

Our HPC focus this year is to connect, grow, and serve. All living things grow...and God wants His children (including us) to grow up. Ephesians 4:14-15 ***“Then we will no longer be infants... Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”*** Becoming like Christ. On this Super Bowl Sunday, we consider six points about spiritual growth that will make a touchdown for your spiritual life.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS INCARNATIONAL

Ephesians 4:23-24 ***“(You were taught)...to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”***

“Incarnation” means “in the flesh”. As a “Christian”, we have “Christ in” us...so when others get to know us, they get to know Christ. The Christian life is not a matter of imitation...it is a matter of inhabitation. You cannot by sheer willpower, make yourself, like Jesus. It doesn't work. Only Jesus can be Jesus. Spiritual maturity is not living an artificial life of imitating Christ; it is living life as it was meant to be through the transforming love, presence, and power of Christ. Spiritual growth is both mystical and practical. The mystical part is what God's Spirit does inside of you. The practical parts are the habits and the things that you develop that help you grow as a believer.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS INTENTIONAL

Ephesians 4:1,3 ***“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received...Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit...”***

Spiritual growth takes effort...it is not automatic. Can you grow old without ever growing up? We all know people like that. They grew old and never grew up. They didn't grow up emotionally. They didn't grow up relationally. They didn't grow up financially. They didn't grow up spiritually. Listen up: You can be as close to God as you want to be. Don't blame anybody else. You can't blame your family or friends. You are as close to God as you want to be...and you are as spiritually mature as you want to be. If you are still a spiritual baby, it is because you are choosing to put other things first. You have to choose to grow. It is a choice. We grow by making commitments...be it a team or a job or a relationship or parenthood or home ownership or becoming a Christian...the commitments you make, make you. God takes us through a process that is an intentional process of moving us from no commitment to deep commitment. The first words Jesus told those who would be his followers were: *“Come and see.”* Not much of a commitment is it? But Jesus never left people there. They came - and saw and began to follow Jesus. Jesus would say “You're my follower if... you love me.” Ok. Then “You're my follower if... you love other people.” Gulp, ok. Then “You're my disciple if ... you take up your cross, deny yourself and follow me.” Huh? From no commitment to high commitment. Christ always has spiritual challenges before us to keep us on our growing edge.

We seek to follow Christ's example here at HPC with our 101, 201, 301, 401 classes that are designed to move people from community to crowd to congregation to committed to commissioned. We get to know each other through connect activities. We get to know Christ and His Church next. Then we get serious about being Disciples. Then we discover our giftedness and where we can serve. Finally we hear God's call to go and to share. It is a strategy to grow like K-12. It is daily. It is weekly. It is yearly. It is intentional...and it is life long.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS INCREMENTAL

Ephesians 4:12 ***“...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the whole body of Christ may be built up...”***

Growth is not instant. There is no book you can read or CD to listen to or experience to have or event to go to that will zap you so you will never sin any more...or have any problems. It isn't going to happen. We grow through stages. Spiritual growth is a step by step, gradual development. Every baby has to learn to breathe before it learns to eat. And then it learns to eat before it learns to walk. Then it learns to walk before it learns to talk. Every baby goes through the same developmental stages...even though we are all different. Same thing with developmental stages in the Christian life. First, I get to know Christ...then to love Christ...then to love Christ's family...then to grow in Christ... then to serve Christ...then I learn to share Christ. We have to walk before we talk.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS PERSONAL

Ephesians 4:7 ***“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”***

With spiritual growth, there is no such thing as one size fits all. There's no cookie cutter kind of spiritual growth where we can figure out something you do on day one and do “this” on day fifty, and we all go through the same process and we'll all be full grown spiritually. I have seen a lot of plans like that. It'll help one person but it won't help another...because we're all different. We grow according to our SHAPE – meaning our Spiritual gifts, our Heart, our Abilities, our Personality, our Experiences. God made us, God knows us, and God grows us...through prayer, study, service, giving, worship, mentoring, sharing, trusting...God wants to grow each of His children into the unique people God knows we can be.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS RELATIONAL

Ephesians 4:16 ***“From Christ the whole body, joined and held together by each supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”***

You cannot grow to spiritual maturity by yourself - with just you and God and the Bible. We need other people. 58 times in the New Testament, we are told: *“Love one another, care for one another, serve one another, help one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, greet one another”*...and on and on. Spiritual growth comes through mutual ministry. In every other religion you become holy by separating yourself from humans...but that is not what Jesus taught. Jesus was with people because it is all about love and you can't learn to love if you're never around people. Growing in Christ IS growing in God's love...transforming our hearts, words, and deeds.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS SEASONAL

Ephesians 3:20 ***“God is able...according to His power that is at work within us...”***

HPC's signature verse sets up this whole section we have considered today. It teaches us that it is God who brings growth – in God's time and in God's way and through God's Spirit. Our nut trees produced a bumper crop last year...but nothing right now...why? It is the dormant season. God designed all living and growing things to have dormant seasons when our roots are going deeper in the difficult days so our faith will bear fruit when that time comes. You may think God is not working in your life right now...but He is. Faith is a muscle...the rest between workouts is as important as the workouts. You will grow...warmer through fellowship, deeper through discipleship, stronger through worship, broader through ministry, and larger through mission...because *“God is able”*.