Message for THE LORD'S DAY EVENING, August 31, 2014
Christian Hope Church of Christ, Plymouth, North Carolina
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TOPIC: Spiritual Growth, Maturity

Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity
II Peter 3:18 (NKJV)

Please turn with me to tonight's scripture text in II PETER chapter 3, and let's read verse 18.

II PETER 3:18 (NKJV) But grow in the grace and knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: There is nothing more precious than a newborn baby, unless its a newborn puppy. (just kidding)

Babies are immature physically, mentally and emotionally. We don't have high expectations out of a baby, do we?

I mean, you don't expect a newborn baby to clean up his room and make his bed, do you? You don't expect a newborn baby to mow the lawn or pick up sticks out of the yard, do you?

You don't expect a newborn baby to do math problems or answer history questions or work crossword puzzles in the daily newspaper.

No, when a baby is immature you expect to have to feed them, and hold them, and carry them, and dress them and bathe them and change their diaper.
But as a baby grows older we expect them to develop and mature, don’t we? We expect them to START WALKING and STOP CRAWLING. We expect them to START TALKING and STOP SPEAKING baby gibberish. We expect them to START EATING SOLID FOODS and STOP DRINKING A BOTTLE. We expect them to START DOING THINGS FOR THEMSELVES instead of having someone else do everything for them. And if they don’t grow and mature as they should, we know something is seriously wrong, don’t we?

What is true of us “physically” is also true of us spiritually. When we first accepted Jesus Christ we were “born again.” As “babes in Christ” we were “spiritually immature.” We didn’t know much about the Bible or about the Church or about living the Christian life in general. Everything was new to us.

But as time passes, we are to grow and mature in Christ, and if we don’t something is seriously wrong.

Our text in II Peter 3:18 (NKJV) says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ.”

What are some of the symptoms of “spiritual immaturity” we should be concerned about?

(1) A spiritually immature Christian cannot handle “the meat” of God’s word.

I CORINTHIANS 3:2 (NKJV) “I fed you with milk and not solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able.”

(2) A spiritually immature Christian is still very WORLDLY.

I CORINTHIANS 3:3 (NKJV) “For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and visions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”

(3) A spiritually immature Christian is INCONSISTENT in his or her spiritual life.

EPHESIANS 4:14 (NKJV) “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”
(4) A spiritually immature Christian **HEARS** the word of GOD, but doesn’t **PRACTICE** it in his or her daily life.

   **JAMES 1:22 (NKJV)** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

(5) A spiritually immature Christian is unable to **TEACH** others even the basics of God’s word.

   **HEBREWS 5:12 (NKJV)** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of GOD; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

(6) A spiritually immature Christian is **SELFISH** and puts his or her own needs ahead of other Christians.

   **PHILIPPIANS 2:3,4 (NKJV)** Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Just as a baby has to take his or her first steps toward being able to walk on their own two feet, there are certain steps every Christian must take in order to become “spiritually mature.”

For the remainder of the message I would like for us to focus on those **STEPS TOWARD SPIRITUAL MATURITY**.
Step #1: I Must DESIRE To Grow

I PETER 2:1,2 (NKJV) Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, all hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, DESIRE THE PURE MILK OF THE WORD, that you may grow thereby..........

1. Physically speaking, did you ever meet a child who didn’t want to grow? Have you ever heard a child say, “My goal in life is to always be a baby?”

No! They say things like..........

“I want to GROW UP to be just like my dad.”
“I want to GROW UP to be just like my mom.”
“I can’t wait until I’m old enough to stay up past 9:00.”
“I can’t wait until I’m 16 so I can get my driver’s license.”

Children desire to grow TALLER........SMARTER........and STRONGER. Children can’t wait to “GROW UP!”

2. Spiritually speaking, every Christian should DESIRE to grow up! Whereas physical growth happens on its own with the passing of time, spiritual growth doesn’t just happen automatically the longer we are a Christian.

We have to DESIRE to grow! We have to WANT to grow! We have to be WILLING to do whatever is necessary to grow.

3. One of the great dangers in the Christian life is that after we have been a Christian for a number of years and have sat through Church services every Sunday morning and Sunday evening for years, and have heard hundreds and hundreds of Sermons and Sunday School lessons, we have this tendency to start believing we have reached our full level of maturity and we just stop growing. If you are one who thinks that way, I want you to listen to these humbling words of the Apostle Paul:
PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14 (NKJV)

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

4. Do you know what Paul is saying? He's saying, “I've grown a lot, but I've still got a lot of growing to do.”

5. Do you still have that DESIRE, that HUNGER, that THIRST to grow up to be like JESUS? That is the first step towards spiritual maturity.

STEP #2: I Need Spiritual NOURISHMENT To Grow

Matthew 4:4 (NKJV) But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Illustration: Some time ago, Dr. Phil had a guest on his show named Jennifer. When Jennifer was 16 years old, she was a vibrant, beautiful teenager, a great student and a very gifted athlete with hopes of traveling around the world.

But by the age of 25 Jennifer’s vibrant beauty was gone. She weighed less than 95 pounds and was nothing more than skin and bones. Jennifer didn’t have cancer or some other dreadful disease. She was anorexic and bulimic. She was literally starving herself to death.
1. Many Christians are battling a form of “spiritual anorexia.” They are starving themselves spiritually by not feeding on the word of GOD each and every day.

2. A lot of Christians are under the impression that reading the Bible is “optional” in the Christian life. But its not!

   Jesus says in JOHN 8:31 (NKJV) “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”

   (English Standard Version ---If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples.)

3. Daily nourishment is vitally important to a child’s growth and development. Good parents are concerned about proper nutrition for their children. They want them to eat foods that are good for them and stay away from the “junk foods” that are bad for them.

4. Likewise, daily nourishment in the word of GOD is vitally important to our growth and development as Christians.

   II Timothy 2:15 (KJV) Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

   ACTS 17:11 (NKJV) Remember what the apostle Paul said about the Christians in the Berean Church? He said, “They searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” (in other words, they searched God’s word daily to make sure Paul was preaching the truth.)

5. Every Lord’s day, you come here to Sunday School and Worship. And let’s be honest, one Sunday School lesson or one sermon is NOT enough “NOURISHMENT” to make you spiritually mature. But a steady, diet of preaching and teaching from GOD’S word year after year will help you to grow and mature spiritually.

6. For many Christians, the weekly Sunday School lesson and Sunday Sermon is the only Biblical nourishment they get for a whole week. If you just ate one or two meals a week, what would happen to your physical body? You would get weak or sick, or even die!
7. If you want to get really serious about your SPIRITUAL GROWTH, spend time reading and studying and meditating on GOD'S WORD each day on your own. There is no SHORTCUT or SUBSTITUTE for this.

   **Listen carefully!** Your level of spiritual growth and maturity will never surpass the level of your personal study of God's word.

Now here's Step #3..............

**STEP #3: I Need Spiritual EXERCISE To Grow**

I Timothy 4:7b, 8 (NKJV) “.......exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things.”

1. Did you ever watch a professional athlete and wonder how they got to be so good at their sport?

   *Despite his personal problems, **TIGER WOODS** is one of the greatest golfers of our time. Even after achieving a level in profession few have achieved, Tiger Woods still practices golf 7-8 hours every day hitting hundred upon hundreds of golf shots.

   **MICHAEL JORDAN** wanted to become the greatest basketball player of all time, so he lifted weights every day to build up his strength, and he spent five hours a day five days a week shooting a basketball and honing his famous moves.

Dr. K. Anders Ericcson did extensive research to understand expertise performance in any field. In his research of professionals from a variety of fields he determined it requires 10 years or 10,000 hours of intensive practice and exercise to reach a professional level in any field. He also determined that anyone can get good at something with a minimum of four hours of practice a day.
2. This same principle applies to growing and maturing in our spiritual life. Many Christians want to “pigeon hole” their Christianity into the one or two hours they spend in Church each Sunday.

3. If you and I are to ever reach the level of spiritual maturity the LORD desires for us to reach we must practice and exercise GODLINESS each and every day.

   We must exercise GODLINESS in every area of our lives:
   At home.......at work.......at school......in our habits......in our priorities......in our finances.......in the way we use our time.... and the way we use our talents.

4. We must understand that Christianity isn’t like a change of clothes we put on Sunday morning and take off Sunday at noon. When we were baptized “we put on Christ” and from that day forward we are never to “take Him off.”

   **STEP ONE:** I Must **DESIRE** To Grow.

   **STEP TWO:** I Need Spiritual **NOURISHMENT** To Grow.

   **STEP THREE:** I Need Spiritual **EXERCISE** To Grow.

   Now here’s the fourth and final step……

   **STEP #4:** I Need **TIME** And **PATIENCE** To Grow

   **JAMES 1:2-4 (NKJV)** 2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

   3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

   4 But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
1. Think back to when your kids were little babies. Did you ever put them to bed at night and think for a minute that they would be all grown up by the next morning? No, you didn't did you? Why? Because you knew the process of growing and maturing into an adult would take a lot of time and patience.

And if you're like me, you look back on it now and it seems like they went from infancy......to childhood......to adulthood.... in “a blink of an eye” doesn't it?

2. Spiritual growth and maturity is the same way. We don't “grow up” spiritually overnight. It takes years of TIME and PATIENCE.

We have to weather a lot of STORMS. We have to endure a lot of TRIALS. We have to fight a lot of BATTLES. And we have to travel over a lot of MOUNTAINS and through a lot of VALLEYS.

And with every storm........every trial........every battle......every mountain.......and every valley.......we are growing stronger and more mature and most importantly, more like Jesus Christ.

**CONCLUSION**

The story is told about a little boy who fell out of bed one night. When his mom asked him what happened he said, “I guess I just stayed too close to the gettin' in place.”

You know, that’s why a lot of Christians fall away from GOD; they stay too close to the gettin' in place.

Brothers and sisters, GOD wants you and me to grow and mature into the likeness of His Son Jesus Christ. That doesn’t just happen on its own. **We Must DESIRE To Grow!**  **We Need Spiritual NOURISHMENT To Grow!**  **We Need Spiritual EXERCISE To Grow!**  **And We Need TIME and PATIENCE To Grow!**

Let us grow in the grace and knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ.