

Characteristics of Spiritual Growth
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Introduction: We are God's possession that is to be molded into His image.

- A. That process of changing is called "growth". (**Rom 8:29**)
 - 1. The change must take place in the heart, resulting in our thoughts and motives yielding to His. (**Matt 22:37-38**)
 - 2. There is a real danger that this growth fails to take place. (**1 Cor 3:1-3**)

I. The foundation of all spiritual growth

- A. I must choose God's way of thinking. (**Rom 8:5-8**)
 - 1. To have the world's thinking we simply must do nothing.
 - 2. To become spiritual we must do so on purpose.
(Ex. What do you get out of: Bible reading, classes, services)
- B. I must expect much effort and struggle.
 - 1. It is like exercise: "No pain, no gain."
 - 2. It is impossible to have a religion of ease and accomplish the growth that God wants. (**Luke 14:33**)

"God loves us the way we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way.

- 3. The scriptures picture this as a war. (**2 Cor 10:3-5**)
- C. I will develop in the knowledge and application of the scriptures. (**Heb 5:12-14**)
 - 1. It has been said of some: "They have stopped studying".

"Maturity is pressing toward the mark; immaturity is complacency and self-satisfaction."

- 2. On the other hand, look at someone who is committed to learning.
- D. I must reject the substitutes of men.
 - 1. An outward front. (**Matt 23:5**)
 - 2. Religious Activity. (**Matt 7:21-23**)
 - 3. Knowledge Alone. (**1 Cor 8:1-3**)
 - 4. Time spent "in the church". (**Heb 5:12**)

II. Characteristics of Spiritual Growth

- A. **A constant awareness of God's presence. (Psa 139:1-6)**
 - 1. We know of His presence by his word, not our feelings. (**Prov 14:12**)
 - 2. Consider the various stages of our day. Do we think of God? (Example: Driving with Yvette and though not speaking, I know she is there!)
 - 3. Consider the benefits of the knowledge of God's presence.
 - a. I am instant in prayer. (**1 Thess 5:17**)
 - b. The word of God is applied to my life. (**Heb 4:12-13**)
 - c. I am kept from sin. (**Psa 51:4**) (Ex. Cornfield...failed to look up!)
 - d. I repent of my sin. (**2 Cor 7:10**)
 - e. My worship is full of meaning. (**Psa 19:14**)
 - f. I am delivered from fear. (**Phil 4:5; 1:28**)

- B. **A hungering and thirsting for God's word. (Matt 5:6)**

1. When a person first becomes a Christian they are overwhelmed by how little they know. In time they can learn much!
2. Sadly some stop desiring to study because they have achieved the “status quo”.
(2 Cor 10:12)
3. Some study only to avoid embarrassment in class.
4. Are you just getting by? Why study? **(1 Peter 2:1-3)** What is your God like?

C. The things this world has to offer has lost its appeal. (Rom 12:1-2)

1. The world seems to have an unfair advantage! We can see our clothes, houses, positions, bills... but we cannot see God, Christ, heaven, our soul.
2. When a consistent choice is made to spiritual things, a slow change occurs. (Ex. Couple used to travel and shop every weekend. Now it is not important.)
3. When the world loses its appeal many things change. **(Col 3:1-3)**
4. How we view church services will change “Rush to get out” or time with God?

D. You have an ability to see sin coming. (Heb 5:12-14)

1. A new Christian has difficulty to realize and recognize that things led to sin.
2. Consider some areas of growth.
 - a. Modest apparel --- then and now.
 - b. Associations with Christians versus buried in work.
 - c. Dating, marriage and eternity.
 - d. False teachers and taking a stand.
3. In short we develop a God-given wisdom! **(1 Cor 10:12-13)**

E. There are more people you come to love.

1. Our Lord loved everybody, good and bad. **(Rom 5:6-8)**
2. You do not have to “perform” for spiritual people! (Example: When an outsider comes in a congregation, what is the reception?)
3. “Does your sphere of love encompass only the ones who meet your standard of conduct and behavior?” If yes, this is not love, it is bondage!
4. Who do you love? **(Matt 5:46-47; John 13:34-35)**

F. It is easier to forgive those who offend you. (Eph 4:32)

1. When you first become a Christian, forgiveness may take a while.
2. How long does it take for you even when the hurt is deliberate? **(Matt 6:14-15)**
3. Do you know what it is like to be around someone who forgives? How about one who holds a grudge?
4. Those who do not forgive live in an unreal world!

III. True spiritual growth will take time. (James 5:7-8)

1. It is often not the one with the greatest ability who accomplishes God’s work. It will always be the one who is consistent.
2. What happens to the one whose enthusiasm lasts only a while or is choked out by the world? **(Luke 8:12-14)**

Conclusion: In which direction am I moving? **(Phil 4:8-9)**

- A. Men find it difficult to be honest here. Are you growing?
- B. We must with urgency return to the Lord’s ways. **(Rev 2:5)**