

Taking Steps

Develop an action plan for each of the relational characteristics of the growth environment.

Upward – Word and Prayer

Example: Take about 10 minutes each morning to continue reading the Gospel of John and talk to God about your day.

Your plan:

Inward – Fellowship

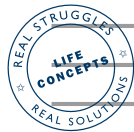
Example: Go to church or to a Christian gathering.

Your plan:

Outward – Witness

Example: Identify one or two people you care about and begin praying for them. Look for appropriate opportunities to tell them about the difference Christ is making in your life.

Your plan:



FROM UNCERTAINTY TO CONFIDENCE

FROM FEELINGS OF UNWORTHINESS TO FORGIVENESS

FROM BEING UNABLE TO EMPOWERED

FROM BEING UNPREPARED TO EQUIPPED

FROM BEING UNDEVELOPED TO MATURITY

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Comparing Our Stories

The Christian life is a life of growth in our relationship with Christ. Spiritual maturity is attained over time, not in an instant.

My experience...

Your experience...

How much of a spiritual foundation have you received for your Christian life—either from your family or your religious background?

What one or two things from your background do you think will be most helpful in your Christian life?

Considering Our Struggles

Why do you think many believers fail to grow spiritually at a normal, healthy rate? What might be some evidence of spiritual immaturity?

How would you feel if, after many years, you looked back and realized you had failed to grow in the most important area of life, your relationship with God?

We need a healthy environment for spiritual growth to ensure that we mature in our relationship with God.

Think about it...

There are two basic reasons why people aren't mature. One is time and the other is health. The world is full of immature people. Some are children who are healthy but have not had the time to grow. They, of course, are normal. Others have had adequate time but have failed to mature either physically, emotionally or socially. They are a source of concern. Their immaturity isn't normal and can indicate either a health problem or an unhealthy growth environment.

Spiritual growth has many similarities to growth in the other dimensions of life.

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Exploring the Solution

The Book of Acts is an historical account of the first believers' experiences after the resurrection of Jesus. In the second chapter, Peter (one of the early leaders) addresses a large crowd and many become new believers. This passage is about that group of new believers and what characterized their spiritual growth.

Acts 2:42-47.

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

There are four characteristics of growing Christians found in this passage:

1. Devoted to the Word (2:42)

What does it mean to be devoted to something?

Who were the apostles?

What did they teach?
(See Matthew 28:18-20)

How could we devote ourselves to this same teaching today?

2. Devoted to Fellowship (2:42)

What is fellowship?

What motivated the believers to gather together so often? (2:46)

How would close relationships like these help us in the Christian life?

How can we experience this kind of fellowship today?

3. Devoted to Prayer (2:42)

What is prayer?

What motivated the believers to devote themselves to prayer?

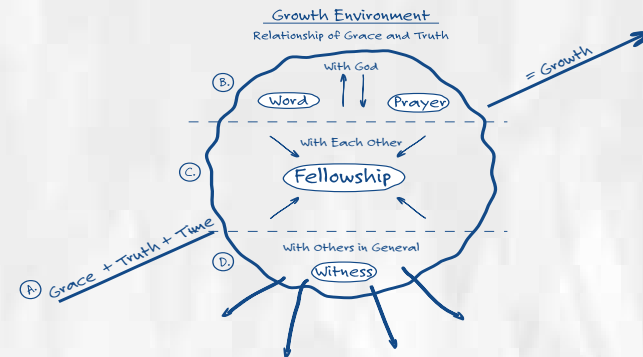
How can we devote ourselves to prayer today?

4. Having an Impact (2:47)

Why did other people join them?

Imagine how exciting it would be if God used your life to influence others to become true believers in Christ.

Examining the Sketch



The Issue: How do I mature in my Christian Life?

Consider a seed that is planted in poor soil with little water or nutrients and little sun. How well would it grow?

What would happen if the same seed was placed in rich soil with plenty of nutrients, water and sun?

The difference in growth would be caused by the environment. The same is true for us spiritually.

A. The two primary ingredients that God uses to cause growth in our lives are grace and truth. Truth gives us the understanding we need to live the Christian life. Grace provides the acceptance and encouragement we need to keep on going. But growth doesn't happen all at once. It occurs as a process over time. Thus, the formula for an ideal growth environment is:

$$\text{Grace} + \text{Truth} + \text{Time} = \text{Growth}$$

Like the new believers in Acts, we experience "Grace + Truth + Time" in the context of relationships.

B. The upward relationship is with God and is experienced through His Word and prayer.

C. The inward relationships are with each other (believers) and are experienced in fellowship.

D. The outward relationships are with those who do not believe in Christ. Our influence with them is through our witness for Christ.