

Growing Strong in Jesus, part 1  
July 6, 2014

My dad didn't know much about auto mechanics so he couldn't teach me. I think he hoped I would learn and could teach him. But none of my friends worked on cars. So I didn't learn either. When I got married, my brother-in-law, Gary, gave me some pointers. He said that auto mechanics wasn't hard. If you have the right tools and know how to use them, auto mechanics wasn't hard to do. He gave me a book on some simple repairs. I still found it daunting because while I could read the book and purchase the tools, I didn't know what the finished thing was supposed to look like. The book didn't tell me, "Now this is what the brakes should look like inside. But if it looks like this, something is wrong."

While I didn't learn how to be a mechanic, I have learned much over the years about cooking and baking. Some of you might think those are the same things, but they are not. Cooking usually takes place on the stove top. Baking takes place in the oven.

I've realized that cooking and baking have much in common with auto mechanics. Let me explain. Four requirements are needed for cooking and auto mechanics.

First, you have to have the right tools for the job. Cooking and baking involve a set of tools. Auto mechanics also have a set of tools. Cooking tools won't enable you to fix a car and mechanic tools won't help you fix a meal. You have to have the right set of tools for the job.

Secondly, you have to know how to use them. A spatula can be used to stir. But it can also be used to fold. If you don't know how to fold and you stir instead, you aren't going to get the right results. When it comes to tuning up an automobile engine a spark plug gap tool is necessary for setting the proper gap on a spark plug. But if you don't know how to use it, it is a worthless piece of metal.

So the first two things you need are the right tools and the skill to use them. The third requirement is knowing how to proceed. For a car repair, you have to know the right order of procedures to get TO the part that needs replacement. You can't just start dismantling things without knowing the right order to take them off, or put them back on.

Cooking also requires a procedure. The procedure for cooking something is called a recipe. A recipe lists all the ingredients you need to make the dish. Then following the ingredients are the tools and steps you use to put the cake or casserole together. Both cooking and auto mechanics require a plan to do the job.

And then the fourth requirement is that you have to know what it should look like, or how it should function, when you have finished the job. If the brakes don't work, you did something wrong. If you have parts left over, you did something wrong. If the cake tastes bad, you did something wrong.

So the four requirements for both cooking and auto mechanics are having the right tools, having the skill to use them, a recipe or plan of procedures, and knowing what the final result should be like. These same four things could be applied to sports or crafts or sewing or painting or any number of things. It could also apply to growing as a Christian.

I hope you are growing as a Christian. God's plan is for every Christian to grow strong in Jesus Christ. That is why He puts the Holy Spirit in us, to produce our growth.

Let me give you some reasons why you should grow. We should grow because we will be more effective and productive followers of Jesus Christ. We will become more like Him. We will better represent Him and draw people to Him. We will be a better witness. We will bring glory to the name of Jesus. And there are more. But let me give you a couple you may not be aware of.

**Lack of growth may be a sign that you are not saved.** We are warned in the Bible to make sure we are in the Christian faith. We are to expect to grow, work to grow, believe that God is growing us, and look for fruit of growth. If we do not see any growth, it may be a sign that we are not yet saved. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth...

**2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)** Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?

You must be saved in order for Christian growth to take place in you. You have to be saved in order to grow in Jesus because growth in Jesus is produced by the Holy Spirit with the watering and fertilizing you do in order to grow. So lack of growth may show that you do not have the Holy Spirit in you that causes the growth to take place. Lack of growth may reveal to you that you are not yet really saved from your sins.

**Lack of growth may be a sign that you are still a baby Christian.** In the book of Hebrews the writer criticizes the Christians he is writing to because they haven't learned more than the basics of the Christian faith.

**Hebrews 5:11 - 6:1 (NIV)** We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 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.

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity...

He doesn't mean they should desert the elementary teachings about Christ. He means they should build upon them. The elementary teachings are enough for you to get saved, but are not enough for you to grow mature and be able to tell good from evil. We very much need help in telling good from evil in our world today. So let us do the things that will lead to growth.

Some years ago we were doing a Bible study on adopting the mind of Christ. We were looking at various qualities of Jesus' character and examining ourselves for signs of growth in that character. After a couple of sessions a young woman broke down in tears. She realized that she had no growth in her faith. She was embarrassed and distressed. She quit the group. I never found out which of these she realized about herself. But she did realize one of them. God may use this study to wake you up to your true spiritual condition.

**A non-Christian can't grow.**

**A baby Christian needs to grow.**

**A maturing Christian will show evidence of growth.**

Which one are you?

While there is no place in the Bible that gives a detailed plan for growing into Christian maturity, there are passages that point us in that direction. We're going to look at one of those passages this morning and over the next several weeks.

The setting is the book of Acts. The context is opening day for the Christian church. God, the Holy Spirit, has poured Himself into the apostles in the city of Jerusalem and caused a commotion that spills out onto the street. The street is full of people, Jews, who have traveled to the city for the Feast of Pentecost. The crowd in the street is astounded by what they see and hear and the Holy Spirit moves Peter, one of Jesus' followers, to address the crowd and explain what is going on. What he says is that this event is the fulfillment of a very old prophecy from God. One day, the prophecy foretold, God would send the Holy Spirit to all His people Israel and usher in a new age of blessings.

Peter explains that this new age began with the coming of Jesus. Jesus had been put to death several months before this day, been raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit, and then after 40 days, had returned to heaven. God, initiated by this miracle was calling on people everywhere to believe in Jesus and repent of their sins. Let's pick up with the story in Acts 2:36.

**Acts 2:36-40 (NIV)** "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Messiah)."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

I want you to note that Peter calls them to make a response. That response starts with believing his message, repenting of their sins, and being baptized into Jesus' name. If they do this, he promises that they too will receive the presence of the Holy Spirit in them just as they have seen the presence of the Holy Spirit in the apostles.

As we will see in just a moment, they do all these things. But what I want you to focus on is the other things they did, things he doesn't tell them to do, but that the Holy Spirit led them to do after they did what he said to do. It was them continuing in these other things that enabled them to begin to grow strong in following Jesus. It is also these other things that will help us to grow strong in Jesus.

**Acts 2:41-47 (NIV)** Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was

filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Our focus in this series is verse 42. This morning we are looking at just the first part of that verse.

**Acts 2:42 (NIV)** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...

The word devoted is an effort to show a continuing activity. This was not a one time event. It was not one sermon, or a few introduction lessons that they came for. This was an ongoing activity. They looked to the apostles to teach them what this was all about. And they kept looking to the apostles. They came every day to learn more of this new thing God was doing, and their part in it was.

Most had heard of Jesus, but they did not know much of Jesus. Even if they had heard Jesus preach, much of what Jesus said to the crowds was in parables. It was when Jesus was alone with His disciples that He explained the meanings of the parables and taught them much about the kingdom of God.

It is now these things that the apostles need to teach all the new followers of Jesus. And the people listened. They knew there was much to learn. And they wanted to learn it. They wanted to live it.

We too, to grow strong in Jesus need to be well-informed about our Christian faith. How informed are you? If someone asked you today why you are a Christian, I have no doubt that you could tell them. If they asked you how they could become a Christian and why they needed to do so, most of you could do an adequate job of that.

But what if someone asked you to share five or six of the major doctrines of Christianity. Could you do that? What if someone asked you how Baptists and Roman Catholics are different. Could you do that? If someone asked you if you are a Calvinist, would you have any idea what he is talking about? Each of us needs to be devoted to the teaching of the apostles.

So how will you do this? How will you devote yourself to the apostle's teaching? How will you learn the doctrines of the Christian faith? How will you learn to live out the doctrines of the Christian faith. Because these aren't just bits of information to know. They are something that needs to be internalized so that it is lived out.

How will you do that? Let me give you some suggestions to start. What tools do you need in order to grow stronger in Jesus?

**Prayerfully attend to the preaching ministry in your church by...**

Note the word "prayerfully" at the beginning of that sentence. On Sunday, before you come and after you get here and before the preacher preaches, prepare yourself to

listen to God speak through the preacher to you. That may sound kind of supernatural or mystical. It is. And we believe God does this through Christian preaching. That is why we spend so much money on the preaching ministry. We believe that God uses preaching to communicate His truth to people's hearts. If you believe that too, then you need to take the preaching ministry seriously enough to be preparing and asking to hear what God wants to say to you.

**... preparing to hear God speak.**

**... responding in prayer.**

This is worship. Worship isn't just listening to God. Worship is responding to God.

**... acting on your prayer.**

What will you do to obey God this week? What do you need to do differently because of what God said to you? Do it!

**... sharing what happens.**

I don't fish for complements. I don't need, or want, a routine "good job" from you because you think you ought to say something to the preacher as you leave the room. What I need to hear from you, what gets me floating off the floor is when you tell me that God spoke to you and you actually did something because of it. If you did something suggested in the sermon, and you share with me what happened, that is what I need.

Share with me what happens when you obey God. Share with your Bible study group what happens when you obey God. If you who are maturing Christians will share that God is speaking to you and you are obeying, the new Christians learn that this is normal and expected in the life of growing Christians. Otherwise, we end up with a church full of immature Christians.

**Read and study the Bible.**

Some of this will be in preparation for your Bible study group coming up in the next week. Or it may be in response to last week's group.

Reading and study are not the same. Read the Bible to get the basic story of the Bible. You should know the history of Israel, because it sets up the coming of the Messiah. Every page of the New Testament depends upon an understanding of the Old Testament. Unless you know the story of Israel, you will miss much of the New Testament riches.

Study the Bible to go deeper than the story. To understand the doctrines of Christianity you will have to go deeper than the overall stories of Israel and Jesus and the church.

As with the sermon, apply what you learn. See if you can tell someone else what you learned about the doctrines of Christianity, even if only your dog. Trying to say it out loud so that someone else can understand it will reveal to you whether or not you really understand it.

**Teach.**

You will never understand something better than when you can explain it to someone else, logically, with illustrations, that enables them to grasp the same content and teach

it to someone else. If you want to understand fully the Christian faith, teach it to someone else. It may be your child, a sibling, a friend, a coworker, your spouse, or a group at church.

We need teachers all the time. We are short of teachers right now. We need a middle school teacher for the fall. I could use a co-teacher in my class. We always need substitute teachers. We always need teachers-in-training so that we can continue to provide for the growing/changing needs of our church. Even if you have never taught before, you can learn to teach. You may never be good at it, but you won't know if you don't try. And teaching will force you to read and study and grow.

#### Invitation

I believe in the ministry of preaching. I believe God speaks, when it suits Him, to people who listen. Maybe God has spoken to you today about your need to grow. Maybe God has revealed Himself to your heart this morning and now you know God is real and does speak to people.

Knowing that the first response to God is to respond to His gift of a Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to die on purpose for your sins. You can be forgiven of all sin and get a fresh start with God today by putting your trust in Jesus, repenting of your sins, and being baptized in His name. Then come and give your life to Jesus with us.