forgiveness, blessings and kindness, and now we give freely to others, and this includes forgiveness.

So we are children on God and we are to be fathers and mothers, who give to others. Thirdly, John addresses the believers as ‘young men’.

3. YOUNG MEN

a) You have overcome the evil one v13, 14

‘I am writing to you young men/women because you have overcome the evil one’. This statement is repeated two times, so John is emphasizing its importance.

We have a real enemy, and we spoke about this several weeks ago. This enemy is the devil, Satan, and the angelic beings who rebelled against God along with him. He is described in the Bible as the god of this world – and he seeks to deceive men and women and lead them away from the true and living God.

When Jesus died and rose from the dead, the devil was defeated and the power of sin and death broken.

1 John 5:4

For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

The one who has been born again, who has received the seed of God, the Holy Spirit, is the one who has overcome the enemy, the god of this world. We overcome him by our faith.

1 John 4:4

You dear children, are from God and have overcome them because the One who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

‘You have overcome them’ – Who is this referring to? It is speaking about the evil spirits in this world, the spirit of antichrist and the devil himself. God’s word is saying that we have victory over them. ‘Because the One who is in you’ - Who is this One? It’s referring to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, the One who lives in God’s children.

'Is greater' – it says this One is greater than any other spirit. The word greater in Greek is 'megas'. It sounds like mega doesn't it? Actually it is saying that the One in us is the greatest.

- The One living in you has already defeated the enemy.
- As we walk in that truth – we will walk in victory.
- This is true the moment a person receives Christ! The One living in them is greater, whether that person is a child or adult – the One in them/in you is greater than any other spirit.
- We need to understand the battle is real and the enemy does come against those who belong to the Lord. He sends arrows of doubt, fear, discouragement, depression, suicide..
- The One in you is greater and through faith in Jesus you can overcome.

We lived in the Philippines for three years and we often travelled to different towns and churches. One time when we were away someone broke into our home, stealing our valuables. Thankfully the two young ladies who lived with us didn't wake up and weren't hurt. However some days later while we were at home they tried to break in again. This time we heard them and William bravely went to the back door and it scared them away. Not long after that some men were caught. They were ex-military and were armed.

The enemy tried to take advantage of what had happened, coming against me with spirits of fear. So that verse – 'greater is he who is in you' – became a powerful tool I used against the enemy. Many times since then I have prayed for others who have been attacked by the spirit of fear.

b) You are strong and the word of God dwells in you v14

Let's look at the second mark that identifies young men or women. 'I am writing to you young men because you are strong and the word of God dwells in you.' 'You are strong'.

A mark of youth is strength. You don't send children to war as they are still developing their strength, and you don't send older people to war, as their strength is waning.

In World War 1 New Zealand sent 100,000 young men and women to war. This was one tenth of our population. Then in World War 2 New Zealand sent 140,000 young people overseas. Again it was about 1/10th population. Tragically many of those died. It illustrates though the fact that you send the young people to war.

John is making a declaration to the believers. You are like young men and you are strong. He is not speaking about physical strength though, he is speaking about spiritual strength. While physical strength is often determined by age, spiritual strength isn't.

What makes us strong? It is the Lord!

Ephesians 6:10

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

When we acknowledge our dependency on him, and trust him we are strong. The bible says that 'God's strength is made perfect in weakness'. If we are confident in ourselves and our experience

or ability, we limit what God can do. It is only when we recognize our need for God that he works through us by his Spirit.

But if we look back at that verse again we will see that it continues, ‘you are strong and the word of God dwells in you.’ We are strong when God’s word dwells in us. It is true that Jesus himself is ‘The Word’ and he lives in us, but this is referring to God’s word written for us in the scriptures.

Often when they make motorways and cut into hills, the council will plant shrubs and trees or creeping plants along the sides. This is not just for decoration, but it helps prevent erosion. The best plants are those that have deep roots and those roots help keep the soil from slipping. The same is true in our lives. When we allow the word of God to grow in our lives, it goes deep and spreads to keep us from slipping, and makes us strong.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active – sharper than any double edged sword.

God’s word is alive! It grows inside of us, and as we listen to it, think about it, memorize it and seek to live by it, it has the power to change us and make us strong so we can overcome temptation and stand up against the attacks of the evil one.

We are not strong because we feel strong necessarily. We need to understand that. We are strong because we trust in God’s strength – that he is the greatest and we have nothing to fear.

I would like to make this declaration over us:

1. We are children of God and have been forgiven, and God is our Heavenly Father. He will be faithful and will never abandon us.
2. We are like fathers and mothers who are growing to know our God and are learning to give to others, even as we have freely received from God.
3. We are like young men and women and through Jesus we have overcome the evil one. We are strong because the word of God lives in us.

The reality is we that we don’t always see ourselves like that. We may have had doubts about God’s forgiveness, or we feel defeated, discouraged or weak. We are in a battle and there are times when we feel like we have been pushed back by the enemy. When we go through times like that our Heavenly Father doesn’t scold us. Look what he says:

Isaiah 40:30-31

Even youths grow weary and tired, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up on wings like eagles, they will run and not be weary, they will walk and not faint.

And that is the key to stay strong – to draw near to the one who is the source of our strength.