

➤ **Treated like Dummies**

These days it's as if everyone assumes that the typical member of society is incapable of doing anything without being told what to do. The authorities insist on doing everything for us and treating us like children. Health and safety has gone mad – to the point where kids aren't allowed to play conkers at school in case someone gets hurt!

In contrast to this nanny-fying of our society the Bible is clear that God wants us to grow and mature. The apostle Peter, Father of the church, says: *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation"*

As leaders of the church we are very keen for us all to grow and mature in our faith – discipleship is one of our 5 core values. This is huge topic and not one that can be covered completely in one sermon however here are three key actions that will help us.

➤ **Let the Holy Spirit Transform Us**

*2 Corinthians 3:18*

*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

- Amanda and I hope that our baby is going to have a little bit of family resemblance. My nose, her beauty etc. Paul talks in this passage about how as the Holy Spirit abides in us we are transformed. As God's children we are taking on the family resemblance.
- First thing we need to be realistic – We can't grow as Christian's on our own – we need the Holy Spirit's help. We do have a part to play but He is the only one who can really change us. In John 14, Jesus talks of sending a 'paraclete', a helper. This 'helper' is the Holy Spirit who guides us, prompts us, and renews our minds. He effectively rewires us to be more like Jesus...
- If we want to grow we need to develop a hunger and thirst for God's spirit. It's easy sometimes to sit back and stagnate – I know this in my life. Do we want to grow? Do we want to mature? If so then we need to realise that being filled with the spirit is an ongoing refilling not a one off event when we are baptised. Paul says: *"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."* (Eph 5:18) - Literally 'Keep on being filled by the Spirit'.
- We must also realise that it is possible to grieve the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person. We are in a relationship with him just as we are with the Son and the Father. Each time we hear His voice and do something different; disobey that little voice of righteousness, each time we sin we are damaging that relationship. We can resist the

Holy Spirit's leading. After all we have free will. Of course we can repent and ask for forgiveness. But for us to grow we need to take being obedient seriously - to live 'right' lives.

➤ **Press On Into Christ-likeness**

*Hebrews 5:11 - 6:3*

*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, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.*

- My mum became a Christian late on in life. She always professed to having a simple faith, basically that Jesus loved her and she loved Jesus. She struggled with the more complex aspects of theology but even as she was dying from cancer it was clear that her simple faith gave her courage, strength and hope – it was deeply rooted in her. We all need solid foundations on which to build our faith or the first storm that comes along will uproot us. Jesus' parable about the man who built on the rock and the man who built on the sand clearly highlights this.
- However God doesn't want us to stand still (see reading above). Paul using the analogy of milk and solid food. He wants to challenge us and move us on from 'milk' to solid food.
- How do we get this solid food? God's word, study. Asking God to speak to us, teaching from more mature Christians, putting what we know into practice and seeing what happens.
- For years the emphasis on growth has been put on 'knowing more'. But there are loads of times in New Testament where we are warned against taking in head knowledge and not putting it into practice. It's a bit like bathing in milk – it might get us clean but it doesn't feed us. In order to grow we must put God's word into action: *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."* (James 1:22-25)
- Let's face it - We probably already know far more that we have put into practice. It comes back to that firm foundation. Application is vital. Knowledge but no action means no life change and it's life

change that Jesus was after. We are not made perfect by the number of Christian books on our bookshelf.

- If we are to press on into Christ we have to be open to God working in our circumstances to help us to grow. Saying God can't use 'that circumstance' or running from God when we are hurting is putting up a barrier to growth. God uses bad times, maybe even more than the good times, to build us up and help us to mature. A guy walking in the mountains with a guide noticed that at the base of the mountain the trees were tall and healthy – 40, 50, 60ft high. The higher up the mountain they climbed the smaller the trees got. At the top of the mountain all that could be seen was shrubs and trees that were only a few ft high at most. He asked the guide what species these new trees were. The guide pointed out they were the same as the ones at the foot of the mountain. The lack of soil, oxygen and rain had stunted their growth. The same is true to us. There are times when we are at the top of the mountain. We feel close to God, bathed in sunshine and can look out over an amazing view. However the real growing times are when we are in the valley. We can't see the way forward we might feel far from God and burdened. God never leaves us even if we lose sight of Him. These are the times that our faith is tested, strengthened like gold in a furnace where the impurities are burnt off. Press on, persevere, don't give up – ask God to help you to grow in a tough situation
- Another danger is to be tempted to separate out our spiritual life from day to day life. We might refer to growing in maturity as 'growing in faith' but this still relates to all parts of life – work, home, relationships etc. God is in all that we do and we bring him glory in all parts of our life. Our whole lives are worship – our whole lives must honour him.

➤ **Use The Gifts God Gives Us**

*Ephesians 4:11-16*

*It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

- God is incredibly generous. He loves to give us gifts. Not natural abilities – spiritual gifts. If you don't know what gifts he's given you might want to do the SHAPE questionnaire – ask Mary Palmer or

one of the Elders. You might also want to look at 1 Cor. 12:7-12 for ideas on what these gifts might be.

- Jesus warns about not using our gifts (parable of the talents). The servant who puts the money to good use is blessed with more the servant who buries the money in fear has everything taken away. God has given us gifts for a reason – to build up the body of Christ. To encourage others, to build faith etc. If we use our gift to benefit his body then the chances are God will give us more gifts.
- In vs. 16 we see that maturity and service go hand in hand. Christian maturity is demonstrated by our willingness to serve others. Jesus clearly demonstrated this as he washed his disciples' feet at the Last Supper.
- As we go out into our lives again let this verse challenge and instruct you: *“Fix your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2)*