



# HOW TO BE A GROWING CHRISTIAN

Preaching and Teaching Resources

ADRIAN ROGERS





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# How to be a Growing Christian

**SERMON REFERENCE:** 1 John 2:12-14

**LWF SERMON NUMBER:** #2484

A growing Christian is a maturing Christian because spiritual maturity is becoming more like Jesus. Some Christians are saved but aren't growing. We will never know true victory and joy unless we learn how to be growing Christians.

In 1 John 2, the Apostle John compares spiritual maturity to three stages in our physical lives.

"I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14).

New Christians experience the thrilling wonders of spiritual childhood. They are "all tomorrows; no yesterdays." However, children live in the realm of their feelings. They can be selfish and self-centered; uncooperative.

We are only young once; but if we aren't careful, we can be spiritually immature for a long time. If we grow, we'll experience the triumphant warfare of manhood.

Abiding in the Word of God strengthens us for warfare. Obeying God and serving others transforms us into workers and warriors, equipped to combat the enemy.

Next comes the tested wisdom of fatherhood.

Adrian Rogers says, "When we spend time with someone, we become like that someone."

Because we view God as our Father, the goal of spiritual maturity is to become spiritual fathers (and mothers). Mature Christians reproduce through soul-winning and discipleship.

What are the means of maturity?

- There must be the miracle of life; we must be saved.
- It takes time. There is no instant maturity; we experience growth through time spent with Jesus Christ.
- Growth requires nourishment; we have to feed on the Word of God.
- Growth demands discipline and exercise; we serve God and others.

Remember: we don't substitute fatherhood for young manhood, nor young manhood for childhood.

In a father, there ought to be the vision and zeal of a young man. In a young man, there ought to be the wonder of childhood. All three stages are legitimate; a mature Christian is a composite of them all.

## Life Application

It takes life, time, nourishment, and exercise to grow. Adrian Rogers offers this advice: "Don't worry about what you can't do. Find out what you can do and begin to do it, and you will grow."



# How to Be a Growing Christian

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## 1) INTRODUCTION

- a) Are you a growing Christian?
  - i) Do you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ better today than you did last year or last week?
- b) There are some people who are saved, but they're not growing.
- c) We will never know the kind of victory and joy that we ought to know unless we learn to be growing Christians.
- d) To be a growing Christian refers to maturity.
  - i) We grow on toward maturity.
  - ii) You can be young only once, but you can be immature for a long time.
- e) Hebrews 6:1
- f) It is possible to be spiritually healthy and not mature.
  - i) A young child can be healthier than a 50-year-old man, but he is not mature.
  - ii) If you are a newborn babe in Christ and rejoicing in the Lord Jesus, then you are healthy, but that does not mean you are mature.
  - iii) You may be gifted but not mature.
    - (1) 1 Corinthians 1:7
- g) Maturity is Christ-likeness.
  - i) Maturity is being like Jesus.
  - ii) Ephesians 4:13
    - (1) The word "perfect" here does not mean sinless but mature.

## 2) THE MARKS OF MATURITY

- a) Maturity is a life-long process, and we actually go through three major stages.
  - i) 1 John 2:12-14
    - (1) In these verses, the apostle John speaks of childhood, young manhood and fatherhood.
    - (2) Each of us are in one of those three categories.
      - (a) God wants to move us in progression through these stages until we come to the fatherhood stage.
- b) The thrilling wonders of childhood.
  - i) This is the mark of the childlike Christian.
  - ii) 1 John 2:12
  - iii) When someone becomes a newborn babe in Christ, he is thrilled at knowing Jesus.
    - (1) All of his sins have been forgiven.
    - (2) He is all tomorrows and no yesterdays.
  - iv) The little child lives in the realm of his feelings.
    - (1) He hasn't lost the wonder yet.



- v) Little children are wonderful, but we don't want them to stay little children.
  - (1) Little children can be lazy, rude, selfish, uncooperative and mean.
- vi) A failing church is a church where everyone is a mature Christian.
  - (1) This would mean that people are not being saved day by day.
  - (2) Once someone is saved, at that moment they are a child in Christ.
  - (3) The church should be a maternity ward for new Christians, but it is sad when some stay in the maternity ward for the rest of their lives until it becomes a nursing home and they never mature.
  - (4) Someone once said that to cease to be better is to cease to be good.
- c) The triumphant warfare of manhood.
  - i) 1 John 2:13-14
    - (1) The apostle John calls those who have come from childhood to manhood workers and warriors.
  - ii) They are workers in the church.
    - (1) They no longer have to be served, but they have learned to serve.
  - iii) They are also warriors in the church.
    - (1) The Word of God has made them strong.
    - (2) 1 John 2:14
  - iv) The devil wants to keep us in the childhood stage.
    - (1) He doesn't want us to be strong.
    - (2) He doesn't want us to be workers or warriors.
  - v) We can only be made strong by the Word of God.
- d) The tested wisdom of fatherhood.
  - i) 1 John 2:13-14
  - ii) The father stage is maturity where we have grown on.
  - iii) We think of God, not as a child or as a young man, but as Father.
    - (1) Matthew 6:9
  - iv) The goal of our lives is to be Christ-like, which is really to be like God the Father.
    - (1) John 14:9
    - (2) When we spend enough time with someone, we begin to think and act like they do.
    - (3) When we spend time with someone, we become like that someone.
  - v) What do fathers do?
    - (1) Fathers reproduce through soul winning and discipleship.
    - (2) A father not only meets his own needs, but he also provides for the needs of others.
    - (3) Fathers have wisdom.
      - (a) Do people go to you when they have a heartache, a tear, a fear or a problem?
        - (i) If so, then you have come to the fatherhood stage of maturity.
- e) As we grow up, we do not substitute fatherhood for young manhood, and we do not substitute young manhood for childhood.
  - i) All three stages are legitimate, and a father is a composite of them all.
    - (1) In a father, there ought to be the vision and zeal of a young man.
    - (2) In a young man, there ought to be the wonder of childhood.
  - ii) We do not grow from one stage to another; we just add each stage on.



- iii) If we are perfectly whole, all of these stages will be in us.
- f) The apostle John, who wrote these passages, had to grow in maturity.
  - i) When John was saved, he was mean and nasty; and he stayed that way until he grew.
    - (1) He had a violent disposition.
      - (a) Mark 3:17
        - (i) His nickname was “Son of Thunder.”
      - (2) He was selfish.
        - (a) Mark 10:37
      - (3) He was prejudiced.
        - (a) Luke 9:54-55
      - (4) He was intolerant.
        - (a) Luke 9:49-50
    - ii) John grew up; and when he wrote the Gospel of John, he was the disciple who leaned upon Jesus.
      - (1) John never even mentioned his own name.
        - (a) John 13:23
      - (2) No longer is John seeking the chief place.
      - (3) John is no longer prejudiced.
        - (a) Acts 8:14-15
          - (i) The first time John prayed, he asked for fire to come down upon the people.
          - (ii) The second time he prayed, he asked God to bless the people and to fill them with the Holy Spirit.
      - (4) He is no longer intolerant.
        - (a) 1 John 1:7
    - iii) John was changed and transformed.

### 3) THE MEANS OF MATURITY

- a) There must be the miracle of life.
  - i) We can't begin to grow until we have life.
  - ii) We must first get saved; become a Christian.
- b) There must be the passing of time.
  - i) There is no instant maturity.
  - ii) God wants us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
  - iii) Secret of maturity is spending time; we're not going to mature overnight.
- c) Growth requires nourishment.
  - i) We have to feed on the Word of God.
  - ii) 1 Peter 2:2
    - (1) There is no way that we can grow without taking nourishment, and our nourishment is the Word of God.
  - iii) We need to feed upon the Word, not merely read the Word, but ponder over it and apply it.
    - (1) Jeremiah 15:16
  - iv) Many Christians read the Bible like it is a recipe book, then they never eat the meal.
- d) Growth demands the discipline of exercise.



- i) Hebrews 5:14
  - (1) This refers to full-grown Christians.
- ii) Our physical bodies, when exercised, toughen and harden.
- iii) Many Christians are spiritually flabby; they have no strength or vitality because they have no exercise.
  - (1) They go to church on Sunday morning and sit and soak and think by being in church that they're serving God.
  - (2) We call going to church "the service," but the service actually begins when we walk out of the church building.
- iv) When we begin to serve God, we're going to grow; and we're going to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- v) Read the Word of God, and don't worry about what you don't understand.
  - (1) Obey what you do understand, and you'll soon be understanding what you didn't understand.
- vi) When it comes to service, don't worry about what you can't do; find out what you can do and begin to do it.

#### 4) CONCLUSION

- a) Take inventory of your life.
  - i) Are you a child who is thankful that your sins are forgiven?
  - ii) Are you a young man who's a worker and a warrior?
    - (1) The church could not exist without workers and warriors.
  - iii) But these two stages are not the final goal.
  - iv) The final goal is to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - (1) John 10:30
- b) You need to be the kind of Christian who can reproduce, who has fatherly wisdom and who can meet the needs of others.
- c) If you've never received spiritual life, then you need to be saved.
  - i) There is good news: God loves you, and He wants to save you.
  - ii) You don't have to beg Him to save you; He has promised to save you if you will trust Him.
  - iii) Believe that Christ, the Son of God, paid your sin debt with His shed blood on the cross and that God raised Him from the dead.
    - (1) Ask Him to come into your heart as your Lord and Savior.
  - iv) Acts 16:31
- d) Ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins; acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.
  - i) Romans 3:23
  - ii) Romans 10:9-10
  - iii) Romans 10:13
  - iv) John 3:16



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Would you take God's precious and holy Word and turn with me this morning to First John. And if you're new in the Bible, that's back toward the end of the Bible. First John chapter 2, and in a moment we're going to read there.

But, let me ask you a question. And answer it silently, but answer it honestly. Are you a growing Christian? Do you love and know the Lord Jesus Christ better than you did last year or last week? A wise man said, "To cease to be better is to cease to be good." Some Christians are saved, but they're not growing. They're not like a tree; they're like a stump or like a post. They don't grow. Now, you ought to be a growing Christian. And you will never know the kind of victory that you ought to know and the kind of joy that you may have unless you learn to be a growing Christian.

Now, when I'm talking about growing Christians, I'm talking about maturity. You grow on toward maturity. You can be young only once, but you can be immature for a long, long time. You can be 40, 50 and still be spiritually immature.

Now, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 6 verse 1 that we are to go on toward maturity. Williams says, "Continual progressing toward maturity." So I want to talk to you about how to be a growing Christian. And there's not a person that does not need this message, because none of us has yet arrived. So I want you to get pencil and paper and I want you to write down these things.

Now let me tell you, first of all, what maturity is spiritually and what it is not. You can be spiritually healthy and not mature. A five-year old child can be more healthy than a 50-year old man, but he is not mature. Now, if you're a newborn babe and you're rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ, you're healthy. But that does not mean that you do not need to go on and mature. Hey, you can be gifted and not mature. As a matter of fact, if you're gifted and not mature, you may get yourself and others in a mess. The Corinthian church, Paul's most carnal church, he said to them in First Corinthians 1:7, "You come behind in no gift." They were gifted. Are you gifted spiritually or are you gifted with talents? You may be, but that doesn't mean that you are mature.

Now, what is maturity? Let me just give it to you in just a simple sentence. Don't forget this now. Maturity is Christ-likeness. Maturity is being like Jesus. The apostle Paul said in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 13, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man." Now, that word perfect means mature. It doesn't mean sinless. You say a rose is a perfect rose. You don't mean it's a sinless rose.

Now, what he is saying is this; Paul was saying that, "The goal of my ministry is to present every man a mature Christian." That's the goal of my ministry. I thank God for these buildings. I thank God for the Sunday school attendance. I thank God for the budget. I thank God for the organization. But, friend, all of that is splendid nothing without you growing in the grace and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What is the goal of my ministry, and what is the measurement of my ministry? Very simple: are you becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ? Now, if you're becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ, that



is a blessing to me, and that is the sum total of my motivation for you, that you might become more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to notice, as we turn now to First John chapter 2, that maturity is a life-long process. And actually, we go through three major stages. Look now, if you will, in this First John chapter 2 and let's begin in verse 12 and read through verse 14, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write unto you fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." Now, in those verses, the Apostle John speaks of childhood, little children. He speaks of young manhood. And then he speaks of fatherhood. Now, all of us today are in one of those three categories. And God loves them all, and God loves you, but God wants to move you in progression through these stages until you come to the fatherhood stage. And in our physical life we are babies, we're children. Then we become adolescents. Then we grow up and become fathers and mothers.

Now, think with me a little bit. What is the mark of a childlike Christian? Well, little children know **the thrilling wonders of childhood**. Look in First John 2 verse 12, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." Now, when a person becomes a newborn babe in Christ, what is the mark? Well, he is thrilled at knowing Jesus. He blesses God that his sins are forgiven, buried in the grave of God's forgetfulness. He's all tomorrows. He is no yesterdays. And he is thrilled. And little children have the thrilling wonders of childhood.

But the little child lives in the realm of his feelings. He is just thrilled with everything. He hasn't lost the wonder yet. And that's so wonderful to be a little child. Maybe you're a little child. Maybe you've been saved in the last year, maybe in the last six months, maybe just last week, and you just can't get over it. All my sin, not in part, but the whole, has been forgiven. And you rejoice in forgiven sin. That's what he says right there in First John chapter 2 and verse 12, "I write unto you, little children." Look at it again. "Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake."

Now, little children are wonderful, but we don't want them to stay little children. Let me tell you something. I am a bonafide father and grandfather and I know a lot about little children that will tell you and me that little children have some problems. Number one, little children are lazy. They can't and don't help around the house. I'll tell you something else about little children. They will burp in your face. They're rude. They're as rude as they can be. I'll tell you something else about them. They're selfish. They're self-centered. And I'll tell you something else about the little rascals. They're uncooperative. They will wake you up in the middle of the night to wait upon them. These are the babes in Christ. These are the little children. Sometimes they are just plain mean.

Have you ever thought of a child being mean? I have two very young grandchildren, Andrew and Stephen Paul. And Stephen Paul, his father and mother are missionaries. And so, they were here on furlough, and we thought how wonderful now for Andrew and Stephen Paul to get to know one another. So we sat them down on the floor, and Stephen went over immediately and bit Andrew. That's a little child for you. Little children do you know, they do some things that are not so great. As I say, they are rude, they're uncooperative, they are selfish, and sometimes they are mean.



Now, you might make the mistake of saying, “If that’s what a human being is, I don’t want to be one.” Okay? Have you ever heard anybody say, “If that’s what a Christian is, I don’t want to be one?” Well, friend, little babies have to grow up. That doesn’t mean that they haven’t been saved if they’re spiritually babes in Christ. They just have to grow.

I tell our Discovery Class, that I used to think that a perfect church was where everyone was a mature, spirit-filled, Christ-like Christian. Hey, folks, that’s not a perfect church. That is a failing church, if everyone were a mature, Christ-like Christian. Why would that be a failing church? It would mean that some people are not being saved day by day. You know, every morning here when we preach, we ought to hear the cry of newborn babes, Amen? When we give the invitation and souls come forward and give their hearts to Jesus Christ and are twice born, at that moment they are a child. Now, that’s wonderful. This church ought to be a maternity ward. But the sad thing is that when the church becomes a maternity ward for some, they stay in it until it becomes a nursing home and they never mature. Can you imagine a 45 year old man being rocked, sucking his thumb? What about some of you who’ve been saved for a long time? You have never gotten out of the baby stage. And I’m ashamed of you. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself, because we said earlier on, “To cease to be better is to cease to be good.” Now, there is the thrilling wonders of childhood.

Now, that moves on and we see the young man stage and **the triumphant warfare of manhood**. Look, if you will, in verse 13 and the last part of verse 14 in First John chapter 2, “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men,” now listen, “because you have overcome the wicked one.” And then skip down to the last part of verse 14, “I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.” Now, what does that mean? Well, these have come now from childhood to manhood. And what does the Apostle John say that they are? They are workers and they are warriors.

And I thank God for the workers in our church. And I thank God for the spiritual warriors in our church. And that’s so great to see these vibrant, healthy, wholesome people who are no longer children, who no longer have to be served, but have learned to serve, and our church has so many workers. I tell you, all over this morning there are workers everywhere you look. These ushers are workers. Go over to the nursery and there’re workers there. As you drive out, there are workers helping with the traffic. Up there in the sound booth there are workers helping me. How does all of this happen? And our music program, and the leaders, the orchestra people; they are workers, and I thank God for them.

But not only are they workers, they are warriors in the church. And how do they become warriors? Well, the Word of God has made them strong. Look again in First John 2 verse 14, “I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you.”

Now, would you like to stop being a child and would you like to start being a worker and a warrior? Then how are you going to do it? The Word of God is going to make you strong. Now, you know what the devil wants to do? The devil wants to keep you in the childlike stage. He doesn’t want you to be strong. He doesn’t want you to be a worker and a warrior. And because of that, he knows he can overcome you.

Now, I want you to imagine the finest junior high team that you know in football. Then I want you to notice the, Tennessee Titans or the Green Bay Packers on one side. They’re lined up against this junior high school team. That wouldn’t be fair. If they played hard-nosed, what we call smack-mouth football; it would be devastating for that junior high school team because they’re not mature. These others are



mature. Now, the devil is like the Green Bay Packers. And we are sending some junior high schoolers up against them because they have never matured; they've never been made strong. And how are you going to be made strong? You're going to be made strong by the Word of God.

Now, there is the child stage. There is the young man stage. And then there is the fatherhood stage. There's the father and **the tested wisdom of fatherhood**. Now look, if you will, in First John 2 verses 13 and 14, "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning." And then I have written, in verse 14, "I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning."

Now, the father stage is maturity where we have grown on. We think of God what? Not as a child, not as a young man. How do we think of God? Matthew 6:9, "Our Father, which art in Heaven." Now, the goal of my life and your life is to be Christ-like, and which is really to be like God the Father, because Jesus said in John 14:9, "He that hath seen Me hath seen My Father."

Now, how do you get to the, the third stage? Well, you know, if you spend enough time with someone, you begin to think like they do and act like they do. Sometimes they say when you've lived together for a long time you even begin to look alike. I tell you, Joyce is getting worried. But when we spend time with someone, we become like that someone.

And what do fathers do? Well, number one, fathers reproduce through soul winning and discipleship. Are you reproducing yourself? Can you be called a father if you don't have any spiritual children? No. I'm not just talking about getting wiser. I'm talking about winning souls and reproducing yourself in soul winning and discipleship. What does a father do? A father not only meets his own needs; he provides for the needs of others. Fathers have wisdom. Do people go to you when they have a heartache, a tear, a fear, a problem, and they want to talk with you? It's because you are mature. You have come to the fatherhood stage of maturity.

Now, here's what I want you to notice, that as you grow up, as you become a father, you do not substitute fatherhood for young manhood, and you don't substitute young manhood for childhood. All three are legitimate, and a father is a composite of them all. In a father, there ought to be the vision, the zeal of a young man. And in a young man, there ought to be the wonder of childhood. You don't grow from one stage to another. You just add each stage on. So when a person becomes a father, he is a composite. In the father there's a young man. And in the young man, there is a child. Now, in you, if you're perfectly whole, all of those will be in you. Do you know who makes the best youth workers? These people who still have youth in them. They can think and identify with young people because that's still in them. And who are the people that you would enjoy being around the most? Well, I'll tell you, people like my daddy.

You know, my daddy had a little boy in him. He always wanted to play, never grew out of that, never became old and crusty. And there ought to be a little boy in every man, and there ought to be a young man in every man, and there ought to be a father in every man when you reach that final stage of fatherhood. Now, these kind of people in a church make the best children's workers and youth workers when you become a composite of all of these things.

Now, who wrote this? Well, the Apostle John wrote it. You say, "Oh, dear, old, sweet John. He was just so wonderful. From the time he got saved, he was just like a father. I can just imagine the old Apostle



John." Let me tell you. John, when he got saved, was mean and nasty, and he stayed that way for a while till he grew. Remember, I told you little children sometimes can be mean and selfish? Let me tell you what John, who wrote this, was like.

First of all, he had a violent disposition. The Bible tells us in Mark chapter 3 verse 17, his nickname was, "Son of Thunder." I mean, you wouldn't want to be around him. He had a hair-trigger temper and he was violent by his disposition. And not only that, he was very selfish. You say, "The dear, old Apostle John?" Yes, he was selfish. You read in Mark 10 verse 37. He came with other disciples and said, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left, in Thy glory."

They'd been having a discussion, almost an argument. Who's going to be the greatest in the kingdom? You wouldn't expect John to be there, but he was there. He said, "Now, look, Lord, there are other people around here, but look, here's what I want. And I want You to give me a special exalted position when You come into Your glory."

No, old John was violent. Old John was selfish. And I'll tell you what else he was. He was very prejudiced. One time Jesus and John were going through Samaria, and the Samaritans didn't treat Jesus very well. And look, if you will, in Luke 9. Don't turn to it, just jot it down, Luke 9 verses 54 and 55, "And when His disciples, James and John, saw this, they said, 'Lord, will You that we command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You know not what manner of spirit ye are of.'" Now, here was John. He saw Jesus being mistreated. He said, "I'll tell you what, God, let's nuke them. I'll tell you what, Jesus, let's get a little heavenly napalm and fry them because of the way that they're acting." Jesus said, "John, you don't know what spirit you're of."

But here was a man. He was violent. He was selfish. He was intolerant. And, look if you will, in Luke chapter 9 and verse 49 and 50, "And John answered and said, 'Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us.' And Jesus said, 'Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us.'"

Now, they had their little coterie of their little holy huddle. They saw a man who wasn't a part of their religious club. We would say not a part of our denomination. And they said, "Lord, here's a man over here casting out devils in Your name. Don't You think that we ought to rebuke him?" "No," Jesus said, "He that is not against us is for us."

Now, if you'll think about all of these things. Here was a man who was violent. Here was a man who was selfish. Here was a man who was intolerant. And here was a man who was just, you wouldn't want to be around him. You would not have wanted to drive across the country with this guy named John before he grew up, and yet he was saved.

As a matter of fact, Jesus enlisted him as a disciple. Now, he grew. As a matter of fact, he's no longer selfish. When he wrote the Gospel of John, there was a disciple who leaned on Jesus' breast. That was John. But John never even mentioned his name. He just said, "That disciple whom Jesus loves." No longer is he seeking the chief place. John is no longer prejudiced. Now this time, he comes back to Samaria in Acts chapter 8 verses 14 and 15, "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost." The first time he prayed, he said, "Lord, let fire come down upon them." The second time he said, "Oh, God, bless these people. Fill them with



the Holy Spirit.” He’s no longer prejudiced. He’s no longer intolerant. As a matter of fact, he’s the one who wrote in this same book, First John 1 verse 7, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” John was changed. He was transformed.

Now, let’s just shift gears and think a little bit, if we can, about the means of maturity. I’ve talked about the marks of maturity. You move from childhood to young manhood to fatherhood. Fathers can, are full of wisdom. They provide. They reproduce.

Now, what are **the means of maturity?** I said you need to grow up. You need to get strong in the Lord, because you don’t want to be that junior high school team against the Green Bay Packers. You need to get strong. Now, number one: **there must be the miracle of life.** You can’t begin to grow until you have life. There’s the miracle of life. Then you begin to grow.

Some years ago, I had an idea where we got our children together. Actually, I learned this from Peter Lord. He did it in his church. And we gave each department in the children’s department a potted plant. All of the plants were exactly the same, as much as they could be the same. And each department was given a potted plant. Now, one department was told to give that plant water, fertilizer, and sunlight. That’s what we want you to give your plant. Another department, we said, give it water and fertilizer, but no sunlight. Another, give it fertilizer and sunlight, but no water, just kept leaving one ingredient out, except for the one that was given water, sunlight, and fertilizer. And each week the kids would bring their plants in and display them. It was amazing to see how some of them, their leaves were down, the ones that didn’t get any water at all. Some of them, the leaves were kind of good, but they were yellow. And some of them were just growing and flourishing, the ones that got water, sunlight, and fertilizer. And we’re trying to teach the kids a spiritual lesson about what it means to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. But we gave one department a stick, a dead stick, and said, “Now, you give it water, you give it fertilizer, and you give it sunlight and see what happens to it.” Well, you know what happened to it. It didn’t grow. In order for you to grow, you have to cease being a dead stick. You have to get saved. You have to be born again when you receive Jesus. There’s the miracle of life. Now, that’s step number one; to get saved.

Step number two: **it takes time.** There is the passing of time. There is no instant maturity. It’s just not so. Now, if you’re a squash, you might be mature in forty days; if you’re an oak, you’d be mature in forty years. Now, God wants you to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now, the secret of maturity is spending time, and you’re not going to be mature overnight.

Number three: **growth requires nourishment.** You’re going to have to feed on the Word of God. “I talk unto you, young men, because of the Word of God abides in you.” First Peter 2:2 says, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby.” Church, listen to me. There is no way possible under God’s sun, on God’s green earth that you can grow without taking nourishment, and your nourishment is the Word of God.

Ethel Barrett wrote about Dwight L. Moody. You know, Dwight L. Moody was the Billy Graham of his day. And Ethel Barrett said this about this man who was so mighty. She said, “That when Dwight L. Moody became a Christian, he developed such a hunger for God’s Word, spent so much time reading it, and was so quick to obey it that he became a menace to other believers. His rapid spiritual growth was an embarrassment to certain people, though they had been saved for years and never grew up in



Christ. Week after week the church Moody attended, when he was there week after week, he would share a new experience that he'd had with the Lord. Finally, some of the older saints just couldn't stand being humiliated anymore by his life, and they went to his uncle and asked him if he could slow him down and tone him down because he was just feeding on the Word of God, devouring the Word of God, and then he was obeying the Word of God." And then Ethel Barrett went on to say this about Moody: "His robust, spiritual health and abounding energy disturbed their napping. He was just too much. So while they were sucking their thumbs, he was growing until he left them far behind. He grew more in a few years than they did in twenty." Isn't that amazing? The Word of God. Moody got hold of the Word of God and he devoured it.

I read one time where Moody said, "You know, I used to pray to God for faith. 'Lord, I want more faith.'" And he said, "One day, I read in the Bible where faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," and he said, "That's the secret. If I want faith, I've got to let the Word of God come into me." And he stopped praying for faith and asked God to give him an understanding of the Bible, and he said he grew in faith.

Another man of yesteryear was a man named George Mueller of Bristol. If you read the life of Mueller, it's a life of miracle after miracle after miracle after miracle. And people think, well, what a great prayer warrior he must have been. And he was. But let me tell you what he said about his secret of faith and maturity. He said, "When I come to my quiet time," he said, "I just greet the Lord for a few moments and then I get into the Word of God. I study the Word of God. I devour the Word of God. I let the Word of God fill me." Well, let me read it in his words. "The first thing I did after asking the Lord in a few words, the Lord's blessings upon His precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God, searching into every verse to get a blessing out of it, not for the sake of public ministry of the Word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. Now, what is food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God. And, here again, not simple reading of the Word of God so that it only passes through your mind, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts." That sounds like what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 15 verse 16, "Thy words were found and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah says, "Lord, I devoured Your Word. I fed on Your Word."

Now, you know how so many of us read the Bible? Like it's a recipe book, and we never eat the meal. One man said to his wife, said, "Why do you call it shopping; you never buy anything." She said, "Why do you call it fishing; you never catch anything?" And some people just kind of window shop through the Bible. They say, "Oh, what a nice verse that is. Oh, what a great verse that is. Oh, here's one for the refrigerator." Friend, feed on the Word of God. That's what Mueller did. He became mighty in faith. That's what Moody did. He became mighty in faith. There must be nourishment.

Now, number four: **growth demands discipline of exercise.** Hebrews 5 verse 14, "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even to those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Now, he's talking about people who become full grown, and he's talking about your spiritual senses that get exercised, just like in the physical realm. Your physical body, when it gets exercised, it toughens and hardens.

Now, folks, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I've been in the church long enough, been a pastor



long enough to know that most Christians are flabby. They're flabby. They have no strength. They have no biceps. They have no vitality because they have no exercise. They come on Sunday morning and sit and soak and think that by being here this morning they're serving God. We call this the service, but it's not the service. The service begins when you walk out those doors. And when you begin to serve God, you're going to grow, and you're going to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, I know that if you're a baby Christian right now, you can't do everything. But you can do something. I know if you're a young man today and the Word of God abides in you, you still haven't reached the fatherhood stage where maybe you can reproduce. But read the Word of God. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Obey what you do understand, and before long you'll be understanding what you didn't understand." And the same thing is true about service. Don't worry about what you can't do. Find out what you can do and begin to do it, and you will grow. It takes life to grow. It takes nourishment to grow. It takes exercise to grow. But if you're a stick, you're not going to grow at all. Bow your heads in prayer.

Now, you take inventory this morning. Are you a little child, saying, "O, thank God, my sins are forgiven?" Well, I thank God, too. I thank God too that your sin is forgiven. But there's more to that. Are you a young man, a worker and a warrior? The church couldn't exist without workers and warriors. But that's not your final goal. Your final goal is to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, or, actually, like the Father. Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." You need to be the kind of a Christian who can reproduce, the kind of a Christian that has fatherly wisdom, the kind of a Christian that not only can meet your needs but, as a father, meet the needs of others.

Now, friend, would you pray. Say, "God, help me to be a growing Christian. If You helped old John to grow. You took this man who was selfish and this man who was intolerant, this man who was violent, and You made him into such a wonderful apostle, Lord, You can do that for me. Lord, help me to grow. Lord, write the message this morning upon my heart, and help me not just to hear it, but, God, I want to be a growing Christian." Would you pray that?

Now, while these are praying, maybe you're a stick this morning. That is, you've never received spiritual life. You need to be saved, and I've got wonderful news for you, glorious news. God loves you and He wants to save you. You don't have to beg Him to save you. He has promised to do it if you will trust Him. Believe that Christ, the Son of God, paid your sin debt with His shed blood on the cross. Believe that. Believe that God raised Him from the dead. Believe that. And now receive Him into your heart as your Lord and Savior. Do it. The Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Pray a prayer like this, "Lord Jesus, thank You for dying for me. Thank You that You hung on that cross in agony and blood. And now, Lord Jesus, this moment, I receive You into my life as my Lord and Master. Take control of my life. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be. And, Lord, I will live for You. Lord, I'll not be ashamed of You. Lord, I'll make this public because of what You've done for me. Amen and Amen.



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