

GROWING DEEPER WITH GOD, PART 2

As I was thinking one night last week, the thought occurred to me that life is similar to the stock market. Sometimes things seem to be going well, and sometimes they don't. And it varies from day to day. The fact that yesterday was a good day guarantees nothing for tomorrow. And the fact that today is a terrible day with many losses doesn't mean that it won't all turn around and do good tomorrow. The stock market can be very volatile, and so can life. That's why Prov 27:1 tells us "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." You never know what the next day will bring.

Another way life is like the stock market is that you only have a limited amount to invest. You may wish you could invest heavily in a number of stocks or mutual funds, but you can't invest what you don't have. In life, we only have a certain amount of time and energy to invest, and we have to decide where that time and energy will go. You have to decide which activities are the most important and give your best to those things.

One of the things we have the opportunity to invest in is our relationship with God. Each one of us have to make the choice as to how much of our lives we are going to invest in getting to know God better . Going deeper with God requires investment. It requires choosing to give Him priority time in our lives so that our relationship with Him can develop. That is a choice we must make today, tomorrow and every day for the rest of our lives. When we stop investing, we stop growing.

WHAT GROWTH DOES

1. Growth Demonstrates The Reality Of Christ To The Unbeliever

Like it or not, as believers in Jesus Christ, we represent God. We don't have a choice – it goes with the territory.

2 Corinthians 3:2-3, "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. ³You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

Every believer launches his or her own advertising campaign, which will positively or negatively impact the cause of Christ. The people of the world are not looking up to find God; they are looking around at those who profess to know him.

What is it that impresses the unbelievers? Is it a beautiful building? We have been working hard on all that is involved in building our new building, and we are very close to seeing some exciting things take place. But we don't need to fool ourselves. As much as we need a building and as much as I believe it will help us, unbelievers are not going to drive by, see the new building and say, "look at that new building. I think I will become a Christian." Buildings are going up all around us all the time. Will unbelievers be impressed by the fact that we meet regularly? The fact that we assemble regularly also means nothing. All kinds of organizations meet every week, and many of them meet more than once a week. Neither will unbelievers stand in awe of the fact that we have Bibles and read them. Many religions in the world have their own holy writings. As right as those things are, they do little to impress the average unbeliever. But when they see a life that is changed by the power of God, that gets their attention.

2. Growth Gives Excitement To The Christian Life

There is no excitement in going through a religious ritual. Who cares how many times you kneel, recite a rote prayer, read something in a book or go through some other kind of prescribed ritual? If that's all you have and you do it week after week, you probably won't be exceptionally excited about it. On the other hand, if God is teaching you and you see your life being transformed by His Spirit, that's exciting! Every person you see come to Christ is a reminder of the time when you were saved, and when you see that person beginning to go deeper with God, it rekindles the fire within your own heart.

WHAT GROWTH LOOKS LIKE

It's pretty easy to understand when you are growing in certain areas such as your career, your golf game or anything else. But what about our spiritual lives? How can we tell if we're making progress there?

1. Spiritual Growth Makes Me More Humble

In Matthew 5 we have the record of Jesus' teaching in what is called the "Beatitudes." Jesus went up on mountain, began to teach and told the people how to have a blessed life. The first "Blessing" is seen in vs 3.

"Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The words "poor in spirit means you realize how insufficient you are and how much you need God to do what you need to do. Alex Haley, the author of Roots, has a picture in his office of a turtle sitting on top of a fence. The lesson of the picture is simple: If you see a turtle on a fence post, you know he had some help getting there. Humble believers know where their help comes from. They know it is God who enables them to sit on

life's fences. And the closer you get to God, the more you realize that. That's because the greater God becomes in your thinking, the less you see yourself to be by comparison.

2. Growth Results In More Love For Jesus

As you look at the church in the world today, you see that some have reduced Christianity to a set of rituals. Others have tried to make it into formulas. If I do this, then God will do that. If you were to ask a Christian in the first century what Christianity was all about, he would tell you that Christianity is all about loving Jesus.

When Peter wrote his 1st letter, he spoke of his reader's love for Jesus.

1 Peter 1:9 says: " Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,"

Can you love someone you can't see? Can a blind child love his parents? Sure. When the Holy Spirit controls your life, one of the things he does is to produce love for the unseen Christ, and the more you grow, the greater that love becomes.

3. Spiritual Growth Results In A Greater Desire To Be Around Those Who Are Like Jesus

Have you ever liked being around someone because they reminded you of someone else in your life that you loved deeply? I have found myself at times staring at someone I didn't know because that person reminded me of my father, my grandmother or some other person from my past. And as I looked at that person, I was reminded of how it used to be when I still had that person in my life. Spiritual believers want to be with other spiritually minded believers is the fact that when they are, they sense the Spirit of Jesus coming through that person.

4. Spiritual Growth Results In More Love For Others

John is known as the apostle of love. As you read 1st John, you hear him telling us over and over again to love one another.

"Dear friends, "let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God" 1 John 4:7

The apostle John was a very loving, sensitive man, but it was not always that way. Earlier on, he and his brother James earned the name, "the sons of thunder." An illustration of their fiery temperaments is seen in Luke 9.

Luke 9:52-56, "And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; ⁵³but the people there did not welcome him, because he was

heading for Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" ⁵⁵But Jesus turned and rebuked them, ⁵⁶and they went to another village.

There's not a lot of love and gentleness there. What happened to John to transform him into the loving man he became? He grew deeper with God. That's what spiritual growth does. It causes you to love others more. There is no way you could say you are becoming more like God unless you are growing in love because God, as to His character, is love. If you're not growing in love, you're not growing deeper with God.

5. Spiritual Growth RESULTS IN MORE CONTENTMENT

Sitting in prison with most everything taken from him, the apostle Paul wrote the following words in

Phil 4:12, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

Contentment is not something that comes because of all you have. John Rosemond, a family psychologist—likes to take informal polls of parents. Whenever he's in a foreign culture, he'll ask parents, "Do your kids complain about boredom?" Without exception he's always been told "no" outside of this country.

Rosemond also likes to question parents who raised their kids in the forties and fifties. He asks: "When you were raising your kids back then, did you hear them complain about boredom?" The typical response: "Rarely." In another of his little surveys, Rosemond asks middle-aged parents, "How many toys did you have growing up?" The answers range from zero to ten, but mostly these folks respond with something like, "Toys? We took a cardboard box, and we made something out of it." In contrast, Rosemond says the typical American child of five years of age has accumulated 250 toys! They're accumulating almost one toy per week. They're bored.

Contentment, whether you are a child or an adult, doesn't come from having more things. Contentment comes from within. It is a mark of growth because the closer you get to God, the more you believe Him to be sufficient in every circumstance.

WHAT DO I DO TO GROW?

1. Don't Compare Yourself With Others

Often, when we think of someone as being a “mature” Christian, we do so by comparing that person to other Christians. We look around the church, identify those whom seem to be out ahead of the flock and label them as being spiritually mature. That being true, if you have a church made up of carnal believers, none of which have ever grown much, spiritual maturity becomes defined by those who are the least carnal. Brother James is thought to be spiritually mature because he only yells at his wife 2 or 3 times a week, and it has been over 3 months since he beat her! You can't judge spiritual maturity by comparing yourself to other believers. Jesus is the only One you can rightly compare yourself to.

2. Continually Surrender Your Will To God

As human beings we live with an innate desire to control our surroundings. From the earliest moments of life we struggle for control of our world - first with parents, then with teachers and employers, and too often with God. Without thinking about it our lives are steered by how I feel and the constant desire for what I want, what I need, and what I deserve. If you are to grow deeper with God, you have to be continually giving up the most important thing in your life-your own will.

(Romans 12:1) - The apostle Paul puts it this way,

“present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”

The idea of surrender is the struggle for control. This idea of who is in control of your life is the most critical decision of your life. As long as you believe that you know best and that you are in control, you will remain spiritually immature. Surrender to God is the door you walk through to get to the deeper life and experience the fullness of God's presence.

What kind of investment are you making in this thing of spiritual growth? There is no question as to the kind of investment God wants you to make. God's desire is that you grow deep in Him. He wants to be the One you share the most intimate things in your life with. He wants you to share the times when the stock of life is high, and He wants to share the times when the bottom has just fallen out. He wants to be your constant companion through this journey we call life.