



Motivation For Growth...
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Series Title: Discovering Your DNA...
Sunday, April 13, 2008

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (NKJV)

- Pray
- It's easy to grow.
- Physical body:
 - Waistline
 - Grey hair
 - Hair out of my ears!
- Yard:
 - Weeds
 - Pool algae
- Home:
 - Dust
 - Mold
- Character:
 - Get offended - Bitterness
 - Look at what others have - Envious
 - Don't help others – Indifferent
 - Ignore God – Cold and hard-hearted

- Unhealthy growth is easy. It comes naturally, without any effort.
- Thesis: Healthy growth takes work.
- Body:
 - Healthy body requires exercise and a good diet
- Yard:
 - Clean yard requires we pull the weeds and clean the pool
- Character:
 - Need to work hard to grow in forgiveness and compassion
 - Need to work hard to grow in our relationship with God
- Healthy growth requires work. Hard work.
- This morning, I want to give you the tools for growth.
- In particular, we will look at how to grow in your relationship with God.
- Our focus will be upon developing what is called a “devotional life” – the starting point to a healthy relationship with God.
- First, we'll look at the evidence of healthy spiritual growth.
- Then, we'll look at ways to motivate yourself to develop a healthy devotional life.

Body

1. The Evidence of Healthy Growth

Jesus spoke of four responses to the preaching of the Word

- Ignore it
- Receive, then reject, it
- Receive it, but be burdened by the cares of the world
- Receive it, then bear fruit

Taken at face value, this means that only a small percentage of those who hear the Word actually bear fruit.

Fruit is the evidence of growth. But what is “spiritual fruit?”

I used to think that “spiritual fruit” had to do with how often you went to church:

- Sunday morning – okay
- Sunday night – you were pretty spiritual
- Wednesday night – you were a spiritual giant!

It didn’t take long for me to realize that “spiritual fruit” had little to do with how often you went to church. There are really two things that indicate that you are bearing fruit –growing in the Lord....

a. Holiness

“But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” (Rom. 6:22, NKJV)

- i. Holiness is becoming more like Jesus
- ii. When begin to bear spiritual fruit as our lives start looking more and more like Jesus

What does this mean in practical terms? It means we start to shake loose from the sins of our old life, and start embracing the life that Jesus exemplified. We discover more what this life looks like by reading about Jesus in the Bible.

Why is holiness critical? Because I am one choice away from throwing it all away

- I am one visit to an inappropriate website away from throwing my ministry away
- I am one embrace with another woman from throwing my family away
- Ultimately, the quality of my relationship with God will be a sum total of the choices I make in life

b. Replication

Apple trees beget apples. Orange trees beget oranges. Christians should beget more Christians.

I used to think that spiritual people were always in church. I now realize that spiritual people lead others to Jesus. This is what it truly means to bear fruit.

The Bible gives us a measuring stick as to whether or not we are growing to maturity and able to lead others to Jesus. It’s called the ability to teach:

“You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God’s word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn’t know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.” (Heb. 5:12-14, NLT)

Does this mean you need to teach an MBA class or children's Sunday School? No. What it means is that your words and your actions should be conditioned to be able to lead someone to a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. Motivation For Growth

What motivates you to spiritual growth? To grow in your devotional life, you can focus on three key motivational tools:

- Purpose
 - Plan
 - Persistence
- a. Know Your Purpose
- i. Why do you want to grow?
 - ii. Maybe you just want to learn more about the Bible?
 - Those who are taking Bible classes
 - Those who attend MBA and Wednesday night classes
 - iii. Maybe you are struggling in a certain area and need to learn how to be an overcomer?
 - iv. Maybe you want a better marriage, be a better parent, be content in your singleness, be a better employee?
 - v. Whatever the reason, having a solid purpose for growth will help you work hard to achieve your goal

Example: I want to grow in leadership.

b. Have a Plan

The story of manna is a great picture of spiritual growth. The Israelites would wander 40 years in the wilderness. Manna was their only source of nourishment. Our source for nourishment during our "wilderness" journey is prayer and the Bible. How God proscribed manna is similar to how you and I can develop a healthy devotional life.

i. Schedule a time for devotions

"These are the Lord's instructions: Each household should gather as much as it needs. Pick up two quarts for each person in your tent.

"So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little. But when they measured it out, everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed." (Exodus 16:16-18, NLT)

Moses told the Israelites to gather manna in proportion to their need. To grow in our devotional lives, I believe we should ask God "when?" and "how long?" we should spend daily in devotions – what is our "portion" for prayer and Bible study.

There is a growing trend to pray just whenever you think about God. What I've discovered for my life is that to develop a healthy and strong prayer life and Bible study.

When I schedule a time with God, He is always prompt to be there. The question really is, "Will I be there?"

ii. Have daily devotions

"Then Moses told them, 'Do not keep any of it until morning.' But some of them didn't listen and kept some of it until morning. But by then it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell. Moses was very angry with them." (Exodus 16:19-20, NLT)

Today's manna would spoil by the next day. In the same way, yesterday's prayers may not be sufficient for today's needs.

Your goal should be to have a daily devotional life. I've discovered that if I go just a few days without praying or reading my Bible, that I become spiritual stale and seem to struggle more with sin. When we make that daily connection with God, we are making a daily connection with the One who can help us be overcomers in an increasingly difficult world to live.

iii. Make devotions a priority

"After this the people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared." (Exodus 16:21, NLT)

If the people waited past the morning to gather manna, it would melt in the heat of the sun.

In similar fashion, the less priority we place on our devotional lives, the less chance we will have devotions at all!

Manna was gathered in the morning. The time of day that you do your devotions is less important than placing a priority on your devotions. For most, though, morning is probably the best time.

Example: What happens when you don't pray in the morning?

c. Be Persistent

Many will start well in their devotional lives, but soon (like the seed on shallow ground) will give up because of the work required.

One of the biggest excuses I hear about people not having devotions is that they don't have the time.

Example: Here's a surefire way to find 30 minutes a day for devotions. Skip your meals.

Well, if you are too busy to prayer and read your Bible, maybe you are too busy! Since time with God is so critical to your spiritual growth, I believe God will help you find the time necessary for growth:

- While commuting the Altamont?
- When the baby is asleep?
- When the kids are at school?
- During your lunch break?
- Wake up 30 minutes early?
- Turn off the TV?

Conclusion

- Healthy growth requires work. Hard work.
- The goal of this lesson is not to make you feel guilty about your time with God.
- My goal is that God would convict and encourage you to make prayer and Bible study a priority in your life.
- Know your purpose for growth.
- Follow the simple plan to (1) schedule a time for devotions, (2) have devotions daily, and (3) make devotions a priority.
- Finally, be persistent. The more you work at growth, the easier it will become.
- Remember, unhealthy growth is natural. Healthy growth requires work.