

Growing Up Into One's Identity in Christ

Purpose:

1. A baptized infant knows nothing of who they are, what the world is like, and what their parents and/or grandparents believe.
2. This puts a crucial responsibility on the parents and grandparents to make sure that infant comes to realize what God gave them in baptism.
3. The challenge here is great, for the child will be most influenced by what their family leaders believe and practice in their own lives.
4. If a child grows up recognizing their identity is in what God has aligned them to in baptism, they will be less vulnerable to connivers who will seek to undermine that identity.

Welcome back to Lesson Three

In lesson two we began to see how important it is for a child to know whose they are. They are God's child. They might never have known that if it had not been for their parents or grandparents sharing it with them. An infant knows nothing. Whatever that infant is going to believe must come from others. In this case, it is the belief of the parents in Christ which give the child's baptism real authenticity. Only if the parents commit themselves to raising the child in their faith, does the baptism of an infant make sense, since the infant knows nothing. It is the parents and the grandparents who are to pass on their faith. They do that by caring for the child. That is the first step. Secondly, they keep sharing who God is, and what God has done for them in Jesus Christ. How is it that they are now a child of God and have a special identity? They have been adopted into the family of God by grace and this is who they are.

In *The Estate of Marriage*, volume 45 of Luther's Works, Martin Luther says:

“Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops and priests to their children, if they make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.” This tells us what a high calling and challenging responsibility Luther realized parents have as they bring up their children.

Discussion Questions: What are some of the best ways that parents and grandparents in your congregation could come to terms with this primary calling from God? How does sitting down together, discussing, learning, and growing into one's calling make sense in your eyes? If people realized there are valuable resources out there to help them, what might they do to start finding those resources? As a starter for grandparents, have any of them ever accessed Lesson 11 in Course One of www.adultssavingkids.com under the Curriculum tab? Do grandparents know of a valuable website: www.legacycoation.com?

Two stories in Acts 16 help us see how baptism of children is to happen. In verses 11 to 15 we learn of Lydia hearing the Gospel of Jesus and believing. Then she and all her household are baptized. We don't



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know how old the children in her household were, but they would have to be taught what being baptized means. Much of that seems to be left up to Lydia and her husband, if she had one. They would need to keep working with the children so they would come to realize and believe what God had done in their lives, who they were in God's eyes, and what it means to follow Jesus.

In that same chapter, in Acts 16:22-34 there is another similar story. In the town of Philippi, the apostle Paul and Silas have been unfairly accused of disturbing the town. They have been stripped, beaten and put in prison. There, at midnight, while they were praying and singing hymns, suddenly there is a violent earthquake. They could easily escape, but they stay put. The jailer, thinking they have escaped, is ready to kill himself, knowing death will be his fate for allowing the prisoners to escape. Paul calls out, "Do not harm yourself for we are all here". The jailer brings Paul and Silas outside and asks them, "What must I do to be saved?"

Paul now makes this reassuring statement, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." What are we hearing here? Does Paul believe that not only will this man's faith save him, but his faith will also save his household? How can this be? Paul and Silas share with this man and his family what God has sent them to share. The whole family is baptized. It will now be up to this father to keep sharing God's word and message with the children, so they know who they are as children of God. This sharing, praying, and modeling will need to be a long-term process.

Here is the big truth. The faith of the parent and the grandparent makes all the difference for the children. The children depend on the teaching of their parents to see who God is, what he has given them in love, and the work of Jesus that brought them God's gift of salvation. The children need to learn what the gift of prayer means and what living their lives as Christ's followers entails. They will also gain from the wisdom of their parents so they in turn can make wise decisions for their own lives. You can see how this builds a good foundation.

In all this, we must remember one thing. Whenever God calls someone to do something, God provides what is needed to fulfill that call. Every parent and grandparent needs to embrace this truth. They need to keep looking to God for the wisdom, courage, and resources to carry out what he has assigned to them.

Discussion Questions: What makes parents and grandparents so important in how their offspring come to see themselves? If a parent simply told his or her child one time, "You are a child of God," do you think this would do it for the child? What makes it important that a parent continually works with a child concerning their identity in Christ? How does a baptized infant come to be a true believer? If you are a parent or grandparent, have you been told in no uncertain terms what God is expecting of you in preparing your offspring for life? What do you see you could be doing as you proceed from here? What are ways that anyone who has a calling from God can keep accessing what God provides?

Here is a story that helps us understand what we are talking about. It is the story of four simple fishermen who became Jesus' disciples. Mark 1:16-20 tells it most succinctly. Jesus simply calls on Peter, his brother Andrew, James and his brother, John to follow him. He will make them fishers of people. They leave their nets, their boats, and their fishing careers. The last two leave their father



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Zebedee and take off. Immediately, they shift away from their former priorities and put their lives in the hands of Jesus. From now on, they will listen only to him. Do they know where they are going and what is going to happen? No!

What does this tell us? Faith starts somewhere. It is only the first step. What the future has in store for the four disciples is not laid out. Yes, these four men are told they will be fishers of men. But what does that mean? There is no clear explanation as to where this is going to lead. But a first step has been taken. A lasting commitment has been made. Now it is up to Jesus to bring in the knowledge, the insight, the awareness of what their lives will become. Whether it is Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus, Lydia's children, the jailer's family, or a baptized infant, it starts with a simple initial step down the road of faith. There is still much to learn, much of one's sin to deal with, learning to love others, and becoming wise in the Lord. It is all there waiting to happen in the days and years ahead in this journey of faith.

It all comes from having a new identity in Christ and being part of the community of faith. Being a child of God through Christ changes everything.

Discussion Questions: Even if we don't know what might be ahead of us, can we still commit ourselves to live out our Christian lives, claiming our new identity in Christ? In this process, why is it so important that we know who we are and stay faithful to that? Ask if people in the class will share something they have learned in their journey of being a Christian? How might the reality that some day one will be with a loving God forever come into play here?

Now we come to the challenge of sticking with our belief in our Christian identity in a variety of circumstances. Here is a very telling story. A woman shares what happened in her life. When she was 19 a young man asked her to marry him. She was young, inexperienced and taken by the possibility of a wedding. Later however, she found herself in an abusive marriage. She had not seen it coming. Like many women who are victims of domestic violence, she found herself in a trap from which she could see no escape. So, she lived with the abuse for ten years.

Finally, there came a time when she and her husband were sitting in their pastor's office. The pastor had become aware of what was going on. He looked at the husband and pointed to the wife. He spoke this question to the husband, "Don't you realize she is a child of God?" This question did not seem to faze the husband. However, for his wife, the question struck deeply into her heart. Yes, she said to herself, "I am a child of God." She suddenly recognized a truth that she had lost sight of. It propelled her to get out of that marriage. Her identity in Christ had emerged again in her heart and in her thinking. For the first time in years, she allowed the truth of what God had given her to become the motivation for her to take action. What God said about her became more important than what she was saying to herself. That is what made the difference for her. She left that marriage, not willing to take the constant abuse anymore.

It is a natural phenomenon that even as Christian people in Christ, we lose sight of who we are. Listen to what Martin Luther said: "**We need to hear the Gospel every day because we forget it every day.**" Then as a preacher giving a sermon every Sunday he realized, "**Every week I preach justification by faith to my people because every week they forget it.**" Is it any wonder our kids fail to remember



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who they are as Christians when confronted by smooth talking manipulators? This means the message needs to be stressed and repeated again and again. It must be put to use by practicing this essential tool in a variety of situations. For instance, a father tells his daughter going out on a date, “Remember whose you are.” When she hears this, she knows what he is talking about because of the prior conversations he had with her.

Discussion Questions: If a person is in an abusive relationship, what makes it difficult to get out of that relationship? How is it that some of the most important messages spoken to one’s life tend to be forgotten? As sinners, where do our minds tend to go? Who has God declared us to be? What are some things we could do to keep God and his gifts to us, continually in our lives?

Summary:

1. When it comes to raising a child in the Christian faith, the parents and grandparents are the irreplaceable ones who cause true faith to happen.
2. No matter how many times one is told what God has done and who one is in Christ, it can easily be forgotten.
3. Like the early disciples who followed Jesus, a person must step out in faith, not knowing what lies ahead. As they do this, they continue to learn and grow as faithful followers.
4. Concentrating every day on what God provides gives one solid footing for fending off manipulators, schemers, and anyone seeking to prey on the weak and cause them to go down harmful and hurtful paths.

Helpful Bible Passages:

Philippians 4:4-9

Colossians 3:1-17

Ephesians 6:10-20

Faith is taking the first step even when you do not see the whole staircase. Martin Luther King

Possible Prayer to Consider:

Holy Spirit of God, thank you for calling us to such important tasks in Christ’s kingdom. We know we are frail and ill-equipped for the mighty challenges before us, for working lovingly and wisely with our vulnerable yet growing offspring. Give us the grace, the wisdom, the talent, the courage and the resources we will need to help our young ones grow into what God has given them, in the adoption they have received into the family of God, in becoming true disciples of Jesus, in his name we pray. Amen.