

The ABC'S

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. (Hebrews 5:12)

Imagine a high school where the students did not know the basic principles of reading, writing and arithmetic. Although they had been attending classes for years, the students could not read a book, write a composition or do elementary math. Many of us would feel compelled to agitate for dramatic changes in the system that permitted such a mockery of the educational endeavor.

Now imagine a church where people have been sitting on the pews for years and yet do not know or practice the most rudimentary principles of the spiritual life. They are unable to define or defend the basic tenets of the faith and their lives are indistinguishable from people who never attend church. The author of Hebrews faced exactly this situation when he wrote to believers in the first century. Though they had been Christians long enough to be mature and fruitful, they needed someone to again come and remind them of their spiritual ABCs. I'm not sure if the author was mad or sad. But it is obvious that he was shocked. Brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Many of us have sat on these pews at LCC for years yet still don't practice the most elementary principles of God's truth. By this point we ought to be teachers, deacons, elders, fruitful witnesses, godly in character... and yet some of us look like 12th graders scrunching up to fit into a 1st grade desk! For those of us stuck in elementary school, let me humbly offer my own version of the Four Rs of spiritual education.

READ. Never in history have there been more Bibles, books and magazines to encourage growth in spiritual maturity. And never before have I been more aware of intellectual laziness among the people of God. In a day like ours, ignorance is simply inexcusable. Read as if your very soul depended on it. It does! Read as if the future of the world was hanging in the balance. It is! Turn off your TV, video games, internet, I-pod and cell phone and read, read, read.

RELATE. No one survives in the Christian life who tries to make it alone. Without webs of meaningful relationships our growth will be stunted and we will never learn the meaning of love, the most basic element of the Christian faith. Get connected with other believers in a way that transparency, honesty, accountability, and prayer define those relationships. The best place to begin is in our own families.

REPRODUCE. The first commandment is "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28). An unmistakable mark of spiritual maturity is to stop asking *What can I get?* and start asking *What can I give?* Our focus turns from self to others. The deepest joys of redemption are discovered when the Holy Spirit makes us creative and fruitful for the glory of God.

RISK. Many churches today are full of pew potatoes, people who have grown obese listening to sermons but never putting them into practice. We will remain stuck in spiritual immaturity until we dare to get out of the pew and exercise our faith by taking risks for God. Gathering on Sunday for worship should be the spiritual equivalent of a football huddle. We pause, take a deep breath, encourage one another, get our signals, refocus on the game plan and then rush back to our positions so we can put it all into action during the coming week.