

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE
PART 2–THE PROGRESSION OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH
MARK 4:26-29; 1 JOHN 2:12-14

Introduction

Read Mark 4:26-29

In Mark 4:28, Jesus spoke of a progression of growth as it relates to the sown Word of God by comparing it to the growth of grain.

Read 1 John 2:12-14

I believe what we see here in this text is the Apostle John also referring to three levels of spiritual growth.

In these verses, he uses the words "*little children*," "*young men*," and "*fathers*."

As we examine the context we can tell that he is using these terms as illustrations of three levels of spiritual growth.

I. THREE LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

A. LITTLE CHILDREN. The First level of Growth.

The use of the words "*little children*" here refers to infants.

He says two things about them ...1) Their sins are forgiven...

2) THEY KNOW THE FATHER.

About all an infant knows is they are alive and they know who their parents are! They don't know much else!

B. YOUNG MEN. The Second level of growth.

Note what he says about the young men in verse 13.

He says that **they have overcome the wicked one!**

Who is that the wicked one? It's referring to Satan, of course!

Overcoming the Devil's influence in our lives comes as a result of spiritually growing in Christ.

Note what he says about the young men in Verse 14.

1. He says that they are strong.
2. He says that the Word of God abides in them.
3. He reiterates that they have overcome the wicked one.

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It is the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ which brings us to maturity and in order to get that knowledge, we must feed upon the Word of God because the Word of God nourishes us to maturity.

*2 Peter 1:2–“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you **through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,**”*

*2 Peter 1:3–“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, **through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:**”*

*2 Peter 1:5–“And beside this, giving all diligence, **add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;**”*

*2 Peter 1:8–“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful **in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”*

*2 Peter 3:18–“**But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.**”*

*Colossians 1:10–“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, **and increasing in the knowledge of God;**”*

Growing in the knowledge of the Lord is more than just knowing things about Him or knowing the things that He says. It means that we put what we know of Him and His Word into action and prove them.

(Example–When I studied Accounting in school I got book knowledge but when I worked for my first CPA firm I got experiential knowledge–both were essential!)

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Just as we cannot grow physically without the right food, we cannot grow spiritually without the right spiritual food.

Many people struggle with problems they can't seem to overcome in their lives causing them to walk in defeat rather than in victory!

This usually happens because they aren't growing spiritually as they should! They have become what I call spiritually anemic!

The reason they have become spiritually anemic is because they haven't consumed a balanced diet of the Word of God in order to grow properly! Or if they have fed on the Word of God, they haven't put it into action and proved it in their lives! (*Again, Book Knowledge vs. Experiential Knowledge*)

What happens if you just eat all the time but you are inactive? Your health begins to deteriorate. Your limbs get weak and your muscles begin to atrophy (or shrink) from inactivity! The same is true in the spiritual realm!

If you're not feeding on the Word of God like you should, you get to where you don't have any spiritual strength!

But even if you are feeding on the Word, but you're not actively putting the Word into action, you also get to where you don't have any spiritual strength!

You get weak! And when you are spiritually weak, you can't overcome the world, the flesh, and the wiles of the devil!

I want you to note, there is no mention in our text of the Word of God abiding in the *"little children"*. They know God, but they know little else. They must learn. They must be fed! They must come to know God through the Word and experience!

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1 Peter 2:2—"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:"

It says in our text that the "young men", are strong, because the Word abides in them! They were taught the Word of God and they learned their lessons by putting the Word of God into action and it has made them strong!

This **does not** mean that they had just a **head knowledge** of the Bible. Its says *"it abides in them"*. *Abide* means it lives in them.

It affects them and directs them! It does not just reside in their memory! It has become a part of their being!

(i.e. The principles that the Bible teaches have become more than words in a book to them! They are words to live by! The Bible is their source of wisdom to help them in their daily decision making!)

Look at what the Apostle Paul said in **Ephesians 4:14-15**:
Ephesians 4:14—"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:"

Satan is the master deceiver! Many people who are saved believe wrong things and do wrong things in sincerity, thinking they are right.

But **not** the mature believer! He is not so easily deceived. He knows the principles of the Word of God, therefore when Satan cunningly twists the Scriptures and uses half-truths, he recognizes that and is not fooled!

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I was reading an article one time about sheep. It said that a healthy sheep stays with the flock and stays alert. However, the article said a sick sheep becomes listless, and has a tendency to wander off and not stay with the flock.

God's program is the flock—i.e. the local Church—and he has no other program!

There are sheep no doubt who are outside the flock, they are wandering around on their own, and that just proves they are spiritually sick.

They are not mature, and they are not healthy sheep. If they were, they would be in the fold with the other sheep that the Shepherd made for them.

LITTLE CHILDREN. . . YOUNG MEN. . .

C. FATHERS. This is the greater level of growth.

Look at verse 13 and 14...he says the same thing in both places.

“ . . . ye have known him that is from the beginning.”

1. The baby knows who his parents are, but he doesn't really know them intimately. That comes in time by living everyday with them!
2. The father is said to have *“known Him that is from the beginning.”*
This is talking about a deeper understanding than just knowing his identity. This is referring to a close relationship!

II. WHAT THEN ARE THESE VERSES TEACHING US?

A. These Verses Teach Us That Spiritual Growth Is A Progression.

1. First, when you are born again, you are a babe in Christ. You know little else but that Jesus Christ is your Saviour and that you are a child of God!

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2. Then, as you are fed spiritual food (i.e. The Word Of God) and you receive it, you begin to grow and develop as you put into practice what you learn. Over time it becomes a part of you. You win victories over sin and God uses you to teach others.
3. Then after growing in the Word of God it comes to abide in you and you go on to an even more intimate and closer relationship with Christ Jesus.

So, These Verses Teach Us That Spiritual Growth Is A Progression.

B. These Verses Teach Us That Each Step Is Important And We Can't Jump From One Step To The Other.

One of the greatest lies the devil is telling today is that you can be a mature Christian without the Word of God.

Ain't going to happen!

The world says you can look into yourself. It says that in each of us is a spark of divinity, and all we need do is fan it.

That just isn't so! We **cannot** look inside ourselves for truth! We must look inside the pages of God's Word!

And another great lie that Satan is telling is that you can mature as a Christian without putting the Word of God into action in your life! Again, it ain't going to happen!

C. These Verses Teach Us That Every Believer Is Born Into The Family Of God To Bring Glory To The Father.

The child that fights and rebels against his parent and is disobedient lives a confused and miserable life. He doesn't know the joy of a receiving the full love of the parent.

And because of that he makes his life miserable and everyone around him miserable.

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The rebellious child of God is at odds with the Shepherd and with the flock and most of the time is found outside of the flock wandering around aimlessly.

When the attacks come, it has no comfort from the Shepherd or the flock, because it has chosen to go its own way!

It doesn't have the full protection of the Shepherd or the comfort of the flock.

Now, the Shepherd still loves the wandering sheep and would care for it, but He can't make it do right!

III. A SURE TEST OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY IS HOW ONE THINKS ABOUT THE WORLD. (Vs 15-16)

Jesus said, you can't serve two masters! You will love one and hate the other.

John says here that the one who runs after the world and who loves it more than Christ, will not know the love of the Father.

James 4:4—"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

If we love the world and are in close friendship with the world, it points to the immaturity in our lives.

And something else, you need to know that those who are saved can't be comfortable loving the world because of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit makes God's children aware of what is pleasing to the Lord and what isn't.

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Conclusion:

How is it with you today? Where are you in your spiritual walk?

First of all are you a child of God? If not, you are spiritually dead in your trespasses and sins.

Contrary to the world's thinking, **we are not all God's children.** Only those who have been born again by His Spirit are truly His children!

If you are not a child of God, we invite you to come join the family today! You join the family by being born into it and we can show you how!

If you are a child of God:

Have you desired the sincere milk of the Word so that you can grow? What are you hungering for? Sadly, some have lost their appetite for the things of God and have traded it for an appetite for the things of this world.

Have you been saved for some time but are still crawling around in spiritual infancy? There is nothing wrong with being an infant as long as you grow out of it!

When a baby doesn't grow, something's wrong!
And if you are not growing spiritually, something is wrong!

God wants you to come to have knowledge of Him. Not just book knowledge, but the knowledge that comes from putting the Word of God into action in your life!

God wants you to grow in your walk to where you can have a deep intimacy with Him! He wants you to grow to such an extent that you can say as Paul said, "*For me to live, is Christ!*"