

CHAPTER ONE

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Our Christian living and vocation needs spiritual growth (growing in Jesus). Spiritual growth is the spiritual exercise of our Christian faith. Spiritual growth is the bearing of fruits in our Christian lives, and so, a very important mark of a disciple of Christ. It is good for our souls, just as physical exercise is good for our bodies.

“Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is valuable in every way, because it promises life both for the present and for the future.” (1 Tim 4:8)

Here, Paul teaches us to pay more attention to our need for spiritual exercise because it contributes to our spiritual growth.

A SEED-LIKE FAITH

As Christians, all of us are given a seed-like faith, and this faith must grow to produce spiritual maturity. If not, we will become weak and sick spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically.

A person can be a Christian for 50 long years and yet still have a seed-like faith; that is, like a seed that never germinated but continues to remain as an undeveloped seed, without experiencing any spiritual growth in his life. All natural seeds need sunlight, rain, soil, and fertiliser to grow strong and healthy. It is the same with our Christian lives. We need spiritual food to grow and become strong and healthy. When we are baptised we are like a newly born ‘spiritual baby’. Like growing babies who feed on milk, as they grow older they need to feed on solid food. However, if as young adults, they still continue to feed on milk, then it is not difficult to recognise that they are indeed abnormal. Paul used the analogy of ‘milk’ and ‘solid food’ to describe the importance of spiritual growth (1 Cor 3:1-3).

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH?

Spiritual growth is our daily walk with Jesus, our Lord, and we cannot survive without Him. Beautifully, Jesus uses the description of the vine and the branches to highlight this truth:

“I am the vine, and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.” (Jn 15:5)

If we do not have spiritual growth, we cannot abide in Jesus and neither can we bear fruits. The joy of being a Christian begins when we abide in Him and grow, and there is no other way to look for joy!

Spiritual growth is totally the work of the Holy Spirit in us as we co-operate with Him, and as we yield to Him and allow His power to transform our ‘worldly life’ into a ‘Godly life’. Our Christian vocation and calling is based on this spiritual growth and the attainment of the spiritual maturity that the Holy Spirit alone can give.

Paul said: *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth”* (1 Cor 3:6).

But we, on our part, must truly and sincerely have a deep desire for spiritual growth. Our walk with God in this life provides the basis of our spiritual growth. This spiritual growth will bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit which represents the character of Jesus. We must possess the life of Jesus and manifest His character in our

lives. As Paul put it: *“At all times we carry in our mortal bodies the death of Jesus, so that his life also may be seen in our bodies”* (2 Cor 4:10).

This passage speaks of our need to possess and manifest the life of Jesus, His power, and character in our own lives. In other words, the Kingdom of God is prepared for all of us, unless we choose not to enter it by not changing our sinful ways of living, our old attitudes, and character. To change and to manifest the character and life of Jesus in our very own lives is spiritual growth at work. At the same time, spiritual growth also allows an authentic display of the gifts of the Holy Spirit - the power of Jesus. And so our lives should display the life of our master, both in His character and power.

As we grow and mature in this manner, we will come to know the will of the Father. His love and power will enlarge our lives. This will enable us to lead victorious Christian lives and to do His work well. More than we can ever ask, spiritual growth in our lives becomes a source of blessing for us, our families, as well as for others.

In our spiritual growth, we need self-deliverance and inner healing. Deliverance and healing are part and parcel of our spiritual growth. In fact they are important for our Christian life to progress. They are God’s provision for us to grow and be transformed. Self-deliverance and inner healing are on-going processes that help us to have continuous growth in the Lord. In other words, our worldly lives are always filled with bondages, sins, and weaknesses. They are like tentacles which hold us back firmly and stubbornly, refusing to let go, choking our spiritual growth and eventually making us slaves and prisoners, or captives. Examples are lies, fears, pride, greed, lust, selfishness, resentment, hatred, self-pity, and anger.

Bondages may start from our bad habits, lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviour. Such bondages can easily be transmitted to our children. If we understand the saying “like father, like son” then it is not so difficult for us to see how easily our children can pick up our bad habits, character and behaviour, and in turn becoming captives themselves.

Because of these bondages, many Christians find it difficult to come to the Lord and worship Him freely, let alone have spiritual growth in their lives. The people whom the Lord sent to me were more often than not spiritually wounded, broken, sick, and needed to be delivered and healed. I believe that God is inviting all of us to have spiritual growth in our lives so that He may use us for the good of our own families, as well as for others.