

GROWING UP IN THE LORD

1 Peter 2:2; 3:18; Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 2:7

Introduction: After our children (us included) are born into this world, the normal response is to grow mentally, physically and emotionally until reaching mature adulthood. The Bible says that Christians are born and are also to grow. As it is natural and necessary for a baby to grow in the human realm of life, so it is in the spiritual realm as well. We were not born mature human beings nor are we born spiritually mature. We were born with much to improve upon, having to learn about everything. The same is in the spiritual birth and life. There are several stages in growing in the Lord and as we look at some of them today, try to find where you are and then see where you need to go on to.

I. THE STAGE OF UNBELIEF

1. There was a time you did not believe/trust in Jesus and were separated from God.
 - You lived and were ruled by human nature and your priority in life was ME!
 - You lived and acted "fleshly" and had your own set of moral codes.
 - Somewhere you learned about Jesus Christ and you began to think in areas you had never thought before and you even fought the thoughts of trusting Jesus.

II. THE STAGE OF SALVATION

1. There came a moment when you let go of your defenses and trusted in Jesus.
 - You were born again and were indwelt with the Holy Spirit and you became a Christian.
 - You felt good, clean and whole for the first time in your life.
 - You wanted to tell somebody about what had happened to you.
 - You began to feel that you needed to repay God, to do something for Him somehow.

III. THE STAGE OF SERVICE

1. You began with a pure motive but your methods seemed to be wrong.
 - You joined the choir, ushered, taught, visited, witnessed and visited some more.
 - You felt you HAD to do something because God had done so much for you.
 - After serving and trying for awhile, you began to realize you weren't doing so good and you felt inadequate.
 - You thought, "well, I'm saved and serving, what's there to do next?"

IV. THE STAGE OF FRUSTRATION

1. After serving for a while, you began to feel that something was wrong, still missing.
 - You look back at your "failures," trials, temptations, and heartaches.
 - You began to question why you had failed. Why you felt so defeated and why you were frustrated.

- Somewhere you ran across Paul's statement about frustration: *"...The things I do, I should not..the things I should do, I do not..."* You identified with Paul.
 - You just can't be good enough and you have tried to live exactly as the Bible said a Christian should live and you just could not. You had failed.
 - If being a Christian is only going to heaven someday, then living the Christian life is just too hard and so much is being missed out on.
2. What you had not realized was that God doesn't want you dependent upon anything or or anybody but HIM.

V. THE STAGE OF SPIRITUAL DEPENDENCY

1. At no point in your life does Jesus ever intend for YOU to live the Christian life all by yourself.
 - When you were saved Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into your life. It is His work to teach you to depend upon Him to do everything, walk, talk, think, total dependence.
2. This is the MOST DIFFICULT LESSON for a Christian to learn. It is like living on the edge all the time and without God's help you will fall off.
 - When we are frustrated enough and look up to God and admit that we can't live up to His standards, THAT IS WHERE GOD WANTS US.
 - You become filled with the Spirit and you begin to walk, serve, talk, and love in ways you never dreamed. This is how God wants it!
 - You begin to grow in ways you never dreamed of.
 - From time to time you sense that God is up to something special in your life.

VI. THE STAGE OF BATTLE WITH THE HUMAN NATURE

1. God dealt with ALL our sins when we were saved, however He did not do away with all the pre-programmed human nature.
 - From the time of our human birth we have been influenced by others, their ideas, morals, behavior patterns, speech patterns, and so on. We really are the summation of a lot of different people.
 - Many do not like themselves after becoming Christians. There is so much unlike Christ they never realized was there and they feel God doesn't love them as much as others, so they try harder, they do more.
 - WE are the ones who make ourselves feel unloved, a nobody. NOT GOD!
 - God has to dig out and do away with all that which has been pre-programmed into us. WE MUST LOVE OURSELVES just the way we are. God does.
 - Remember, the blood of Jesus has cleansed us completely.
 - Everybody is different, so everybody is at different stages of spiritual growth, but everybody MUST ACCEPT THEMSELVES and move on to the next step God has for him/her.
 - Most of our battles are fought WITHIN and with ourselves.

- As God brings to the surface those pre-programed human nature things, confess them and repent of them and let God deal with them.

VII. THE STAGE OF THE EXCHANGED LIFE

1. God is not satisfied with us living in sin, serving in the flesh, doing the best we can. God has goals for us.
 - God wants us to live on the edge every day, trusting Him for everything. Doing so does not mean sinlessness, or that we've reached the top, but it does mean that Jesus will supply and meet every need we will have.
 - As we begin to live as God wants us to, on the edge, totally dependent upon Him, we will **DESIRE** and **HUNGER** for the Lord and His Word.

CONCLUSION:

1. Are you where God wants you to be? Have you exchanged everything in order to live on the edge where God wants you to be?
2. Are you **AWARE** of where you are?
3. Do you **HUNGER** for a closer walk with God?
4. Do you have a **WILLINGNESS** to be totally dependent upon God, surrendering, abandoning your total being to Him, "*Not my will, but thine be done...*?"