



Sunday January 29, 2017
Growing

In life, it is important to keep growing.

Growth is seen by increase in **stature, ability, maturity and responsibility**.
When a person is growing, we see increase in these areas.

This is also applicable to our spiritual life as believers. We are to GROW spiritually.

Lets take a quick look at a few verses that indicate to us that we need to grow spiritually:

Ephesians 4:15

but, speaking the truth in love, may GROW UP in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

2 Thessalonians 1:3

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith GROWS exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

1 Peter 2:2

as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may GROW thereby,

2 Peter 3:18

but GROW in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Spiritual growth causes increase in Christlikeness (Ephesians 4:13-15) and fruitfulness (John 15:8, 2 Peter 1:8).

If we are not growing spiritually, we are most likely stagnating or possibly even weakening spiritually.

What we wish to discuss today is **how** growth happens? We will use comparisons to the physical development of a person (which we are all obviously familiar with) and draw some lessons from these, for growth in our spiritual walk.

Our spiritual walk is quite similar, it is a life of continuous growth and maturing. The same things we do for natural growth, apply to our spiritual growth.

#1, Eating

#2, Exercising

#3, Training

#4, Stretching

#5, Testing



#6, Resting

#1, Eating

Eating has to do with getting nourishment into your system so you can grow as a result.

We start off with milk (1 Peter 2:2), but we must move on to consuming "solid food" (Hebrews 5:13-14, 6:1-2).

Don't be a "candy christian"! These are people who only want things that please them and make them happy. We need the solid meat of God's Word.

We need to be in God's presence in prayer and worship.

How and with what have you been feeding yourself spiritually?
Are you spending time in God's Word - reading it, studying it?
Are you spending time in prayer - being nourished in God's presence?

#2, Exercising

In the natural, in addition to eating, we need some amount of physical activity.

To exercise is to practise - putting into life application the things we learn.

With the help of the Holy Spirit we do the Word.

James 1:22 teaches us to be doers of the Word, not just hearers.

#3, Training

In the natural we go to school, college and through continuous learning classes in the workplace, etc. We have trainers, coaches, mentors, etc.

Training involves a more rigorous learning process through self-discipline and coaching, where available.

Similarly, we need to be trained, that is, we need to come under more rigorous discipline and learning.

Some of this we do personally with the help of the Holy Spirit. We go through the School of the Spirit and the Word.

But we must also learn from others. Read books. Listen to them. Observe them. Where possible personally interact with others who are more mature and let them speak into your life. Draw out from them.

This is how Paul trained Timothy:



2 Timothy 3:10

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance,

and he encouraged Timothy to do this for others:

2 Timothy 2:2

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Training (Discipling) Others

On the flip side, as you grow you are able to "train" others. We call this being able to disciple others.

When you "train" others spiritually, you are helping "disciple" them. If you have been a believer for some time, you really should be doing something to help train (disciple) others in their spiritual walk.

Here are some things to think about - how we wish to see discipleship (training of others) happen at APC:

Discipleship is about developing people not just improving programs.

New Believers -> Disciples -> Ministers -> Leaders

While we provide a wide range of resources and learning opportunities, our intent is that these will help develop people.

Discipleship is not about filling people up with information, but it is about personal growth and life transformation. It affects lifestyle. It causes growth into Christlikeness. Our goal is to help people become, not just attend or consume more.

How can we know if someone is developing as a disciple?

We can see them

- ✓ grow in their commitment to Christ, His Word and the work of the Spirit
- ✓ grow in Christlikeness in life and character
- ✓ grow in Christian disciplines as prayer, worship, witness
- ✓ grow into their life's purpose - finding their place and serving the Lord.
- ✓ turn around and start discipling others, taking on responsibility in ministry to others.

At APC we need to create a discipling culture - where everyone takes interest and works with others to help them in their spiritual growth.

Here are some key elements of a good, healthy discipleship culture in a community of believers:

- ✓ connections happen one on one, in group settings (e.g. Life Groups), and across generations (age groups)



- ✓ discipleship happens based on relationships, and is more life centric rather than program centric. It is more about who you are and what you are becoming, rather than how many programs you are attending.
- ✓ people are encouraged to identify where they need to grow and work on those areas. *We need not script peoples spiritual journey. We should help shape their journey.*
- ✓ disciple in the middle of life - not outside of life (technically, we'd call this 'on-the-job' training, as distinguished from classroom training). Our discipleship process should be anytime, anywhere (technically we call this asynchronous, ubiquitous) so that we disciple people anytime, anywhere - NOT just inside a Life Group, or a Foundations class or some other program. *For instance we encourage people to engage in serving in church or on missions teams and along the way coach them, build them up.*

Start having intentional spiritual conversations with people.

We should also be willing to disciple outside of church contexts, e.g. at workplace, in school, in colleges, etc.

#4, Stretching

In the natural we take on challenges, responsibilities and assignments and we grow through these.

Similarly, spiritually, we must be willing to be stretched. Taking on responsibility for the work of God. Take on challenges. Challenges stretch you and help increase your capacity. Step into new roles. Step into doing things you have not done before. Take up things that you know are much bigger than you, but with faith in God, you can do it. Or as we often say, step out of your comfort zone.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

#5, Testing

Tests, Temptations and Tribulations

Tests are meant to promote us to the next level in our spiritual growth and walk with Him. God tests us. The devil tempts us and the devil attacks us.

God's tests are meant to get us to the next level in our walk with Him.

The devil's temptations are an inducement to sin. The devil's attacks are an attempt to steal, kill or destroy what is ours.

Here are some tests we see God presenting His people with, in Scripture:



- ✓ The Endurance test (Abraham Romans 4:17-21, Hebrews 6:12) : God gave Abraham a promise, but waited 25 years to fulfill it.
- ✓ The Blessing test (Abraham Genesis 22:1-2, Hebrews 11:17-19) : God gave Abraham the promised blessing, and then saw if Abraham would give Isaac back to him, still believing His promise.
- ✓ The Promise test (Joseph Psalm 105:17-22) God gave Joseph dreams about his destiny, and then let him go through times that seemed these would not be fulfilled.
- ✓ The Abundance test (Israel Exodus 16:4, Deuteronomy 8:2-3,15-18) : God blessed His people with abundance and watched to see how they would handle abundance.
- ✓ The Adversity test (Israel Judges 2:20-23, 3:1-6) : God permitted some of Israel's enemies to continue, to teach Israel how to war.
- ✓ The Stewardship text (Matthew 25:14-30)

As the Scriptures teach us, the Old Testament has lessons for us New Testament believers to learn from and we are to walk in the steps of Abraham's faith (Romans 4:12, Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:6).

God **tests** us - but He empowers us by His Word and His Spirit to pass these tests. Every test we pass brings us into a new realm in God.

God has permitted the devil to continue his works in the world for a time, with his **temptations** and **attacks** on believers. God has also permitted us believers to journey through a world where we will face **trials and tribulations** (adverse situations). However, God empowers us to overcome. Each victory we win puts us in a place of greater spiritual strength.

Romans 5:3-4

Failure is a stepping stone to success.

If you fail a test, get up and try again. Pass the test.

Even if you fall to the ground when facing a temptation, an attack, a trial or tribulation - get back up and fight the good fight of faith. God will cause you to triumph. Move forward.

#6, Resting

We also need time to rest, in solitude with God. This is also important to our spiritual growth. we've covered this last Sunday in our sermon on Solitude.

Refreshing by being in God's presence.

Praying in tongues.

Conclusion

So here are some things we do to keep growing spiritually:

#1, Eating

#2, Exercising

#3, Training



#4, Stretching

#5, Testing

#6, Resting

We never stop growing.

Keep growing.

Help others grow in their faith.