



SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

MOVING TOWARD MATURITY

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Peter 3:14-18 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: John 3:16 | Romans 8:29 | Hebrews 10:25
2 Peter 2:1-3, 14, 17-18

► SUMMARY

Spiritual Growth

When a baby is born, he naturally grows; and if for some reason he doesn't, we know immediately that something is wrong. The same is true of each of us when we are born again as children of God. No matter how young or old we are at the time of salvation, we should continue to mature spiritually until the day we die. None of us ever reaches a point when we've grown enough and can retire in the Christian life. If we stagnate in our spiritual development, we don't just stay where we are in our relationship with the Lord; we actually drift further away from Him.

How do we know if we're growing spiritually? It's not something tangible that can be recorded with a measuring tape. Nor can it necessarily be evaluated by the sins we avoid or the religious practices we observe. Although these are important and can be evidence of growth, genuine maturity is determined by our relationship with the Lord.

► SERMON POINTS

From God's perspective, spiritual growth is imperative. Peter tells us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). The tense of this Greek word signifies continuing action—keep growing.

Why should we endeavor to grow in Christ?

■ **God has predetermined that we should grow.** This is His will for our lives—that we "become conformed to the

image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). The measurement of our growth is whether we are progressively becoming like Christ in our conversation, conduct, and character.

- **Spiritual growth protects us.** Peter warns us to be on guard, so we won't be carried away by error (2 Pet. 3:17). Only as we grow in our knowledge of Christ and the truth of His Word will we be able to recognize deception and false teaching.
- **God is interested in our relationship with Him and desires our sanctification.** A sanctified life is one that increases in holiness, righteousness, and obedience to the Lord. He is not trying to deprive us of fun and pleasure but wants to protect us from the painful consequences of sin.

Why do we fail to grow spiritually?

- **Lack of instruction.** After salvation, we need to be taught how to grow in our Christian lives.
- **Neglect of Bible reading, prayer, and church attendance.** Growth requires nourishment, and God's Word is our sustenance.
- **Negative influence of others.** When we imitate what others are doing or listen to their advice instead of clinging to the Word of God, we can easily be led astray and stop growing.
- **Uncertainty about beliefs.** If we're unsure of what the Scriptures teach and simply adopt the beliefs of others, we'll be led astray. That's why it's so important to fill our minds with God's Word.
- **The lure of the world's system.** Much of what is offered by the world and advertised in the media and on the internet looks appealing but can sidetrack us from what's really important. If we don't guard our minds and eyes, the devil is ready to ensnare us.

- **Doubts about God.** Whenever we doubt that God's ways are right, we begin to base our decisions on what we think is good rather than relying upon guidance from His Word. Before long, disobedience causes us to drift further away from Him.
- **Temptations.** If we give in to temptations, they become like heavy burdens that hinder our growth; but repentance sets us free by cutting the cords that bind us.

What is the evidence of growth?

The following list of qualities can help us evaluate our lives to determine if we are growing spiritually.

- **Increasing awareness of our sins and weaknesses.** We become more sensitive to thoughts, attitudes, and practices that no longer fit who we are in Christ.
- **Responding to sin with immediate repentance.** Instead of waiting until the end of the day to come to the Lord, we'll confess and repent at the first conviction of sin.
- **Rejoicing even in intense spiritual battles.** When we're able to thank the Lord in the midst of trials and rest in His provision and love, we'll know we're growing.
- **Seeing trials and temptations as opportunities for growth.** We will trust God to guide us through difficulties and strengthen us to respond wisely.
- **Viewing service to Christ as a high honor, not a burden.** The Christian life is an exciting journey when we discover what God wants us to do and see our service as a chance to exalt Him.
- **Counting everything as coming from the Lord.** Since God is all-powerful, nothing touches us except by His permission. When we realize this, it keeps us from becoming angry or resentful toward others.
- **Sensing growth in our faith.** Situations that used to bother us and temptations that once ensnared us no longer have power over us.
- **Spending more time worshipping and praising the Lord.** We will delight in gathering with other believers for fellowship and worship.

- **Increasing desire to obey and diminishing attraction to sin.** When we are becoming more like Jesus, we'll want what He wants.
- **Eagerness to share what Christ is doing in our lives.** We won't be able to keep it to ourselves.
- **Increasing awareness of God's presence.** In everything we do, we'll remember that He is always with us.
- **Jealously guarding our private devotions and prayer time.** Knowing that we can't grow without spiritual food, we will be diligent to meet with the Lord and feed on His Word.
- **Desire to spend time alone with the Lord.** We'll be excited and look forward to being with Him each day.
- **Increasing desire to give.** God is always giving to us; therefore, as we grow in Christlikeness, we too will become givers.
- **Growing hunger for the Lord.** We'll discover that Christ is the only one who truly satisfies.
- **Ability to feel God's love.** As we draw closer to the Lord, we'll sense and accept His love for us.

► RESPONSE

- As you look back over your life, have your conduct, conversation, and character become more like Christ? Are you holding on to anything that's hindering your growth? It could be a sin or maybe an attitude or habit that's keeping you from using your time and energy to grow closer to the Lord.
- How's your spiritual diet? What steps can you take to ensure a daily intake of God's Word?
- Living in the immediate demands of each day often keeps us from focusing on greater goals. Take a moment to contemplate the end of your life when you will stand before Christ. What changes can you make today that will allow you to come before Him as a mature believer who has never stopped growing?

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