

SPIRITUAL GROWTH COURSE

FOUNDATION PRINCIPLES

#1 WHEN: TRANSFORMATION STARTS WITH SALVATION NOT ENDS

Genuine and lasting transformation that leads to the spiritual maturity that we are talking about in this course is only possible through the blood of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the journey of maturity begins with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a person. But that is only the beginning. While our spirits are reconnected with Jesus in an instant, our minds and souls are transformed over a lifetime. Some may believe that the act of conversion (whether through saying the sinner's prayer or through the sacrament of Confirmation) concludes the spiritual maturity process and now the saint just gets busy serving God. However, this is a grave mistake which leads to believers that are devoid of the character of Christ. Thus, Christ has been grossly misrepresented to the world over the years as our churches have languished in powerlessness and lovelessness. The work of maturing or spiritual formation is something that every Christian must be actively engaged in as long as they are on this earth.

Scriptures:

John 15:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (ESV)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ

#2 WHERE: INTERNAL LIFE THEN EXTERNAL LIFE

Throughout this course we will be focused on our internal life not our external life. Our premise is that Jesus transforms from the inside out. The world tries to change people through conformation; making external changes to our behaviour without any internal change in our heart motives, emotional wellbeing or mindsets. Jesus goes after the heart first and then our behaviour automatically adjusts. We are not concerned with behaviour modification, sin management or morality. We are fixated on the redemptive work of Christ at work in the deepest parts of our soul. Our objective is not to produce Christians who choose to act like Christ but Christians who reflexively acts like Christ because their hearts, minds and souls have become like Christ's.

Scriptures:

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 13:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Matthew 23:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

#3 WHAT: FRUITS BEFORE GIFTS OR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since we are concerned with the internal life of the Christian, then how we measure progress must be aligned to this goal. The question is, “What evidence can we look for of growth in maturity?” Often, we confuse a greatly gifted or accomplished person in ministry with maturity. It is an unfortunate truth that one can have quite a bit of success and notoriety without being mature. One has only to consider the many examples of secular leaders who are successful to realize that this is a poor measure. The evidence that we look for in ourselves and others is the fruit demonstrated in our relationships as defined in Galatians 5. Even when looking at these fruits we can easily (mistakenly) judge with external eyes. For example, we could say that John and Jane have been faithfully married for 30 years and therefore are quite mature. But further examination may reveal that they look like a happy couple in public but in the privacy of their homes they do not speak to each other with kindness or gentleness, they are frequently unfaithful in thought and word and there is no joy in the marriage. The fruit of maturity therefore is only tasted up close and over a long time. Another mistake is to measure fruit in absolutes. I may be kinder than my neighbour, but I have been saved 20 years and she got saved last year and has already seen more improvement in that short time than I have in a lifetime. Do not compare your fruit with others, compare with your fruitfulness a year ago.

Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (ESV)

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Romans 14:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

#4 HOW: RELATIONSHIP TRANSFORMS MORE THAN INFORMATION OR WILLPOWER

Perhaps, the most important question is, “How do we grow?” We believe that what transforms human beings more than anything else is relationships. Christians have been employing a very ineffective growth model that goes something like this: INFORMATION + WILLPOWER + HABITS = TRANSFORMATION. It has not worked, at least not for everyone. Perhaps very disciplined and strong-willed persons have seen results in some areas, but it certainly has not worked for everyone, and not all the time. We need a different model. We believe that the strongest change agent in the universe is love. Specifically, when we are bonded with God and others in a covenant based on unconditional love. People will do amazing things for the ones they love. Fathers will run into blazing buildings. Mothers will run in front of tigers. But more to the point, we imitate the behaviour of those we love like a child learns how to behave from observing his/her parents. Instead of focusing our growth work efforts on more information and more willpower and more discipline we are proposing to focus our growth efforts on building better relationships with God and others. This is a fundamental shift. Our church engines are built around a belief that the sermons and bible study and church attendance is what causes growth. We will need to re-focus on deep personal connections with God and others in drastic ways that were common in the first century church but are very counter-cultural today.

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2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

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Romans 5:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

1 Corinthians 1:11 (ESV)

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.