

GROW (part 1)
Are You on a Path Producing Spiritual Growth?
10.14.2018

Introduction

Before I get into this, let me talk about who is listening.

You may be listening and you are not a Christian, but you have interest. My hope is that this encourages you to pursue a relationship with Jesus, because that relationship can change how you live your life! A relationship with Jesus can change you!

You may be listening, and you are a Christian. Maybe you're a new Christian. This will help you detect the phases of growth you will go through. Don't compare yourself with someone who has been with Jesus for a long time. It takes time to grow! Give yourself some space and grace to change.

You may be listening and you've been a Christian for a long time: 5 years, 10 years, 20 plus years. You will be able to see if you are growing, or if you've gotten stuck along the way. This will move you to feel a bit uncomfortable with where you are, and it should!

A current relationship with Jesus should regularly change you!

The case for seasons of spiritual growth in a person's life...

Ephesians 4:8 (NKJV)

Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NKJV)

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (13) till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (14) that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, (15) but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— (16) from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

vs 12: for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Notice here that my job as pastor/teacher is to equip you to go and minister to others.

If all we do is come to a meeting, enjoy some worship, hear some teaching, go home, and do not seek to minister to others, then I have failed in my job!

Are you leaving here and in your everyday world, seeking to apply what you hear?

notice vs 13: till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

My goal is that you grow into a mature believer, and become so solid in your relationship with Jesus that nothing moves you. You are living from your relationship with Jesus, and no matter what happens on your job, in your family, or in your personal life, you stay the course, you walk by faith, and you don't need anybody to prop you up!

vs 14: that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

(NLT) - Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

My goal is that you are able to easily discern the false from the true when it come to the Word, regardless of where it comes from.

I've seen people over the years that hear this and hear that, and they get distracted from following Jesus with all their heart. When we grow up, we will know God for ourselves through the Word and by the Holy Spirit, and we can stand firm when challenges and hardship comes.

For instance, I had a couple a few years ago that got distracted because they heard a "new teaching that tithing was under the law, and now that we are in Grace, we don't need to tithe, and they left our church.

I've had others that heard that under the Grace of God you don't need to repent of sin in your life because all is good, everything is already forgiven, and they got onto the wrong path.

There is a lot of info out there these days, and it's easy to get "off" and get sidelined.

My goal is that you grow up so you will never be sidetracked by deception...

Notice in verse 15: but, speaking the truth in love, *may grow up* in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

It is speaking the truth in love that helps us to grow up spiritually.

1 Peter 2:1-2- NKJV

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

The reason I preach the Word is so that you will grow and become self sufficient in God. You'll be strong when challenges come.

God places the ministry offices in the body of Christ so that we can grow spiritually. And any healthy thing is growing!

Growth means change.

Anything healthy is growing and changing. Growth means change. If you're not changing, you're not growing.

Naturally or spiritually, once you're born, you should grow - and change should be constant!

John 3:1-8 (NLT)

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. (2) After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you." (3) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." (4) "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" (5) Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. (6) Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. (7) So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' (8) The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

1 Peter 1:23-25 (NKJV)

Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, (25) But the word of the Lord endures forever.”

1 Peter 1:23-25 (MSG)

Your new life is not like your old life. Your old birth came from mortal sperm; your new birth comes from God's living Word. Just think: a life conceived by God himself! (24) That's why the prophet said, The old life is a grass life, its beauty as short-lived as wildflowers; Grass dries up, flowers droop, (25) God's Word goes on and on forever. This is the Word that conceived the new life in you.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (AMPC)

Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!

Once new life begins, growth and change should never stop!

We should be changing with how we see ourselves. Instead of depressed, forlorn, forsaken, forgotten, abused, hurt, we learn to grow out of that into a person that knows that he or she is loved, favored, blessed, cared for, and is independent in God!

We should be changing in how we see others. Our relationships should change. We should grow from being suspicious of everyone to believing and choosing to see the best in others.

We should be changing in how we relate to others. We should grow from thinking about what others are thinking about us, self-consciousness - to thinking of how we can bless and add value to each person we meet. Instead of needing to get something from others, we learn to give, to bless, to help. We go from needing to get to enjoying giving to others! We practice the golden rule - to do to other what we want them to do to us! And boy does America need to see this now!

We know something is deeply wrong if our child fails to go through the stages of growth.

Spiritually, we also go through stages of growth. And just as in physical growth, if we are not changing and going through the stages of growth, something is wrong!

Natural growth and spiritual growth parallel each other.

My wife Susan and I have four grown children. We learned a lot about the stages of growth while they were growing up!

We found that at each stage of growth, their responsibilities changed and our responsibilities changed.

My goal as a parent was to raise children who, when they were grown, were:

- 1) conscience-driven and did the right thing because it was the right thing to do, and who were sensitive to God,
- 2) who were good citizens who were self-sufficient and did not depend on others to do for them what they should do themselves.

As our children grew from babyhood to childhood to adulthood, Susan and I had to be aware of where to draw the boundary lines of what we should do for them, and what we should expect them to do for themselves.

As I have thought about those years, I have found that there are parallels between natural growth and spiritual growth. Many of the same principles apply.

Where am I in my spiritual growth?

I want to take you on a journey through the stages of spiritual development, and I want you to ask yourself - where am I?

There are three very basic stages of spiritual development in the scriptures, and I want to take us through these three stages and look at the characteristics of each one.

The three stages of spiritual growth are:

1. Babyhood - lots of dependence, few habits
2. Childhood - exploring independence, forming habits
3. Adulthood - independent, well-formed habits

It's possible to stop growing spiritually and get stuck, making no progress.

Hebrews 5:11-14 (NKJV)

...of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Hebrews 5:11 (God's Word Translation) We have a lot to explain about this. But since you have become too lazy to pay attention, explaining it to you is hard.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (13) For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (14) But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Hebrews 5:11-14 (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. (12) 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. (13) For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. (14) Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

There are many believers today who should be farther along spiritually than they are, but they have gotten distracted by other things, made wrong choices, and growth was stymied.

The good news is that you can always get back on the track of spiritual growth - if you want to!

When we come back next week, we will start talking about babyhood and start defining how it looks.

Action Points:

1. Am I growing? Can I see change in my spiritual life from last year to this year?
2. Am I expecting others to do for me now what I should be doing for myself?
3. What can I change right now that will begin to create a pattern of spiritual growth in my life?

