



A Lifetime of Growth

Ephesians 4:17-32
Week 9 | Mar 4, 2018

Summary: Last week we looked at Christ's call for the church to measure up to the Gospel. It's a tall order for us, as a community, to be all that Christ commands us to be. But in the last half of chapter 4 Paul narrows the focus to the individual. He paints a picture of what a mind looks like when it is led by anything other than Christ. It isn't pretty—yet it's the mindset we all struggle with at times. But Paul doesn't accept that as our fate. In Ephesians 4:20 he says, "That, however, is the not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ." Instead, we're invited into the cycle of Spiritual growth, where the Holy Spirit empowers us to become the people God created us to be. How does Spiritual growth occur? We **put off** the elements of godlessness, being **made new** by the work of the Holy Spirit, and we **put on** the markers of godliness. Once this vision is cast and the process explained, Paul offers practical examples of the new life that a new heart and mind empowers. In the end, our goal is *to become the people God created us to be with Christ at the center of our lives.*

Spiritual Growth = Becoming the people God created us to be when Christ is the center of our lives.

Discussion:

1. Read Ephesians 4:17-32, along with Colossians 3:1-17 and Romans 12:1-3.
2. What areas of your mind are darkened by sin? How did that come about?
3. What feeds the darkness in your own life and how culpable are you for it?
4. In Ephesians 4:29 Paul references unwholesome or corrupting talk. Where do you most commonly stumble with this type of talk? What actions can you take to build others up with your words rather than tear them down?
5. How are you proactively seeking God's maturing work in your life?

What's the Point of Growth?

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

Are you familiar with the 1960's song “They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love”? It was an anthem for many evangelicals at the time, and was sung with pure intent. It seems obvious to think that love will be a natural byproduct for any Christ-follower. Today, the old hymn carries a funeral-esque vibe with it, as does Christian love in many circles. It's one thing to say you love the Lord and another thing to be shaped by the love of the Lord.

In John 13 Jesus explains Spiritual growth as clearly as possible—your love for me will be evident in your love for one another. We often think of personal, spiritual growth as just that—personal and spiritual—but that's far from accurate. Your spiritual growth has a direct impact on the community around you. As God, by the power of the Spirit, increases your capacity for patience and understanding, your children find that they can approach you with more burdens. As the Spirit increasingly bridles your tongue, your coworkers find you more available for discussions about the trials of life. As your hands become proactive, searching for opportunities to serve, your friends will become increasingly inspired by your generosity.

Our Spiritual growth impacts the world around us as God reshapes the world within us. But it isn't as easy as willing yourself into growth. All too often people hope great things for themselves. We conjure up visions of some dynamic, bold future filled with ease, comfort, success, and prosperity. But all of that is of little use when life goes in a different direction, maybe into sickness, sorrow, or pain. What then happens to your growth when your hope is shattered or your will is broken? Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:23 that our newness is not the result of our effort alone. The growth that Paul calls us into is the work of the Spirit in our lives. This work of Spiritual growth is not easily shook by circumstances—in fact, it is often advanced by hardship—because it's set deeply in our hearts by the Spirit.

Spiritual growth is our calling, our destiny, but it is not forced upon us. God's love for us compels us to draw near and grow. The Spirit's presence within us is our anchor, unmoved by the current or seas, and we too can stay the course if we hold tight to Him. We were created to know God, and growth is the key to a deeper relationship and increased knowledge of the Holy. To know him is to know joy and life to it's fullest, regardless of your quality of life, you can rest assured knowing you have found all you need when you have found everything in Him.

