

Supporting Young Believers



Readying for combat

The teen has very different needs than the little child, just as a young believer has different needs from the new believer. The difference might only be one year's time, but much has changed in that year. This chapter focuses on training Christian young believers.

Challenges for the young believer

While the steps toward maturity quickly bring the young believer into new situations which are

readying him or her for spiritual adulthood, they are not yet there. They need spiritual training to guide them through facing the least amount of distress as possible.

“I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one....I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:13-14).

John again furnishes us with special insight from 1 John 2:12-14. He has focuses us on the aspects of struggle, temptation and learning from God’s Word. The image of the person in spiritual armor from Ephesians 6 also comes to mind:

“Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:11-12).

The important thing to remember is that this is not just something certain believers go through but what all believers will eventually encounter–this comprises a large part of their training.

Their success at this second stage is closely related to how well they were cared for during the first stage. New believer training enables them to gain the right perspective that God is always near to help them. It also helps them gain a good

relationship with mentors. Without this awareness deeply planted inside them, they will not be able to easily trust God as they go through the young believer training. Doubts easily lead to discouragement and defeat, which in turn might bring despair, wondering if they ever will be victorious.

The knowledge that all spiritual ‘teens’ go through this stage makes it easier for the trainer. Let’s get to know new friends or students that come to our church; we can then begin to assess where they are on their spiritual journey. This will also help us develop special evaluative tools to know what the church can do to help them at their current stage of spiritual growth. What once was vague can be quite clear.

To be sure there are dangers of comparing oneself with others, but rightly presented, this spiritual growth chart can be used to help each believer evaluate him or herself and to encourage his or her companions—not judge. Our motive is to help people grow, not to criticize and compare.

The needs of the young believer

The new believer needs to learn basic truths about salvation, eternal assurance, etc. These truths build basic trust in God. John speaks about these. God our Father is there to care for us.

The young believer, however, must learn how to use God’s Word on his own. He should no longer be spoon fed but ought to feed himself with God’s

Word. This transition will have a direct relationship on our training. We must enable the believer to gain the skills to create on-going spiritual disciplines along with a sensitive and trusting heart ready to appropriate God's Word for themselves. For example, teaching people how to do inductive Bible studies will greatly help them in acquiring skills for more in depth studies, but we must remember not everyone has the same educational background for this.

The depth of the young believer's integration of God's Word into their lives will directly impact how well they learn how to ward off the evil one. Group teaching is possible here but mentoring is better for working with personal struggles. Establishing good working relationships enable us to monitor how people are doing through their different stages of development.



One's physical age can affect how quickly a believer might spiritually grow. A young child will

take much longer than an adult to go through the new believer stage. This has to do with their ability to process information and the way they interact with others.

The goals for the young believer

The length of this second stage of discipleship, therefore, can differ, but generally speaking, it should take about three years. Some, or should we say many, unfortunately never grown out of it. They have never mastered the needed lessons. Their length of knowing Christ cannot be a gauge of spiritual maturity. We can deduct from John that the young believer has several major things to learn:

- (1) Spiritually nurture themselves with God's Word (e.g. regular and helpful quiet times).
- (2) Comprehend key teaching from God's Word regarding areas such as victory over the devil through Jesus Christ's work on the cross.
- (3) Consistently discern and overcome temptations that come into their lives.

It is hard, if not impossible, to say when a person becomes a teen and leaves behind the teenage years and attitudes. Since it is vague in the physical realm, we can allow it to be vague in the spiritual world too. There will be those times when he or she is still spiritually young but acts mature, and vice-versa.

It is more important to focus on the main goals for the young believer and identify what must happen to reach those goals. Our Lord is able to use all sorts of situations that we encounter to train us. Nothing is off limits. Be a learner. He doesn't waste a moment as our Master Trainer.

Raising up godly mentors

Our stage two training book highlights how a believer learns how to use God's Word to grow at this young believer stage.⁸ Finding a godly mentor/teacher who believes we have overcome the evil one—not only in theory only but in a practical way is extremely helpful.

Because many believers haven't been rightly trained, they just do not master these needed lessons of faith. The trainer must learn how to take these individuals and focus them on where they need to be as believers. If the mentor has not learned how to overcome temptations in one or more areas of his or her life, then the younger believer will be trained to doubt that God can help them too. This zaps rather than strengthens one's faith.

I remember taking counseling courses and reading many pastoral training books to help me gain confidence so I could personally grow in the areas in which I was struggling. These are things I should have mastered far earlier in my life.

⁸ [Reaching Beyond Mediocrity: Being an Overcomer](#). (Both book and workbook/video training formats.)

There is a general unbelief in the church that believers can overcome the various personal struggles that they face. These struggles often have to do with the integrity of their lives and how they can focus on the needs of others rather than upon their own concerns. The 'victim' mentality presupposes there is no way of winning. Without a history of overcoming, mentors have no message of hope to offer but only unbelief and cover-up for those they train. Being open about one's failure is one matter, but has the mentor shared his or her victories?

Giving the greater vision

This is the reason we need to make this whole spiritual development chart available so that everyone, including mentors, can see where they are. It stirs teachers, pastors and trainers on to faith that God can help them with their sinful behaviors such as looking at porn (really adultery), spiritual pride, anger, etc. We repudiate the increasing tendency to send believers with problems to 'specialists' who subdue problems with drugs or "psycho-babble". This might keep them from extreme behavior but cripples their spiritual response system. Why not show them how to overcome these things and learn how to trust God for these matters? Our aim is to build up the discernment of young believers so that they can see the evil one tempting them and know exactly how to respond. When they consistently do this they will have moved into the third stage of

spiritual growth, one that will continue all their days on earth.

Without faith in God's work at each stage, we will not reach the end goal of full maturity. But if we believe, somehow and someday, that God has purposed me and others to move through the second stage of spiritual maturity, then we be able to trust Him to get through. Our faith in God's work in us will keep us from giving up.

Lesson

- The young believer has a different growth trajectory than the new believer.
- The young believer must learn how to nurture himself in God's Word so that he can overcome a variety of temptations.
- There is a crisis in the church because older believers are not convinced that they can overcome any and every temptation (they have not grown through this stage).
- Although the steps to overcoming temptation are fundamental, young believers along with their trainers often cannot clearly delineate how to do this, and so believers sink into an unbelieving, lukewarm state.

Memorize & Meditate

Ephesians 6:11-12

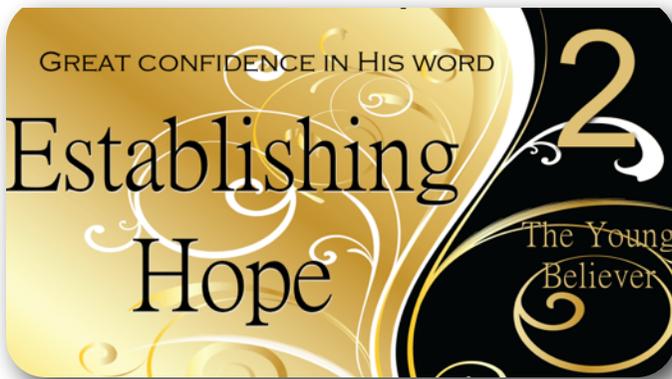
Assignment

- ➔ Why do you think you are or are not a young believer? Give some reasons.

- ➔ How well are you equipped to train a young believer to overcome every sort of temptation?

- ➔ Are there areas that you have not overcome or would not know how to help someone else? What are they? Ask the Lord to restore your belief that His people can overcome, and to show you how God's people can do this.

Equipping Young Believers



Let's discuss training for the young believer. Every little child will physically grow up, but many face a difficult time maturing. They can misunderstand so many things, especially if they grow up in unloving homes. The more dysfunctional their background, the more difficulties these young people face. What is true physically is relevant to the spiritually young believers.

Confusion abounds

Having trained and talked to many people preparing for ministry, I sense that not a few go to

seminary largely to work through personal problems. They think that theology will make their personal struggles disappear.⁹ They should have received the training to overcome these inner struggles in their churches and then, due to call, enter more official training.

Unfortunately, the training they need at this second stage of discipleship is missing in most churches, and for that matter, in most seminaries. Counseling courses and majors have come into existence largely because the church has not properly instructed God's people in these areas.

I wonder, however, if those who sit in many such classes are truly being helped. The reason is that there is a great lack of faith as to where the Christian should be or how he should get there. Many counselors teach that one should tolerate a little anger and anxiety, but this is adopting a perspective so different from what is given to us in the scriptures. We want to eliminate anger, not just to manage it.

God's goals are good

God has His goals and means, but the church has not adopted God's goals and does not rely on His means to help His people grow. The problem is not the world from which the new believers come but the lack of faith in the church and her leaders.

⁹ The answer is not theology but truth—truth believed upon. This problem again illustrates that what we know is not necessarily what we believe.

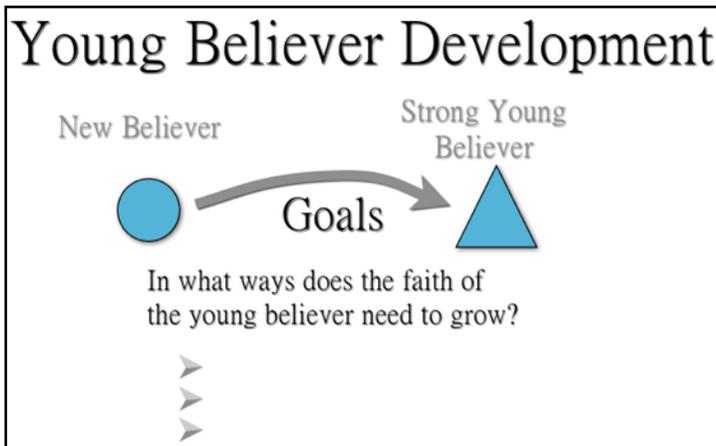
God wants all His people to receive great training so they can grow up into strong and godly people (see Ephesians 4:15-16). This training is not to be relegated to some professional with a state license in counseling. Believers increasingly assume one needs a doctorate degree to be able to help someone cope with basic spiritual struggles in life. This is so wrong.

Although churches should be training their people, many are not and therefore this instruction is needed in Bible Schools and seminaries. What pastor or missionary or Christian Educator, Youth Worker, single person, wife, etc. does not need to understand and live out righteous living? We all need to. Godly living is the core to Christ-like ministering. We need this teaching so that we can assure that all of God's people are spiritually strong and healthy.

Leaders also need training on how *The Life Core* needs to be integrated into their training ministries. They need to adopt God's goals of godly living and learn how to train others. Here are some goals of training the young believers. Each young believer needs to:

- Be fully equipped to spot temptation
- Understand the fundamental problem of temptation
- Observe how temptation relates to their sin nature and the world

- Acquire and use the truth to fight temptation
- Prioritize the place of forgiveness in their hearts
- Personally witness the power of God's Word



Faith accompanying our vision

John the Apostle stated the truth: young men have overcome the evil one. Both men and women of God have their victory secure. It is not something that could be, but something that is. When we allow the full power of God's Word into our lives, then our faith is strengthened and we can discern Satan's lies, apply the truth and stand firm.

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Again, we need to stress that this is all part of a larger life core process. Spiritual life was given to us that we could consistently win over temptation

(though that is not our end goal). Many counselors are not leading God's people to victory but instead only on how to cope with or to tolerate defeat. This is a far cry from God's purpose in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God wants to give us consistent victory. We must refuse to give the evil one any foothold in our lives.

Advantages of training

In the beginning, of course, we need to regularly return to the power of the cross to find forgiveness and restoration. This is simply reminding us of God's amazing grace.

As the believer endures fight after fight, however, he is beginning to see how the evil one pins him down. Training for this stage should focus on how to ward off the evil one's schemes and through the power of God's Word to stand strong.

By implementing this training with every student, church member, attendee, etc., we boost the faith of each believer. This is not a simple religious recitation of 'I believe' but learning how to take God's Word and use it to overcome the evil one.

Is this not the purpose of God for each believer's life? Why is it that most believers never get through this stage? Many pastors and teachers tell me that they are still at this second stage. If they are still there, then they have not yet matured in their faith to train others about how to escape, at

least in the areas they feel weak.¹⁰ Worse yet are those leaders which are convinced it is not possible to live godly lives and overcome temptation.

Learning how to train

You might be wondering how we can train these things? Where can we learn how to put these behaviors and characteristics into practice? The training is personally challenging but not complicated or expensive. The Apostle John has done a wonderful job at targeting the key areas on which we need to focus.

The basic principles are explained in the first four chapters of our [*Reaching Beyond Mediocrity: Being an Overcomer.*](#) It is built on the assumption that God has already made us overcomers and that God is working on our behalf in this spiritual warfare in which we're engaged to better reflect His holy image. The later chapters use these principles to show how they empower us to overcome major personal problems like anger, lust and pride.

If one does not learn how to properly handle 'little' sins, such sins will become occupiers, eventually destroying him or her. Think of the many pastors that have blown up their ministries. The needed

¹⁰ This is one big reason that the church goes from strong to weak. What one leader does not learn to overcome, he tolerates and promotes lesser standards to ease his conscience.

protection takes place deep in the heart through God's Word. "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

Growing up

This training does not take long. Just as a person should grow through the teenage years, a young believer should grow to full maturity in just a matter of a few years.

I generally say it takes about three years to grow through this stage. The principles can be learned more quickly if the disciple is already knowledgeable of God's Word. The problem is not time or expense. The biggest problem is to convince teachers and pastors to believe this is what God wants to do, and can easily do, in each believer's life. We are not suggesting some type of magical or miracle healing process be followed, but are putting forth clear biblical principles that work!

Clarifying our vision

Think for a moment. What is your personal belief about average believers? Do you think they can grow into full spiritual maturity? Are they able to withstand every temptation?

What if we personally could believe that God wants us to consistently overcome every temptation so that we do not need to fall; would that not be an awesome bit of news? The church

is lukewarm because it has given up hope that real change can occur.

What kind of people are we graduating from our training schools and seminaries? What kind of leaders are we producing in our churches? Are we satisfied with their spiritual maturity? In most cases, the unfortunate answer is 'no'. The reason is simple. We have not trained them in the manner that God's word directs. Due to their learned unbelief and defeat, they will in turn train others to not seek for personal victory. It is imperative that our leaders learn to live by the truth of God's Word and to teach others to do likewise.

Our church congregations are in such a mess, not because they can't change, but because they do not believe they can be changed. Although addictions form extra barriers to overcome, they can likewise be leaped over as we consistently apply these principles with a heart of faith.

Implementation of God's vision

How do we implement this in our schools and churches? Some instruction can be taught in classes, but small group and individual mentoring is key to identifying personal struggles and then being able to show how the victory process works.

People often do not like to publicly acknowledge their weaknesses and sins. They might not have problem talking about certain sinful problems, but others are hidden behind the scenes, including negative reactions and sinful thought patterns.

Many sinful responses like an unforgiving spirit are embedded into our lives early on from our childhood so that our familiarity with them overrides their warnings of pain, emotional withdrawal and mistrust.

How do I know these things? God's Word has told us so. I have seen what happens when we do not live by His greater principles—our lives are characterized by defeat and failure rather than testimony and victory. On the other hand I have experienced the awe at seeing the power of His truth working itself out in my life and others. Personal victory goes a long way in establishing effective trainers. You can't really pass something on that you don't have yourself. Schools of ministry along with churches must establish victorious trainers to implement the 2 Timothy 2:2 process.

God is cheering us on to victory. He has made it so we can overcome; now we need to obey Him, grow through this stage and move onto maturity where He has greater plans for us. The quality and quantity of our fruitful service is greatly dependent on how well we do at this second stage.

If the church would have these truths integrated into their training for all believers, God's people would be strong in their faith! Revival would be at hand. Families would be restored. There would be plenty of great leaders. Without proper shaping of the heart and mind, though, we are only perpetuating our problems while the evil one's

dark ways and mindset seeps into our lives. True training must include the establishing of strong godly lives, without which there is no true love.

Lesson

- Many believers go about as defeated Christians because they are not charmed by the power and glory of God's Word working in their lives.
- God has given the church the means to live holy lives by regularly overcoming sin and affirming the truth of the cross for her failures.
- When the church embraces the faith to overcome temptation and sin, then she will learn how to depend on her powerful God and find revival.
- Training must come from leaders who have seen the power of God working in their lives.

Memorize & Meditate

1 John 5:4

Assignment

- ➔ Identify one weakness in your life and the steps needed to overcome it. Are you actively working on overcoming that problem? Can you communicate this process to others?

- ➔ Name several major sins you see in others. Explain the steps needed to help each of them gain hope and faith to step out of those sins.

- ➔ Does your church or school tolerate immaturity and sinful attitudes/behaviors in the leaders it is developing? How should this problem be approached?