

Still Growing After All These Years

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Some of you are wondering why the title sounds familiar and it's because you are remembering Paul Simon's 1975 album that won two Grammys and had on it four top forty hits, *Still Crazy After All These Years*. The song tells of a guy reflecting on the years and seeing that one thing true then he hasn't lost now, he's still crazy after all these years.

Many of us have seen a few years and one thing that according to the Bible should be true regardless of the number of years we have is that we are still growing after all these years. Christ comes into our lives as dynamic, as life, as a seed per the passage we just read and with him in the picture our lives grow. There's are other parables of growth, like that of the mustard seed or that of the talents, where you and with Jesus can, are to, experience growth.

We are not like rocks that might grow in size with the addition of mud. We are living and like plants or people. But growth generally doesn't happen the way it does with babies.

It is not instantaneous or automatic. It doesn't take place in a moment and is all over and done with nor is it done by autopilot. It happens the way one author put it nicely with the title of his book by A Long Obedience in the Same Direction. There is something

for us to do or we would have the command that we have from II Peter at the top of our bulletin today, Grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

While in our adult years we may not grow taller or physically stronger, we are still capable of growing spiritually. Isn't it nice to know that not everything is on the downhill side of life. They say in terms of our span of earthly years that we spend some portion of it going into the forest and then we realize that we are no longer going in but on the way out. But spiritually we are always, always going in.

And in terms of spiritual growth the thought is that with Christ we will keep growing until we die. I would offer that that, death, isn't probably the end of our growth. When we've been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun, I am thinking that I will have had an adventure or two, handled some responsibilities, learned some things I didn't get to learn here, and be stronger than when I/we first begun.

This is the time of year when our society thinks about resolutions and growth but the Christian doesn't relegate it to a time of year. He or she is always thinking about growth. And yet it is not a bad idea to have a time on the calendar for inventory, for planning, and such. Let's ask today, How do we make it so that as we cut our Paul Simon-like album we are singing, Still *Growing* After All These Years?

It takes three things and these can be implemented today. The best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago

and the next best time is today. So if you have been adrift for 25 years, that's the way it is. But you are a living human being redeemed by Christ and he is always pushing you to not drift, to grow, and that propulsion of his to grow can be latched on to today.

First, picture a growing life. See in your mind's eye yourself as a growing person with gained aptitudes and understandings and skills. If you were going to grow in speaking Spanish, for example, picture being able to shop and travel easily because of your skill and picture how much fun that is. If that picture is dull and not vivid, boring and not desirable, we're just not going to pursue it. Plain and simple. But travelling knowing the language is way easier than not and that is the truth and that truth should be pictured. Picturing it helps us grow.

The picture of growing spiritually looks something like this -- being a person who is interesting, who is interested in life, who is deep rooted in character, who is a deep pool of compassion, who is steady in the storms of life ... who lifts others. I listened to a podcast the other day where the lady shared she had published twelve books and was working on a murder mystery and ... oh, did she mention she didn't start writing until age 70? That self that she is was fun to picture and admirable.

You and I are not going to go after a growing life until we picture it like with that writer's enthusiasm or John's pride. We are not going to go after it well

unless we, underline it, taste it, ponder it as a truly great kind of life worth getting.

A choked life, a (in terms of the parable of the talents told by Jesus) one-talent life buried in the ground, dying as emotionally bound and spiritually confused as you were when you were twenty, who wants that? Having the blade of your inner life stronger and sharper every year, having twenty talents given you by the Lord, having 1000 fold growth, now that's the way to go. See it, picture it, ponder it, meditate upon it, taste it, write it down, make a song about it.

... You know Israel signed on for being a people on the move and they were moving from Egypt with a Pharaoh and bondage to a PROMISED LAND flowing ... flowing...with milk and honey, green pastures, still waters. They saw it. So you, picture, right now yourself as a spiritually vivid and dynamic person.

Second, decide . Seeing the greatness of a growing life isn't the same as a committing to the growing the growing life. A 17th century classic now printed as a Devout and Holy Life is a classic largely because it's author, William Law, noted that there are different kinds of decision making and those that go the distance are those that are deeply forged. They are not made in haste. They are made solemnly. One of the reasons weddings are public is that you don't want that decision to fall apart and if just the two of you made it behind the dime store with cigar band rings, it won't be as forged as the public one. Now some of you will tell me you eloped and that's all fine but you get what I mean generally. Jesus when it came

time for the cross “set his face for Jerusalem.” The cement set. He hardened in decision, resolution. When we get done with the message, I’m going to give you several minutes to pray and to decide in your own heart. Then I challenge you to let someone know that you have committed to be not just a Christian but a growing Christian or you have renewed your commitment to be a growing Christian.

Third, you and I need a plan . If you and I decide to learn Spanish, we need a Berlitz book. A tutor. Vocabulary cards. The plan from the Bible is read the Bible, pray, serve, give, and have confidence in God as routinely as you can.

But there’s a specific part of growth found in this wonderful verse in II Cor 4:18ff, seeing the unseen. We are outwardly wasting away but inwardly being renewed, growing and not just in brain cells but soul cells, day by day. How? The verse continues and tells, by seeing the unseen. Or in other phrasing from other parts of the NT, we set our minds on things above. Or we set our minds on the Spirit. This is also said of Moses that he persevered by seeing the unseen.

What does this mean, to see the unseen? Here’s the way I think of it. Two ways. First, with any seeing there is focus. We have all sorts of things in our view and peripheral vision. But we don’t see them unless they get our attention or we give them our attention. Advertisers know this. Go down the grocery store aisle and there’s a little coupon gizmo on the shelf emitting a little, pulsing light. Out of the hundred products

nearby to get seen, there's gizmo. You see it, focus on it, and move in towards. In the meantime, there are many goods you just do not see even though they are there. So to see the unseen means first of all focus, put it at the center of your vision, move toward it. Use a microscope, a telescope, whatever. And we do this with Christ, every day.

Second, I consider that we see some things within the mind.. An architect will see a building in his or her mind before it even exists in a touch with your hands sense. Oddly, before a building can be real in the touch sense, it must be real in the invisible, mental sense. Both are realities and one must precede the other.

What the Bible assumes is that with Christ we are given a measure of liberty with respect to our minds and we can direct the attention of them, we can set our minds upon, we can our minds to, we can dwell upon thinking-wise. And the inward renewal that goes on and on despite our physical decline, happens by bringing out thoughts to Christ, thinking about Christ. If you meet a student having a problem with a class, or anyone with any kind of problem, ask them what has occupied their minds. Probably not the subject matter. Have Christ occupy your mind. Have him be your focus. Right there in your consciousness. I'd love to be a part of a growing church. Most of the time when people say that they mean there are more and more people and that's totally good. But having more and more people who are not personally growing in Christ is... a little scary. Let's be a growing

church this year ... sure add the people... but most certainly let's be a growing church by having each of us personally growing in Christ.

“Between an airplane and every other form of locomotion and transportation there is one great contrast. The horse and wagon, the automobile, the bicycle, the locomotive, the speedboat, and the great battleship—all can come to a standstill without danger, and they can all reverse their engines, or their power, and go back. But there is no reverse about the engine of an airplane. It cannot back up. It dare not stand still. If it loses its momentum and forward-drives, then it crashes. The only safety for the airplane is in its forward and upward motion. The only safe direction for the Christian to take is forward and upward. If he stops, or if he begins to slip and go backward, that moment he is in danger.”—C. E. Macartney.

Pablo Casals was considered the greatest cellist to ever live. When he was 95 years old he was asked why he continued to practice 6 hours a day. He answered, “Because I think I’m making progress.

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