

Growing Up 10-21-01

Adapted from Dr. Yu's 'Eight Experiences with New Life'

Spiritual growth is much like physical growth, it should happen continually, though sometimes in spurts, until we come to maturity. We begin thirsting for milk, but as we grow we desire Christ as meat and bread. I believe we can have growth spurts when we desire them, for God is more willing for us to mature than we are to deal with growth pains. The author of Hebrews told his readers that for the length of time they had been Christians, they should have become teachers. They should have been ready for solid food, instead of milk.

Here are some of the stages of growth and their accompanying experiences. When we come to Christ (not church or an institution or even theological teaching, but the person of Christ Jesus) it is usually with enormous relief and great joy. The guilt is finally gone and we are thrilled with our new relationship with God, our new life, and our new family. Joy often overflows into song. People ask us, "What in the world happened to you?" We are glad to tell them. We are constantly talking to our Father about every detail of our life. This is the place of first-love and we should continue in this intense freshness as we grow.

With some, entering into this first phase is instantaneous. With others, the process is much slower and gradual. I think the rate depends on the revelation of the Spirit of our need and of the all sufficiency of Christ meeting that need. That depends on our willingness to face the truth about our condition. Few see their sin and its depths very clearly, right at the start. With most, it takes time to come to grips with how bad their sin nature is. In this stage God brings clear and obvious answers to prayer to increase our faith.

Secondly, everything is new. We see and sense things very differently than before. Let me share a true story by way of example. A missionary had witnessed to a couple in China who received Jesus as Lord and Savior. He left them with a Bible. The new convert felt uncomfortable about getting drunk like he did most evenings, so he and his wife prayed. They recognized the Spirit would not give them peace about doing things they did before. When the missionary returned they shared with him about the changes in their life. When the missionary asked how they knew God did not want them to do those things they replied, "Our new Resident Boss, tell us He not happy if we do that." In this stage we too find there is a new Resident Boss. He is holy and pure and desires us to be the same. Conviction is suddenly much stronger and real than ever before. But unlike the days before we came to Christ, we can now say "No!" to sin. This is the power of God working within us. It is not in our ability, but all in His to Whom we yield, out of that love for Him that we have come to experience.

The third working in us is an insatiable appetite for "more and more of God." Before we sought pleasure in various ways, but now those things leave us empty and even

convict us. Instead our hunger is turned toward knowing Him and His Word. He has become our first desire. We want to play praise tapes and hear as many sermons as we can get our hands on. If someone speaks of spiritual things we are delighted to hear of Christ working in their lives.

This brings us to the fourth thing, a hunger for fellowship. We want to be with other Christians and hear their testimonies, ask questions of the more mature. We realize that we are a part of something and incomplete without them. When we are away from them we sense there is something missing in our spiritual life.

The fifth thing is the burden for relatives and friends. We have a sense of urgency to share the Good News of what Jesus has done for them. We look for every opportunity to talk of Him and how He has changed our life and given us hope. When rejected, we hurt more for them than we do ourselves, because we are in unity with the love of Christ that will endure suffering for their sake.

All these experiences and feelings are just the beginning of a long process of Christ growing in us. We are on the road to maturity in Him. With some baby Christians these feelings only last for months, others may continue for years, before they move into the next phase.

Somewhere along the line we begin to become inwardly critical of others. The Scriptures warn us not to compare ourselves among ourselves, but we do. "Why is that brother so lax in his attitude toward knowing God's word?" "This group certainly does not have the desire I do to reach out to the lost." "Why don't they grow as fast as I am?" We have been blessed with a desire and zeal in certain areas and can't understand why everyone does not have the same blessing. Sometimes we may even voice this 'concern' to them, or even worse, to others who know them. Worst of all, we impose our personal dealings and convictions on others. We think, "God made it clear to me, so I will help them see it too."

Dr. Yu calls this sixth phase the "wind of God's grace." It is one of the signs that we are still babes in Christ. God's grace has helped us deal with issues in our life. That grace has been like a wind in our raised sail driving us forward. But when the winds subside we begin to feel the old currents that move us helplessly in a direction we no longer desire to go. Romans 7 becomes a reality. Romans 7:15-23 (NIV) ¹⁵ *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*¹⁶ *And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.*¹⁷ *As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.*

¹⁸ *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*¹⁹ *For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.*

²⁰ *Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*²¹ *So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*²² *For in my inner being I delight in God's law;*²³ *but I see another*

law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

Why does God allow this? Why doesn't the wind just keep blowing strong right into the shores of heaven? I have need of a deeper growth. I'm in need of moving from milk to meat. The seventh phase is some of the old temptations of my pre-salvation life begin to emerge. The big obvious things you deal with quickly, but all the time wondering why they have even come up. Some of the 'little' issues you let slide by. After all, the 'big' things are being kept at bay. Then we start to realize we are still as weak as we ever were. We begin to justify other things, which is bribing our conscience with our still-old (not renewed) reasoning mind!

To take us on deeper into Himself, Christ must deeply expose us. In our natural self we have all the weaknesses and failings of those we were critical of. Our very exalting of ourselves over them reveals how immature we are. To bring the point home, Christ allows us to get even worse. We face defeats and despair. Sometimes we even wonder why we should share Jesus when there is so little change in our own lives. We wonder why we can't get a grip on our thought life. Instead of overflowing in songs of joy we are feeling miserable to the point of despair. "Will I ever get the victory? Will God ever restore the joy I once had?" We plead with God to change us, but in His great love He allows us to fall even further and experience more failures. We say with Paul, "In my flesh, there dwells no good thing." If in our unrenewed mind there is some little glimmer of the thought, "I am really not that bad," if we have some justification, if we blame it all on the Devil, we go on in this phase. God must bring us to the point where we realize we are wrong as long as we live according to OUR thoughts and desires.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)⁸ *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, (His thoughts are holy and true righteous and pure, and ours are vile and vain and self-centered and self-righteous) neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. (His ways are perfect, just, compassionate and full of grace, and ours are faulty, biased, callused and full of selfishness)* ⁹ *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Do you see that they are worlds apart? We are still in the self-life, relying on our soul efforts, or determination ("good" flesh) our unrenewed mind. That will never please God. Not only are they not good enough, they are wicked. The difference between our own goodness and God's is as high as the heavens from the earth and as far as the east from the west. There is nothing in our total old creation that could ever please God. Everything about the old creation is an enemy of God and brings death.

We come to the place of total despair that Paul came to at the end of Romans 7. "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" "Get me out of this thing! I want to please God and I keep deceiving myself and going in circles. HELP! God, only You can save me from this condition. I've tried, and I'm going nowhere." Look at Galatians 5 with me and consider those works of the flesh. Gal 5:19-21 (NIV)¹⁹ *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and*

*debauchery;*²⁰ *idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions*²¹ *and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.* "I'd be ok on those sexual sins if Jesus didn't tell us that if we even contemplate them we have as good as done them." Idolatry is anything that I put before the Lord. I don't want to do that, but desire creeps in and soon I am justifying some purchase. Discord, "I didn't mean to sow it, and I thought I was just putting things right." Selfish ambition, "Is that why I let that information slip out?" Factions, "Oh I don't divide up the body of Christ into groups. I almost always realize our oneness, even though our group is best."

Any of us, at any moment can slide into the depths of the flesh and all its subtle destructive tendencies. But the new creation in us is continually against all the old, and all its ways. The Spirit is continually exposing the old and supplying us with super-abounding grace. None of us has any excuse. Everyday, moment-by-moment, each of us decides whether to let our mind indulge itself in the flesh or yield to the life of the Spirit. Will I enter into Christ Jesus, into His mind and Spirit, and walk in Him, letting His Life be manifested or will I show the world the unholy trinity, me, myself and I?

Will you thrill the Father's heart by laying down the old – nailing it to the cross – and enter into His Kingdom and His joy? Just as you first received Jesus, you need to again and again give over your will, to let the Spirit take you into the Life of Christ. We need Jesus as much today as we did the first day we were saved. The road to maturity takes us to the realization that God is pleased with His Son and not in anything of our old nature. We have a desperate need to yield to His life continually. Are you willing to let go of your will and take on the mind and heart of Jesus? The Father wants to conform you fully into the image of His Son and only your will stands in the way. Here is the question I want to present to you. Will you let the Father continue to strengthen your inner man, so that you continually choose the Life of Christ, cooperating with the Spirit of Jesus, denying all that is of your flesh, to let God be All?

If you are living in the yo-yo phase – the up and down life that many settle for as normal, know that God is trying to bring you to the end of trusting in yourself. He is showing you all your old creation is helpless. The only answer is the one Paul exclaimed, "*Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" Romans 7:25 (NIV) We must depend on Him alone for our continual salvation. When we see our total depravity as He sees it, we will be humbled to continually give up all to Him, our criticism and gossip ends, for we recognize our old nature is just as sinful, just as abhorrent, just as vile as any criminal on death row. Then the Spirit works in you to desire more of His Life, all the fruits of the Spirit, in everything you think, do, and say.

In this stage of growth we recognize our works for God will produce nothing of lasting value unless they emanate from Him. Programs and formulas are forsaken,

and instead we seek the direction and Life of the One with Whom we live in communion. We recognize that only His work brings Life. Everything must continually come from above.

Recognizing the reality of our old man, we are broken and tender. We are no longer quick to shout with Peter, "Not I Lord! The others may run but I would never run." Our constant prayer is, "Lord, live in me this very moment and manifest your life through your servant."

There is an eighth stage. It is a deeper revealing of self and a greater revelation of Jesus. Here, we cling to the truth that we died in Him and were raised with Him to newness of life. Romans 6:4-7 (NIV)⁴ *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*⁵ *If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*⁶ *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.*

'Done away with' means 'rendered jobless.' Since your entire old man was crucified with Christ, sin has no medium, no channel through which to entice your body. But most wonderful of all – Christ, the New Man, is living in your spirit and He is against sin and apart from sin. So sin loses its job in your life. When you are in Christ, sin has no handle with which to entice you. The Resident Boss is your Life. He who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in spirit. (1Cor 6:17) As we have seen before in Colossians 3, in verse 3 we have died with Christ (past completed act) but in verse 5 we put to death what belongs to the earthly nature. (ongoing action) It's a daily present need.

Everyday we either walk in, give our attention to, and cooperate with the Old Nature, which is animal like and results in death, OR the Spirit, which lives unto God and results in Life and Peace. Will you stay one with Jesus in Spirit? Will you let Him take you deeper and more extensively into Himself? He mostly uses His Word to reveal His victorious Son in you, but He can use any situation to bring you more deeply into Himself. For you to give up your will to Him in trusting prayer all day is vitally important. God's grace is more than enough, (super-abundant), to cause you to grow up into the fullness of Christ.