SPIRITUAL GROWTH

OUR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL GROWTH

> *Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> 2 Peter 1:5-8 (NASB)
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> *He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.*
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> Colossians 1:28

New life is a beautiful, exciting thing. Bring a newborn baby into a room, and chances are all attention will turn to him or her. But as much as we love and adore babies, we don't expect or even want them to stay babies. We expect them to grow, mature, and develop.

The same is true of spiritual birth. Someone being born into the family of God is a beautiful, exciting thing. But we expect a new believer to grow, mature, and develop in his/her relationship with Christ. In this session, we want to talk about how we can grow and mature as followers of Christ.

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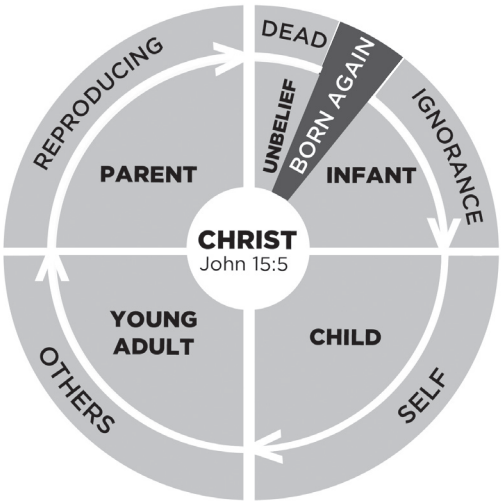

Everyone matures at his or her own pace. As you evaluate your relationship with Christ, where would you say you are spiritually: infant, child, young adult, parent? Why?

Before we look at how-to's, processes, tools, resources, and disciplines, let's take a big picture look at spiritual growth. What are we actually talking about? The important thing to remember is that we are talking first and foremost about our relationship with Jesus Christ. Everything we do to grow spiritually is for the purpose of having a deeper, life-changing relationship with Jesus. Our goal is not to do more or be better; it is to love Him and experience His love deeper. While there will be external changes as we grow spiritually, those changes are driven by the internal changes that come through our relationship with Him. To illustrate, look at the following graphic:

Who is God?	What has He done?	Who are we?	What do we do?

If we primarily focus on the right column, doing the "right things," we are at risk of defining our sense of identity on behaving a certain way. This leads to a legalistic, works-based relationship with Jesus which

communicates that we are loved if and when we do good stuff. But the truth is that we need to live from left to right. As we learned in the Gospel session, we are broken people in need of God's grace. We can never be good enough to earn God's love and favor. God, who is gracious, has given us His Son, Jesus to be our Savior. (Who is God? What has He done?)

When we receive His sacrifice for us, we are fully accepted as God's children and completely loved by the Father. (Who are we?) Therefore, we don't do good things in order to earn the Father's approval or love, but we do it out of a grateful love for Him. And not only that, we begin doing those good things because He changes our hearts and makes us love what He loves and desire what He desires for us. (What do we do?)

So spiritual growth and maturity is really just growing deeper in our understanding of what Christ has done for us, what He does in us, and then living in that truth with grateful appreciation and love.

Having said that, what can we do to nurture and cultivate this relationship? The first key to deepening a relationship is spending time together. If you have a close friend, you know that your friendship wasn't deep and close from day one. It deepened and grew as you spent more time together. And as you spent that time together, you got to know each other better. You learned each other's likes and dislikes. You shared with one another your dreams, goals, and passions. Most probably that happened as you talked with each other.

How do we have those conversations with Jesus? Spending time in the Bible and in prayer. If you are around church much, you will hear a lot about Bible study and prayer, maybe even having daily quiet times. These are all just ways of spending time with Christ.

The Bible

The Bible is the primary way God talks with us. As we read it, we can see God – His passions, His purposes, His character – and we learn how everything He has done and continues to do is driven by those. It is how He reveals His heart to us. The Bible is full of facts, information, stories, truths, and instructions. But it is primarily God's communication of Himself to us; so as we read it, we need to look for what it tells us about who God is and what He has done.

Prayer

Prayer is how we respond and reveal our hearts to God. You may say, "If God knows everything, why do I need to tell Him what is in my heart or on my mind?" Because when you talk to Him, He becomes more real to you. And as you share your heart with Him, it will help

you understand better how you see Him and how you see yourself. For many people, prayer seems mysterious and even a bit mystical. While it is a spiritual exercise, when you see it as part of a conversation with God it becomes less mysterious and will actually become more natural for you. When you pray, you don't have to use any special "spiritual" words. Just talk to God, tell Him what you are thinking and feeling, ask Him questions, and share your needs and concerns with Him. To hear from Jesus regarding how to pray, read Matthew 6:9-13.

The Holy Spirit

To make this whole communication work, God places within us His Holy Spirit to open our eyes to the Scriptures and to intercede for us as we pray. So even the developing of our relationship with Him is not dependent on our abilities, but on His gracious work for us. How has God used His Word and prayer to draw you closer to Him?

What has helped you most to spend time with God on a regular basis? What obstacles do you run into the most? How do you overcome them?

BiLD Training Center | Baseline

There are tools and resources that can help us grow and mature in Christ. These are not things that grow us and mature us, they are tools that help us grow and mature. One resource is Baseline through the Biblical Institute for Leadership Development (BiLD) a ministry of Fellowship where people are prepared and equipped for leadership in life and ministry. Baseline is a training track of eight core training experiences. These eight trainings are meant to provide a starting point for growing into a prepared and equipped spiritual leader and are focused in the areas of Bible and Theology and Life and Ministry. You can learn more about these trainings at fellowshipnwa.org/bild.

Other Spiritual Disciplines to Nurture Your Soul

There are many books and articles about developing the practice of other spiritual disciplines that nurture our spiritual development and growth. Below is a partial list compiled from other sources for you to consider. They are divided into two categories: The Disciplines of Abstaining (letting go) and The Disciplines of Activity (engaging).

Disciplines of Abstaining

Solitude	Spending time alone to be with God
Silence	Removing noisy distractions to hear from God
Fasting	Choosing to go without food for a period of time to find greater nourishment from God
Simplicity	Learning to live a simple, focused life
Secrecy	Choosing to perform acts of service for God without others knowing that it is you performing them
Sacrifice	Giving of your resources beyond your excess or abundance to increase your need for God's provision

Disciplines of Activity

Study	Time to not only read the Word, but to think on it, contemplate it, and meditate on its meaning
Worship	Offering praise and adoration to God
Fellowship	Mutual caring and ministry in the Body of Christ
Serving	Engaging in tangible acts that bless others in an area of their need

Remember, the value of these disciplines lies only in their ability to deepen and strengthen your relationship with Christ. Their purpose is to heighten your awareness of your dependence on God and increase your appreciation for who He is and what He has done.