

## **206. Spiritual Fitness 1**

**By Arland Steen**

Matthew 28:19-20 (New King James): *19Go therefore and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*

Ephesians 4:12 (Living Bible): *Building up the church, the body of Christ, to a position of strength and maturity.*

2 Corinthians 13:9 (Living Bible): *Our greatest wish and prayer is that you will become mature Christians.*

Ephesians 4:14 (Phillips): *We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching but we are meant to speak the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ.*

The New Testament is very clear that God's will for every believer is spiritual maturity. He wants us to grow up. The ultimate goal of spiritual growth is to become like Jesus. God's plan for us since the beginning has been for us to be like His Son.

Romans 8:29 (New International Version): *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

God wants every believer to develop the character of Christ. The big question is: How does spiritual growth happen?

### *HOW SPIRITUAL GROWTH HAPPENS*

#### ❶ Spiritual growth is intentional

Unlike natural growth, which is automatic, spiritual growth is intentional and requires commitment and effort. A person must want to grow, decide to grow and make an effort to grow. Discipleship begins with a decision. It does not have to be a complex decision, but it does have to be sincere and quality. The disciples certainly did not understand all the implications of their decision when they decided to follow Christ; they simply expressed a desire to follow Him. Jesus took that simple but sincere decision and built on it.

Philippians 2:12-13 (New International Version): *12Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

Notice it says "work out" not "work on" your salvation. There is nothing you can add to what Christ did for your salvation. Paul is talking to believers who are already saved. They had a part to play and so do we.

Becoming like Christ is the result of commitments you make. We become whatever we are committed to. Without a commitment to grow, any growth that occurs will be circumstantial rather than intentional. Spiritual growth is too important to be left to circumstance.

Spiritual growth that leads to maturity begins with the kind of commitment described in Romans 6:13.

Romans 6:13 (Living Bible): *13Give yourselves completely to God—every part of you—for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for his good purposes.*

Spiritual growth does not happen automatically once you are saved, even if you attend services regularly. Churches are filled with people who have attended services for their entire lives, yet are still spiritual babies. An *assimilated member* is not the same as a *mature member*.

There are three practices you must commit to in order to consistently grow spiritually with the reasonable hope of becoming mature. These three commitments are like the legs of a tripod that allows you to stand on solid ground. Your life will be dramatically changed if you make these three commitments. It will benefit you in your time, your relationships, your sensitivity to God, your finances and in your schedule!

## ② Spiritual growth is very practical

Any believer can grow to maturity if he or she will develop the habits necessary for spiritual growth. We need to take the mystery out of spiritual growth by breaking the components down into practical, everyday habits. The path to spiritual fitness is as practical as the path to physical fitness.

Spirituality is not someone in a white robe sitting in a yoga position, burning incense, and chanting with his or her eyes closed. It is not even monks cloistering themselves away from the real world, subjecting themselves to the rigors of poverty, chastity and solitude.

Unfortunately, many Christians feel that spiritual maturity is so far out of their reach, they do not even try to attain it. They have this mystical, idealized image of what a mature Christian looks like. They believe “maturity” is only for “super saints.” The Bible paints a different picture of spiritual maturity and who can attain it.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 (Living Bible): *7Spend your time and energy in the exercise of keeping spiritually fit. 8Bodily exercise is all right, but spiritual exercise is much more important and is a tonic for all you do. So, exercise yourself spiritually, and practice being a better Christian because that will help you not only now in this life, but in the next life too.*

Anyone can become physically fit if he or she will regularly do certain exercises and practice good health habits. Likewise, spiritual fitness is simply a matter of learning certain *spiritual* exercises and being disciplined to do them until they become habits. Character is shaped by the habits we develop. Incredible growth will occur in you as you practice daily habits over a long period of time.

## ③ Spiritual growth is a process that takes time

Just as God allowed Joshua and the Israelites to possess the land “little by little” (Deuteronomy 7:22), He uses a gradual process of change to develop us into the image of Christ. There are no shortcuts to maturity. It is a slow process.

Ephesians 4:13 (Phillips): *We arrive at real maturity – that measure of development which is meant by the fullness of Christ. Saying that maturity is a destination at which we arrive implies a journey. Despite our wish to speed up the process, spiritual growth is a journey that will last a lifetime.*

This discounts a popular misconception about spiritual growth: That it may occur instantly if you find the right “key.” Many sincere Christians spend their entire lives earnestly searching for an experience, a conference, a revival, a book, a tape, or a single truth that will *instantly* transform them into a mature believer. Their search is futile. Although we have instant coffee, instant potatoes and such, there is no such thing as instant spiritual maturity. There never has been and never will be.