

Maturing by Spirit and Word

1 Corinthians 13: ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

When one is but a mere baby, or even an infant, then one is solely and undeniably reliant on one's parents. They have to feed you, clothe you, protect you, make decisions for you and make sure that one's needs are met. When one grows older, into the teenage years and beyond, that independency gradually peels away as we develop the intellectual and emotional capacity to meet our own needs.

This is very much the same with our spiritual growth – when we first come to the Lord we are but mere babies and infants when it comes to knowing Him and His divine ways. We are very much dependent upon Him to 'spoon-feed' us, to nurture us, and to grow us. We are after all vulnerable as we struggle to grow out of our spiritually 'baby' and 'toddler' clothing.

The Lord, however, expects us to mature and to grow spiritually beyond our 'spiritual nappies', beyond our infancy and be able to walk, talk and move with the Holy Spirit unto His service to His glory. And such a spiritual journey is one of thousands and thousands of steps. It is a journey and an adventure. But is a journey that we need to embark on if we want to grow spiritually mature.

The Lord will always be there with us, but we cannot expect the Lord to always hold our hand. We need to learn to walk on our own, move in His Spirit and to become mature disciples helping others to mature spiritually.

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

And just like one's growth in body and soul, so often we think that we know all that we need to know. In our teenage years we believe we have all knowledge. When we reach our twenties we realised we knew very little when in our teens. And so as our journey progresses through life, we keep learning and we become little wiser as our experiences mould and shape our character.

This is the same with our spiritual journey. We must never think that we are now mature 'enough' spiritually. There is always more to learn from God. There is always more to know about Him. There is always more room to know Him. There are always more opportunities to expand our capacity to become spiritually wiser in His service.

The author of Hebrews [identity uncertain] wrote in chapter 6 the following: ¹Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ²instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And God permitting, we will do so. We therefore read of an urgent plea by the author that one needs to move on to the deeper truths of the Lord by shedding our 'spiritual nappies'.

We have all access to the Word of the Lord and in the western. To lay the foundation of our faith, which happens in the infancy of our spiritual growth, is therefore an elementary step, but beyond that we need to grow, expand and be filled more and more by the Spirit.

This can only happen when we continually read the Bible and study it. It is essential to spiritual growth. As believers, it is essential that we read, memorize, study and meditate on the Word of God.

It is written in *Psalm 119: 14 I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate on Your precepts,*

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

And contemplate Your ways. 16 I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

The only way to know God's truth, His commandments, His precepts and His Kingdom is to read the Word. Yet, we can only truly understand the Word and apply the Word when we listen to God and when we allow the Spirit of the Lord to teach us and show. This therefore implies spiritually growing so that we may know the voice of the Good Shepherd (John 10), and this implies being filled/baptised by the Holy Spirit. John 3: 5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Once we are led by the Word and by the Spirit, we will be led in the truth of the Lord, and we be led to understand His Kingdom and how to pursue the ways of the Lord. Our spiritual journey after all is nothing more than the ultimate quest to know God. We may argue that one can never really know Him, which is true, but He has made it possible for us to have a living relationship with Him. For all eternity we may learn to know the Lord, but here on earth we must seek Him, we must hunger for more of Him for this is a God who is alive and who speaks and acts and who is personally involved in our lives. And as we grow in the Lord and we know Him more intimately, then truly we shall no longer speak and act like children spiritually.

It says in 1 Corinthians 13: 11 *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

You see, spiritually maturity still calls us to walk in faith like a child but at the same time to *put away childish things* where we think, act and

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

think no longer as a spiritual child but as a mature disciple of the Lord. Our behaviour, our attitude, our mind-set and our approach to this world will be a reflection of spiritual maturity and not the spiritual nature of a mere child.

And this is so sorely needed ... for this world needs the spiritual mature whose very behaviour and attitude and deeds and words reflect the Lord Jesus and by that authority will bring the lost to the light.

But if we remain as children spiritually, our deeds and words and behaviours will be inconsistent and volatile. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6: ...¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Paul therefore made the urgent plea for spiritual growth so that we may attain the fullness of Christ. And the result - We will then no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

We live a world where many false teachings, false doctrines and false Messiahs have come to deceive the flock of the Lord. And we can easily be deceived and be led astray as long as remain spiritually immature. As we grow spiritually mature, we grow in the understanding and comprehension of the Spirit that we will know what is from Him and what is not from Him. We shall know Him and His ways, and we will also know what is from the world and the devil. *1 Corinthians 2: 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all*

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

Let us therefore make every effort to grow as we come to Him daily, even if it is only in thought and spirit, as we seek Him, His truth and His love. May we grow spiritually strong to His glory and service so that we will stand for the truth, and that we may guard against the ways of the devil that destroys, kills and deceives.

Galatians 5:16-18, 24-26: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law...Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."

There is thus the necessity to grow spiritually. The end goal of such a journey and such a process is to walk closer with God and to know Him more intimately. This is the goal of the disciple – to grow.

To grow spiritually is detailed in 2 Peter 1:3-8: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So, to grow spiritually will lead to an increase in your knowledge and understanding of God's Word, a decrease in your frequency and severity of sin, an increase in your practice of Christ-like qualities, and an increase in your faith and trust in God. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Therefore the best description of spiritual growth is to live in the image of Jesus.

Spiritual growth, however, cannot take place if one hasn't first and foremost made a committed choice to follow Jesus. For when we follow the Lord then the Holy Spirit lives inside of us (John 14:16-17).

And it is the Holy Spirit who has come to lead us in all truth and to lead us in the ways of Jesus to the glory of the Father. When we walk in the Spirit and Truth, then our old nature, which is dominated by sin, is replaced with a new nature that is under the influence of God's Spirit.

Spiritual growth can only occur in a person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and who has allowed the Spirit to become the dominant teacher and guiding truth.

Walking in the Spirit is allowing God to be in control of our lives and it allows the Spirit to change us in the image of the Lord (Ephesians 5:18). This is brought about by consciously choosing by faith to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide in thought, word, and deed (Romans 6:11-14).

Learning how to grow spiritually is a life-long journey, which also occurs as you read and apply God's Word. 2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

In the end, as one walks in the Spirit and lives by the Word, we will draw closer to God for within us will produce more and more the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It is so important for us to submit to the Spirit's leading, for it the Spirit who produces the fruit of spiritual growth in our lives. And as we grow spiritually, we will become like Paul who walked after the example of Jesus, and therefore will be true ambassadors of the Lord.

Considering that fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, it stands to logic that if we become more loving, more joyful, more kind and more self-controlled then spiritual growth is genuinely occurring. God, however, works in different people in different ways. Some people grow rapidly, while others grow slowly, but steadily. Our focus should not be on comparing ourselves with others, but on comparing ourselves with God's Word.

The Scriptures acts us a mirror to show us what we are like spiritually and to shine light on the areas that need to experience and learn spiritual growth. James 1:23-25: Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does."

As mentioned, we cannot move in spiritual maturity unless we are led by the Spirit of the Lord, for the Spirit leads us in all truth and to be closer to the Lord (John 16). We cannot understand the ways of the Lord or the Scriptures or the Kingdom without the Spirit of the Lord to lead us

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

in all understanding, wisdom and knowledge. Our natural reasoning will never lead us to spiritual truth. We cannot mature without the Spirit guiding and leading us. A mature disciple is someone who is baptized in the Spirit, for the Spirit of the Lord will lead you in all wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

Before we can understand the truth, we need our minds transformed from their natural, earthly perspective, until we can see with the eyes of Christ, hear with His ears, and understand with His heart. For true disciples, this is the ultimate pursuit. For us to therefore follow God, to live out our callings, we need to be reborn in the Spirit.

Only through a birth in the Holy Spirit and a submission unto the Lord give we truly walk in love, fear, obedience, truth and glory. *2 Corinthians 3: 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Only the Spirit of the Lord can unveil us by stripping away the bondages of religion, tradition, legalisms, old habits, and the strongholds of our spirit and soul. If we behold the glory of the Lord through all of the veils of our traditions and mindsets, we will distort His glory and try to make God into our image. One of the biggest presumptions we can have is to think that God sees everything just like we do or thinks about everything just like we do.

A spiritual maturing that we must undergo is to first have the humility to see the veils we're wearing, which are distorting what we see, and then to have our minds renewed and the veils removed so that we see and hear clearly what the Spirit is saying. We after all can only be led by the Spirit if we hear the Spirit, and we can only change and be transformed by obeying what we are hearing. We need to be reborn, and

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

we need the Spirit of the Lord to strip away our stubbornness, pride and arrogance to walk in His Glory.

One of the most famous passages regarding a life in the Spirit is Romans 8 : New King James Version (NKJV): Free from Indwelling Sin: 8 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. 10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

And also Galatians 5: Walking in the Spirit: 16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication,

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

As disciples of the Lord, we can therefore only mature when we are led by the Spirit, when the Word of God being Jesus (John 1:1) is our foundation and when we continue to draw closer to the Lord in fellowship and in submission. For then we shall grow and mature.

Let us therefore pay diligent attention to the Word of the Lord, let us pursue yielding to the Spirit and let us seek to be disciples who yearn to be more like the Lord. This is the way of the disciple. One who walks as a worshipper in Spirit and Truth, and such Truth comes by the Word and by the Spirit.