

MESSAGE – JANUARY 27, 2013

LIFE IN A WHOLE NEW LIGHT! SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Opening

Recap of series

Last week Pastor Mark talked about the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the power of living that He provides. Now, while that truth provides great encouragement that God is at work in our lives, it does not mean that we have no part to play. In fact, if you recall Pastor Mark said this last week:

"Being filled with the Holy Spirit, allowing the Spirit to control and empower your life, is not passive on our part. We are very much partners with God in this process of transformation. But our part isn't what produces the power; that's the ministry of the Spirit. But we must choose to put our bodies - our hands, our feet, our mouths, ears and eyes, our thoughts and actions - at the disposal of the Holy Spirit." (Pastor Mark Petersburg)

This week is the other side of the coin. This week we're going to discuss our God-given role in spiritual growth. So let me pose to you the same question Pastor Mark asked last week: "Are you content with the experience of Christ you know today?" For me, the question has to do with change. Is it really possible in this life to be transformed... to be different? Is it really possible to see lasting progress in getting over my hang-ups and bad attitudes? Is it really possible to experience a deep, lasting intimacy with Christ? Can I really be used by God to make a difference in the world in the same way I see Him using the Biblical characters? Well, the answer to all of these questions is YES, it is possible! God's method of making this happen is spiritual growth, maturity in Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-16 gives us a picture of what spiritual growth looks like:

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[a] and teachers,[b]12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,[c]to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,"

In other words, spiritual growth means becoming like Jesus. So let me say a few things about spiritual growth.

1. Spiritual growth is normal but not automatic.

Let me say this: spiritual growth is normal, but not automatic. For the person who has placed their trust in Christ, growth and maturity is the normal, expected result of saving faith. Why? Because healthy things grow. The example that I like to use to illustrate this is trees and babies. If you plant a tree, and the tree is healthy, the expectation is that the tree will grow. If it doesn't, you try to figure out what the problem is, because it's supposed to grow. It's the same way with babies. If you have a baby and the baby's not growing, you take that baby to the hospital because something's wrong!

Live Illustration: Bring up the McGee Family to demonstrate their infant growth up to Dad's growth

Growth is the normal expectation for healthy children and spiritual growth is the normal expectation for believers in Christ.

But, even though spiritual growth is normal and expected, it's NOT automatic. Look at what Hebrews 5:11-14 says:

11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

The expectation was that by this time these believers should have matured to a point that they could teach others, but they hadn't! Just because you're growing older in your faith does not necessarily mean you're growing up in your faith. Imagine how silly it would be if this same thing happened in other areas of life. Watch this.

Video - Is your faith in Kindergarten?

We've got to grow up. So if spiritual growth is normal and expected, but not automatic, how does it happen? More than that, is there any way to ensure it happens for us? Well, to answer let's take a look at some people who did grow up. In Acts chapter 3, Peter heals a lame man and preaches Christ to an astonished crowd. In chapter 4, the religious leaders arrest Peter and John for this. Turn to Acts Chapter 4 and let's read about their encounter, starting at verse 5.

What's remarkable about this account is that Peter is the one speaking. Not very long ago Peter denied even knowing Jesus because he was afraid of these very people! Well, he's not afraid any more. Something happened to turn Peter from a loser to a lion, from a coward to a champion, from a bacon bit to a rib eye! Peter wasn't backing down again and his captors took notice. Let's read on in verse 13 and see their reaction.

They had been with Jesus! You see, not only had Peter spent three years with Jesus during his earthly ministry. Peter spent about a month and a half with Jesus after his resurrection and that time with Jesus along with the empowering of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2 changed Peter forever. I'd like to suggest that the answer for Peter is the answer for us. If we want to be changed, if we want to grow, we've got to be spending meaningful time with Jesus.

So what does that look like 2,000 years after Jesus has physically left the planet? It looks like prayer and Bible study. This might sound simplistic, or even overly obvious but it is the truth. I know of no way to develop intimacy with Jesus that doesn't include times of meaningful prayer and the intentional study of the scriptures. In prayer we talk to God, and through scripture, God talks to us. So let's look at these two disciplines in a bit more detail.

2. Prayer transforms

When it comes to prayer, there are some who treat it like a gift registry or a to-do list for God. But really, prayer is far more than those caricatures. I'd like to highlight four important purposes behind God's gift of prayer. To do that I have four different items that I think represent a different purpose of prayer.

The first item is a **Starbucks** cup which makes me think of getting together with friends for times of laughter and conversation. One of the purposes of prayer is to give us opportunities to worship and be intimate with God. Psalm 100 gives the picture of worship for God that we're called to in prayer. Listen as I read:

A Psalm for giving thanks.

100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

2 Serve the Lord with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

3 Know that the Lord, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;[a]

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

5 For the Lord is good;

his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

We're called to worship, to express our love for God in prayer.

Prayer is also like a bottle of **V8 juice**. In these drinks are supposed

to be all kinds of vitamins that our bodies need to grow. Prayer is like that. God uses times of prayer to help us grow in Godliness. A great picture is in Acts 10:9-29. Would you turn there and let's read?

During Peter's time of prayer, God challenged how he viewed, not only what foods we're acceptable to eat, but also what kinds of people he should associate with. God will challenge us in similar ways as we make regular times of prayer a priority.

I think Prayer can also be compared to a **donation jar**. Philippians 4:6 tells us: *6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. We come to God with our needs and he graciously supplies them.*

I think a bottle of **Gatorade** is a great picture of one of the purposes of prayer. In the same way that an athlete might drink this to prepare for a game, prayer can help us prepare for ministry. Listen to Paul's request for prayer in Colossians 4:2-4: *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

3. Scripture transforms

What God does with His Word

- Romans 10:17
- God uses His Word to cause us to grow!

What we do with His Word

- James 1:18-25
- Receive the Word
- Do the Word

Closing

- Do something!
- Journaling Works for me!
- Video: Start Small