

# **Maturity, Growing up or just growing old**

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**Notes from presentation at C&B by Judy Hampton**

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***Scriptural References all in NIV***

Growing old and growing spiritually are two different things. Chronological aging takes place every moment; we have no control over it. Growing spiritually, however, is something we can control. God will not stomp on our will; we must choose to grow spiritually.

## **Hebrews 5:12**

Millions of Christians in America and around the world are growing old without growing deep in the things of God. We cannot grow until we have been born again, born from above, born into the family of God.

## **Ephesians 2:1-3**

Dead things cannot grow. The Bible is for believers. The things of God are foolishness to the unbeliever.

## **1 Corinthian 2:14**

If you don't get it (something spiritual) go back to when you were first born again. After we are saved there is a process that begins in our lives. This process is called Sanctification. God wants to remove us from the externals of life to the internal life where he is going to grow us spiritually deep in his word.

There are **three stages** of growth that we go through in our spiritual life with God. **1 John** reveals to us those **three stages**.

### ***The first stage is the baby stage:***

This is the stage where we know our sins have been forgiven. We now have a personal relationship with Christ. As babies we often act like babies. As Paul says about acting like a child in **1 Corinthians 13:11**.

How well I remember those baby years. I thought Jesus was a Divine aspirin pill who would take away all my pain. Everything in my life would be perfect; husband, kids. We would have all the health, wealth and prosperity that we would ever need.

As a baby I was counting on the externals of life to give me that quality of life that I so deserved. That was what the culture around me taught. (This baby stage of counting on the externals can last for years).

(Quote from C.S. Lewis) We live in the shadow lands. We are always looking for the place where the sun is shining. That place is not here on earth. Jesus Christ is the Sun (Son) who comes to shine on us (and shine in us).

As babies in Christ we are mostly interested in ourselves. As a babe in Christ I dove right into the do's and don'ts of life. I was deeply involved in all the things and activities of the church. I found the "How To" books. I was gaining so much information but so much of what I did was not growing me deep, or growing me up spiritually. I was not anchored in God's word, so I was drawn to the fluff.

At this stage I could only handle the milk of the word. I could only take milk and I had to have someone else do this for me. As it says in

### **1 Corinthians 3:2**

It's ok to start out on milk because that's all we can handle. But somewhere along the way we need to be pushed out of the nursery. God has a way of doing this.

### **Hebrews 5:11-14**

Baby Christians are not ready for the meat of the word. Baby Christians are into "feelings" and are therefore easily deceived. Satan is the deceiver and he loves to fill our lives with false gods and ideas.

If we are still dabbling in the darkest things of this world, we are still babies. How many Christians today get their theology from the talk shows?

(Quote from Randy Elkhorn – from his book "The Grace and Truth Paradox")

Ophrah's philosophy is about promoting a church-free; build it yourself spirituality, where the desire of the individual is paramount. We can indulge our individual preference which we so demand in today's culture. It is pop psychology, with recovery programs, and out of context scriptures.

This is why Paul says in **Ephesians 4:14**

It is easy to be deceived when one is not grounded in the scriptures and when one is spiritually immature. There are not many ways to heaven; Jesus said He is the way **John 14:6**.

Some Christians believe that a Christian is a person who is trying to live like Jesus. They try to replicate his behavior, but that leaves us on the cross. The truth is Jesus Christ is living his life in me as me.

You see, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, the life I live in the flesh (how do I live in the flesh?) I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me. **Galatians 2:20**

Don't ever let anyone tell you that you must strive to be a better Christian; we must die so that Christ will live in us.

### **The second stage is the young stage:**

This is the young man or young woman stage. This is where a person (no matter their chronological age) knows all the doctrines of the faith. Doctrines of the faith such as, there is only One God, the Deity of Jesus Christ, Salvation by faith alone and not works, the virgin birth, the substitutionary death of Jesus, the second coming, the resurrection of the dead, and universal sin. (See our "Statement of Beliefs" booklet for the Doctrines of the faith)

I knew all this stuff, and I stayed in this stage for a very long time because I was very satisfied with my life, everything was going well. I was not hungry for His word outside of Sunday services, where I took copious notes, and the small bible studies I went to where I filled in all the little blanks.

### **The third stage is called the Father stage:**

This is the stage where a person is described as being mature and strong in the Lord and the word of God abides in them. Abide means lasting, (the word of God has become a part of their daily bread)

#### **1 John 2:13c & 14**

Paul describes the spiritually mature in **Colossians 1:9-14** and in **Hebrews 5:11**.

Are we living in times of good and evil, where (evil) is so obvious that we just sense it. I was a Christian for a long time before I realized my position

in Christ Jesus which enabled me to overcome the strongholds of Satan. Read **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

Through Christ we have all authority to cast down all strongholds, through his name and in his power. (That is why it is so important to realize the reality of **Gal. 2:20**; we live in his name, his faith and through his power)

Why is it that most of us are not becoming spiritually mature?

Quote from a bible study author who wrote "One in a Million" by Priscilla Schier; "Most Christians are content to remain in the nursery (being fed by someone else). Only one in a million Christians will experience God's power."

We are all in a spiritual battle and it's raging in the hearts of men and women. The world is filled with things that distract us, and some of us are just spiritually lazy and would rather be entertained than change. We are apathetic and the enemy locks us into false assumptions that imprison us when times are good. (Take the example of the housing boom, people assumed it would last forever – we make unwise assumptions).

### **Story from Judy:**

She tells stories about how we can miss God's call if we are only looking at winning. The fact is that people love God when times are good. I've done that. When times are good I put my Christian life on cruise control. I have a sort of a ho-hum sight-seeing attitude on the road-way to heaven. When times are good, I'm planning out our next vacation, or when to watch the DVD movie I bought, or re-decorating the home.

But God has a way of kicking us out of the nursery, when he allows trials to come our way. Are you in a trial right now? Scripture says that a trial is a good thing.

### **James 1:2 & 12; 1 Peter 1:6 & 4:12; 2 Peter 2:9**

From C. S. Lewis: God wants us to grow up. He wants us to be driven out of the nursery and into the world of others. There is a purpose for our suffering as **James** says in chapter **1:2 & 12**. Why trials, because the testing of our faith develops perseverance. See also **James 1:3** Most folks love God when times are good. But our faith must be tested to see if it is genuine because if our faith has not changed us, it has not saved us. What a dogmatic statement. Yes, we are saved by grace, absolutely, but **1 Peter 1:6-7** says....

Are you in a trial right now? We have gone through some interesting years, we live in interesting times. (What interests us the most?)

### **Story from Judy:**

We know people who come to church only when times are good. When times are bad they will come to church and complain about things at church, or they will create problems in the church. These are people with a victim mentality. Pretty soon they stop coming to church, but then when things get better they start to show up at church again.

They're kind of like you and me. When times are good we sing joyfully, "God is so good." But when things are not good we need to know why.

### **James 1:3**

The testing of our faith should produce perseverance, we need to let endurance have its perfect result.

### **James 1:4**

Then we will be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. (Do we know this? Trials lead to maturity.) Would you like to lack nothing? Would you like to experience His power in every and all circumstances of life?

Then welcome the trial you are in, dear friend. There is purpose in your trial. Trials promote his glory, they exhibit His power, they teach us His will, they turn us toward Him, they keep us dependant on Him.

We have all had to depend on him the last few years. Trials lead us to a deeper prayer life, they convict us of sin. Trials test us to see if our faith is really sincere (genuine). Trials build character and they humble us, trials drive us into God's word, and the word begins to grow us up.

But for years I just wanted something that tasted good. I just wanted what tastes good and feels good (and would make me feel good about myself). But something has to kick us out of the nursery, because (in the world of reality) every day is not a day to stay in the nursery.

If you're in a trial right now, have you considered that this could be a divine appointment. God has allowed this trial in your life to change you. (to grow you up)

**Story from Judy;** serious trials in life, marriage, family, etc.

(In your trial) you're disappointed with God but if we can grasp that the word of God assures us that this place we are in has been appointed by God to change us.

Most people just wait for God to change their circumstances, but God wants to change us, He wants to grow us up.

In this place of disappointment, despair, discouragement, and even depression, God wants to change us. Could he be saying to you personally (put in your name), "Hey, it's time, it's time to get out of the nursery and start growing up.

## **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

Paul is saying; don't lose heart, outwardly we are growing old minute by minute, but inwardly we are being renewed day by day. Trials lead to an eternal glory that just outweighs them all.

### **Story from Judy:**

It's not about us; we are all just vessels, manifesters (of Christ in us), and broken pots. God will use any old pot; cracked and everything, to shine brightly to a lost world. It's about Him.

I am grieved, as I travel, to see how much Americans have become malnourished biblically.

There seems to be a famine of the word in the land. Like the prophecy in **Amos 8:11**, there's a famine of people being malnourished for lack of reading and taking in the word personally.

### **Judy's story about the Rocky Mountain sheep being malnourished from eating junk food**

As Americans, we are not feeding off the food that God created for us to feed on (His Word). We are feeding on junk food. I believe we are malnourished in America; there is a famine in the land. We would rather eat junk food, we would rather be entertained.

Some ministries have started using sales tactics just to get people to come to their church. They give away these little gifts. We would rather read these little devotionals that show up on our computers in our e-mails. We

would rather read about Christians in Christian fiction books and novels. We only want things that entertain and captivate us. We want our bible teachers to be pretty and polished speakers.

### **Story from Judy:**

Just get into the Word is the way to know God's word and hide it in your heart.

**Judy's recommended prayer;** "Lord God, give me a hunger and thirst for your word."

**Judy's recommended strategy for growing up;** Start with the one-year Bible. You can start anytime; you don't have to wait till the first of the year. Remember God will not stomp on your will; this must be your choice. It only takes 15 minutes a day. This is not to gain more information but to receive a Holy Spirit transformation, because the word is alive, it is sharper than any sword; it cuts through all of our motives and intentions, and everything else.

When I began to read this way, guess what, I began to hunger and thirst more. 15 minutes was not enough time. Then I realized that this was just a tool to get me started on my personal growth. By starting here we have 96 opportunities in a 24 hour period to do 15 minutes of Bible study to become a woman (or man) of the Word, a woman or man of faith.

**Psalm 119:11 David** took in God's word; hid it in his heart, so that he might not sin against God.

I'm learning that it is very difficult to trust someone that we don't know intimately. (God wants intimacy with us, but he won't do it apart from his Word)

**Matthew 11:28-30** We need to come to Jesus daily. If you miss a day in your 15 minute a day study, don't go back; just go on to the next day. Remember that the enemy (Satan) will be on your case doing what he can to make you feel like you've failed in some way. Just go on and ignore him. Become a mature Christian and don't just be growing old.

**Matthew 4:4** When we feed on the Word of God we hunger for more, because man cannot live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from God. If we do not choose to be transformed we will settle for being informed and pretty soon we will be conformed into the image of this word.

### **Judy's personal story:**

In our trials remember who God is: He is our provider; He is our faithful God; He is trustworthy; He is all knowing. God is good and apart from him we can do nothing (read **John 15:5**). God has a plan for our lives, a plan to do good (read **Jeremiah 29:11-13**). In the book of Jeremiah we always forget the **verse 13** part, "when we seek him with all our heart."

**Romans 12:1-2 Don't** let a job (or anything) define your life, let God define your life. A wise woman said, "If you don't know God's word, you don't know his will for your life; because it's in his word that he speaks to his children." Otherwise, it's a shot in the dark.

### **1 Peter 2:2-3**

Judy's husband was seeking first the kingdom of God, when he lost his job. Judy was just angry, so she was being plagued with sleeplessness, misery, anger, anxiety. Judy was still trusting in her externals and trusting in herself.

**Proverbs 28:26** He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered.

Are you in a place right now where you are angry at God because he has not given you the life you planned? Then come to him. A friend gave me a book "Streams in the Desert" which is a book about people who have gone through some horrible trials. It just brought me to my knees.

In our darkest hours Jesus will show up. God does not allow anything to come into our life which is not his will. He will work it all out for the good of those who love him and are called for his purpose

### **Romans 8:28**

I prayed and asked God to forgive me, I said, I've been such a brat, I just wanted things to be fixed, but I needed to grow up.

Until we come to the place where we have nothing to lay before him but our filthy rags, He is not ready to do business with us. He is repelled by our arrogance and demanding spirit. He wanted to move me out of the nursery and start growing me up, and I said, "God I'm so afraid, I don't know if I can trust you, I don't know if I can do this faith walk." And God said, "Good, I never said you could, I'll do it through you, Judy, but you have to give it all to me."

I laid it before him and instantly he flooded me with peace, and I had been in such anxiety for so long. My husband has been transformed and is the most Godly man I know and will tell you that all of this happened at his lowest point. And God initiated a growth process that continues today. (This begins with getting into the word of God personally)

In closing, are you still in the nursery? Has God said to you today, it's time; it's time to grow up.

**Hebrews 6:1-3** Let us all rest on this and mature in Christ Jesus.

**Closing Prayer from Judy:**

Thank you Lord, for the difficult times that you bring into our lives, we are not victims, you allow them. We praise you that you want intimacy with each of us on the deepest level. You take away that which we think we have to have and you give us what is far, far better, we praise you that you are that kind of God. We want to come to you and present our bodies as a living sacrifice, for you to use as you desire Lord, this is just our reasonable service of worship. Transform us and mature us, anchor us in truth and we thank you for your grace and all sufficiency in all things. And all God's children said, "Amen."