

GROWING UP IN CHRIST – PART 1
1 Peter 2:2; Ephesians 4:15b

On December 7, 1941, Maurice Martin and Mozelle Hodge eloped and were married by a justice of the peace in Vivian, LA. It was the same day Pearl Harbor was bombed. After WWII was over and they settled down, out of love for each other, they had their first child, Debra Maureen Martin. Two years later they had a son, Mark Roland Martin.

It's funny to look at your pictures of when you grew up – I looked at my elementary school pictures growing up – my how I changed over the years. I used to wonder what I would look like in the years ahead – I still do. It is a natural process for a healthy infant to grow into a child, a teen, then an adult. It is normal. It's natural. It's the way God intended.

It is also God's design for us to grow up spiritually. Ephesians 4:13 says we are to "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." 1 Peter 2:2 says we should grow up in our salvation. Growing up spiritually is like growing up physically – but be aware - just because a person grows in chronological age, does not guarantee they are growing spiritually. It's sort of like how some people never grow up emotionally, no matter what age they are. So what does growing up spiritually in Christ look like for us?

First of all, you must be born into the kingdom of God; That means there are those who have not been born into the kingdom. What does that look like? If a person is not born anew, they are dead in their sins. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ". Ephesians 2:1-3 says, ¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." This is talking about people who are clueless about the things of God – none of it makes any sense to them. They have never accepted Jesus as their Savior, so they remain dead in their sins. The rest of that passage in Ephesians 2 says, ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

When someone sincerely prays to accept by faith what Jesus has done for them, out of His mercy and grace, they are spiritually born into the kingdom of God. No matter what age you are, you're like a baby again. John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." In John 3:3 Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

God, our heavenly Father, in His infinite love for us, calls us to be born into His kingdom, as His child. What is different is that we have a cooperative choice in the matter. You can choose to never be born into His kingdom. But if you respond to His love, we pray and ask Jesus into our heart and life, and His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, comes to live within us. God's nature, not human nature, becomes the transforming force in our life.

We start out as a Babe in Christ. 1 Peter 2:2 says we are to be like newborn babes who crave spiritual milk. But we don't stay Babes in Christ forever. We start out as Disciples, learners. We grow into Children of God, and eventually into Youth in Christ.

A Youth in Christ is someone of any age that has energy and passion for Jesus Christ. 1 John 2:13b says, "I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one." They are ready to face down the devil and beat him to a pulp. They are dynamic in their faith – they are tireless Workers for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then as the person matures in their relationship with Christ, they grow into an Adult in Christ. This is where we are being conformed more and more into the image of Christ. Ephesians 4:13 says, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." A mature person in Christ easily discerns spiritual things, because they have the mind of Christ, as 1 Corinthians 2:16 says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ." They are leaders, because people recognize the presence of Jesus in them and follow. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says we "are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." The fully developed Adult in Christ is only motivated by love, and those who are fully mature in love are few and far between in this world.

Next week I am going to talk about the characteristics and examples of each of these stages of spiritual development. Today I want us to look at where we are in our own spiritual growth.

Growth as a Christian is expected, but is NOT automatic. In other words, when you first accept Jesus as your savior, you're not grown up yet. It is a daily cooperative effort with God. We might look at what is it that makes a child grow up healthy.

One way to look at it is like having a balanced meal. The Balanced Christian life has Jesus Christ at the heart and core of us. Learning God's Word, the Bible; Fellowshiping with other Christians – it is difficult, if not impossible to remain a strong Christian in isolation from others. We need one another. Prayer where we communicate constantly with our heavenly Father; Service – where we put into practice what we believe as we evangelize and lead others to Christ, as well as

care for others in ministry and mission. (The balanced life can also be seen as Bible/Education; Fellowship/Social Skills; Prayer/Good Communication; Service/Exercise.

Where are you in this picture of Christian growth? If you are not growing, something is wrong; A basic sign of life is growth; If something is not growing, it is dead or dying; You might not even be alive yet; You might not yet be a child of God – born anew into His kingdom; That can change today. Today can be your spiritual birthday. Ask Him for the new birth by His Spirit – He is faithful to keep His promises. Once again John 1:12 says, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

If you are a child of God, and you’re not growing – something is wrong. If a child is not growing physically we know something is wrong and we do all we can to remedy the situation. Is your growth stunted? What are you doing to grow in the Lord? Are you studying – not just reading - the Bible? Are you in fellowship with a Christian group, helping one another grow? How’s your prayer life? Are you communicating –talking and listening – with your Living Lord? Where are you putting your faith into action? In what area of Christian service are you involved?

I can’t wait to see what we all look like when we grow up! But I know we all will bear a family resemblance to Jesus Christ – someday.