

GROWING THATS SHOWING

BISHOP SAMUEL R. BLAKES

Lesson 1: The Mandate to Mature

There is a critical difference between aging and maturing. In the natural world, getting older happens automatically, but growing up requires taking on responsibility, learning from mistakes, and developing character. The same principle applies to our spiritual lives. Sitting in a church pew for twenty years does not guarantee spiritual maturity. We can listen to hundreds of sermons, sing countless worship songs, and still remain spiritual toddlers who are easily offended, quick to complain, and unable to feed ourselves from God's Word.

This opening lesson addresses the absolute necessity of growing up in our faith. Spiritual maturity is not an elite status reserved for pastors, missionaries, or a select few super-Christians. It is the baseline expectation for every person who calls Jesus Lord. When we remain immature, we not only miss out on the deep, abundant life God has designed for us, but we also remain vulnerable to the shifting winds of culture, deception, and personal crisis. We must understand exactly what maturity looks like so we can recognize our own deficits and aggressively pursue the growth God demands of us.

Step 1: Recognizing the Danger of Spiritual Infancy

Hebrews 5:12-14 NIV

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The writer of Hebrews issues a sharp pastoral rebuke to believers who had stopped growing. Time had passed, and they should have been far enough along in their faith to guide others. Instead, they had regressed, requiring the basic, foundational truths to be spoon-fed to them all over again.

Spiritual infancy is marked by a dependency on others for spiritual nourishment. An infant cannot feed itself, defend itself, or clean up its own messes.

When believers remain in this state, they rely entirely on Sunday morning services to sustain them for the week, collapsing under the pressure of Monday because they do not know how to open the Word of God and draw strength directly from the source.

Remaining an infant is dangerous because the world we live in requires spiritual discernment. The text explicitly states that solid food belongs to the mature, who have trained their senses to distinguish good from evil.

Spiritual toddlers are easily distracted by shiny, false doctrines and are quickly derailed by emotional hardships. When the storms of life hit, the immature believer questions God's goodness, throws a spiritual tantrum, or abandons the faith entirely. Recognizing this danger is the first step toward growth.

We must honestly evaluate our own lives and admit where we have settled for milk when God is calling us to the meat of His Word.

Step 2: Embracing the Goal of Christlikeness

Ephesians 4:13-15 NIV

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. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching... Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

If we are going to grow, we have to know what the target actually is. Spiritual maturity is not defined by how much theology we can debate, how eloquently we can pray in public, or how many church committees we serve on.

The Apostle Paul makes the standard incredibly clear: the goal is Christlikeness.

We are called to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. This means our reactions, our financial decisions, our marriage dynamics, and our private thoughts must progressively align with the character of Jesus.

Maturity is looking in the mirror and seeing less of our fleshly nature and more of our Savior. This step requires a radical shift in our perspective. We often measure our spiritual growth by comparing ourselves to other believers.

If we are reading our Bibles more than our neighbor, or if our struggles seem less severe than the person sitting in the row ahead of us, we assume we are doing well. But Jesus is our only metric.

When we measure ourselves against His humility, His obedience to the Father, and His sacrificial love, we quickly realize how much growing we still have to do. Embracing this goal strips away our pride and creates a holy hunger to press deeper into the daily disciplines that forge His character within us.

Step 3: Moving from Consumption to Production

John 15:8 NIV

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

A defining characteristic of an infant is that they consume resources without producing anything. They take in food, time, energy, and money, which is perfectly natural for a season. However, a grown adult who only consumes and never contributes is considered a tragic failure.

In the spiritual realm, maturity always shifts us from being consumers to becoming producers. Jesus established that the undeniable proof of our discipleship is that we bear much fruit. This is where "Growing That's Showing" becomes a tangible reality.

The internal work of the Holy Spirit must eventually result in external nourishment for the people around us. Bearing fruit means your life becomes beneficial to others. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness,

and self-control—is not given to us just so we can feel better about ourselves.

Patience is required when dealing with difficult coworkers. Kindness is deployed when serving a fractured community. Faithfulness is tested when a marriage hits a season of drought. When we mature, we stop asking, "What can the church do for me today?" and we start asking, "How has God equipped me to serve His body and reach this city?" The transition from filling a seat to carrying a towel is the ultimate indicator that genuine growth has taken place.

Step 4: Committing to the Daily Process

2 Peter 3:18 NIV

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

The command to grow is continuous and active. Peter does not suggest that we achieve a certain level of knowledge and then retire from spiritual exertion. Growth is a lifelong pursuit of both grace and knowledge. This means we cannot rely on past encounters with God to sustain our present reality. The manna that fed the Israelites in the wilderness rotted if they tried to hoard it for the next day; they had to gather it fresh every morning. In the same way, the revelation and strength we received from God five years ago is not sufficient to fight the battles we are facing today. We must commit to the daily process of seeking Him.

This commitment requires brutal honesty about our daily habits. We cannot claim to desire spiritual maturity while simultaneously feeding our minds a steady diet of secular distraction, outrage, and entertainment. Growth is the result of disciplined choices. It is choosing to open the Scriptures before opening social media. It is choosing to pause and pray rather than reacting in anger. It is choosing to forgive when the flesh demands vengeance. Maturity is forged in the small, seemingly insignificant moments of our Tuesday afternoons and Thursday mornings. When we string together a thousand small decisions to obey God, we eventually wake up to find that we have grown up into strong, resilient disciples.

Discussion Questions

To help transition these concepts from teaching into lived reality, take time to discuss these questions with your group. Be honest about where you currently stand in your spiritual journey. Growth requires vulnerability, and speaking the

truth about our current condition is the only way to move forward.

1. Hebrews 5 talks about believers who should have been teachers but still needed spiritual milk. What are some practical warning signs in a person's life that they are stuck in spiritual infancy?
2. Why is it so tempting to measure our spiritual growth by comparing ourselves to other Christians instead of comparing ourselves to the character of Christ? How does this hinder real maturity?
3. Jesus said that bearing much fruit brings glory to the Father. Can you identify a specific time recently when a difficult situation forced you to produce the fruit of patience, kindness, or self-control for someone else's benefit?
4. Moving from a consumer to a contributor is a major milestone of maturity. What does it look like to have a "consumer mentality" at church, and how do we break free from it?

The goal of these questions is not to generate guilt, but to locate exactly where we need the Holy Spirit's help. Use your discussion to encourage one another, knowing that everyone in the room has areas where they need to grow up.

Application Points

Discussion without action leads to self-deception. James warns us not to merely listen to the word, but to do what it says. Take these practical steps into your week to begin implementing the disciplines of maturity.

1. Conduct a habit audit this week. Write down exactly how much time you spend consuming entertainment, news, and social media compared to the time you spend in prayer and Scripture. Let the numbers tell you the truth about what you are feeding your spirit.
2. Identify one area where you have been operating as a spiritual consumer. Commit to finding a place to serve, give, or contribute within your local church body in the next fourteen days.
3. Choose one specific attribute of Christ (such as His humility, His forgiveness, or His obedience) and make it your primary prayer focus for the next seven days, asking the Holy Spirit to forge that specific trait in your character.

As you step into the week, remember that discipline is simply the vehicle that places us in the path of God's transforming grace. Do the work, stay consistent, and trust God to bring the growth.