**Spiritual Birth Series**

**“Growth after Spiritual Birth”**

**I John 2.12-14**

**Introduction:**

This plant is part of an experiment. I want to see if plants really need water and soil to grow, or if that is “fake news.”

Currently we are in a series of sermons looking at Spiritual Birth. The first sermon focused on the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus in John’s Gospel chapter three where Jesus stresses the necessity of spiritual birth saying, “*Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”* By using the phrase “born again,” Jesus is not talking about adopting a philosophy, or embracing a morality, or identifying with a certain religious sect. Jesus is talking about a supernatural work of God in a person’s heart that brings them to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus had difficulty understanding, so Jesus separates natural birth and spiritual birth saying, “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh* (natural birth)*, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* (spiritual birth).The point Jesus making is that as certain as you know you were born naturally so you must know that you have been born spiritually.

Last week we looked at complications that can occur at spiritual birth. When we allow our comforts, our stage of life, and relationships to drive us away from following Christ.

This morning I want us to consider “Growth after Spiritual Birth.” This sermon will serve as a transition into our next series “Stages of Spiritual Growth” staring next week. Our text this morning is found in I John chapter two where the Apostle outlines for us three stages in our growth in Christ: little children, young men, and spiritual fathers. In the weeks to come we will look at each of these stages in spiritual growth and examine of hearts to discover our spiritual development in Christ. This morning I want to speak against “complacent Christianity” and ask the Holy Spirit to snap us our of “sluggish spiritually.”

*12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

**Stages of Spiritual Growth**

Here the Apostle simply identifies 3 stages of spiritual growth – little children (vs.12, 13c), young men (vs.13b, 14) and fathers (vs.13a) and the characteristics associated each stage: Little children know that their sins have been forgiven. They know God as Father having a strong sense of spiritual adoption. And they begin to walk in Christ practicing righteousness. (IJn.3.7-10) Young men are those who grown out the baby stage and are ready to defend their faith – ready to go to war. They are spiritually strong, abide in God’s Word, and overcome the evil one. And of course the natural progression would be that these young men in Christ would grow to become fathers in the faith. Fathers in the faith are reproducers, nurturers, and providers of wisdom, maturity, and stability. They emulate God the Father to us and so the Apostle characterizes them as those who have *“known Him who has been from the beginning”* emphasizing their confidence in the sovereignty of God in all things.

So, which of these stages would you consider yourself to be? Who you consider yourself to be babe in Christ, a young man, or a father in the faith?

In the same way a child grows and develops so growing in Christ after your spiritual birth is something that is assumed. But there are a couple of places in the Bible where is seems that spiritual growth was stunted.

**Stunting Spiritual Growth**

The writer of the book of Hebrews is attempting to share with his readers about how Christ is the perfect high priest according to the order of Melchizedek but he abruptly stops and writes, “*Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.**But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”* (Heb. 5.11-14)

Here the writer of Hebrews is experiencing “apostolic frustration” because his readers had not “pressed on to maturity.” (Heb.6.1) They allowed their spiritual growth to be stunted by becoming dull of hearing, not pursuing deeper biblical knowledge, and only drinking the milk of the Word. Notice that this dullness of hearing was not their original condition. They had become dull of hearing. They had developed “selective hearing.” (Something Barbara says that I have developed in relation to our marriage.) These Christians had purposefully turned their ears away from the truth and had accumulated for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires. (2Tim.4.3-4) Though by this time they should had been teachers they were content with just the elementary understanding of Scripture and only partaking of spiritual milk of the Word.

The Apostle Paul expresses this same “apostolic frustration” with the Christians in Corinth when he writes, “*Brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it.*” (ICor.3.1-2a) As I have said a thousand times, “There is nothing wrong with being a babe in Christ but there is a problem if you remain as one.” Spiritual growth should be as common as natural growth. Just as a person grows out of infancy into adolescents and into adulthood, so should a Christian grow in faith and knowledge of Christ and His Word.

Neither the writer of Hebrews nor the Apostle Paul will allow their “apostolic frustration” to hinder their call for Christian to strive to grow spiritually.

**Strive to Grow Spiritually**

The writer of Hebrews writes, *“let us press on to maturity.”* (Heb.6.1) He even puts himself in the number: "Let *us* press on . . . " Not just, "*You* press on . . . " but, "You and me—let *us* press on to maturity." The call to grow spiritually is for everyone regardless of how long you have been a believer. This is his life goal for himself and those under his ministry. This is my hope for you as your pastor.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we should *no longer be children* but *to grow up in all aspects in Christ.* (Eph.4.14-15) Growing in Christ involves different aspects:

* To grow we need to eat – the Bible
* To grow we need to breathe – Prayer
* To grow we need good spiritual hygiene – Confession of Sin
* To grow we need a caring family – Fellowship
* To grow we need regular exercise – Service
* To grow we need protection – Guarding against Temptation
* To grow we need to give – stewardship

The Apostle Peter encourages us to “*continue to grow in grace and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ*.” (2Pt.3.18-Phillips) Like the new believers on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two, Peter’s encouragement is that we would continually devote ourselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. Continuing to grow in Christ often requires evaluating our commitment to spiritual growth. Here are some suggestions:

* I will read one Psalm every morning as I eat breakfast
* I will listen to the Bible as I drive to work
* I will memorize \_\_\_\_ verses from the Bible each week
* I will ask a mature believer to meet once a week for discipleship
* I will join a Bible Study
* I will write out my “growth objectives” on a 3x5 card, give it to a friend, and ask him to keep me accountable

The Apostle Paul told Timothy, *“Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.”* (ITim.4.7-Phillips) Just like you will not become physically fit unless you spend time exercising, so you will not grow spiritually unless you take the time and the trouble. Almost every morning I exercise. We have made one of the rooms upstairs an exercise room. Almost every morning Monday-Friday I climb up those stairs at 6:30, sit my butt down on a rowing machine, row for four miles in thirty minutes. After that I’ll lift a few weights and do some sit-ups. Let me tell you I hate to exercise in the morning! But if I don’t exercise in the morning I will not exercise. I have to take the time and the trouble to drag myself up those stairs and afterwards I feel so much better. And so it is spiritually. You have to take the time and the trouble to put yourself in the spiritual gym to keep yourself spiritually fit no matter what stage of spiritual growth you are.

**Starving yourself Spiritually**

Let’s go back and take a look at my plant. Doesn’t look too bad. But if I left it here till next week, just like this, without water, without access to the nutrients from the soil it would be ready for the garbage can.

Here is the tragedy. There are some of you who are starving yourself spiritually. Every Sunday you put yourself back in the pot, only for you to pull yourself out Monday through Saturday. You are trying to grow spiritually by only caring for yourself spiritually one hour a week. What would that type of behavior do to the life of this plant? What do you think it is doing to your spiritual life? You are trying to survive on starvation rations and you wonder why you are growing spiritually.

**Conclusion:**

This morning I want to challenge you:

* To embrace Jesus Christ as Lord of your life – you must be born again
* To do away with those things that are stunting your spiritual growth
* To strive to grow spiritually
* To stop starving yourself spiritually

There is a verse at the conclusion of the birth narratives in the book of Luke that reads, *“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”* Of course Jesus in His divine nature knew all things and contained all wisdom.

But Christ became man not only to satisfy the Father righteousness demands and paid the penalty for our sins but He also came as an example for us to follow. And this verse shows us that Jesus can sympathize with us at each stage of our spiritual growth because He Himself grew *increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”* So, let us follow Christ’s example and keep *increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”*

**Call to Prayer**

*When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.* (ICor.13.11)

**Benediction**

*Lord grant that we would grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.* (2Pt.3.18)