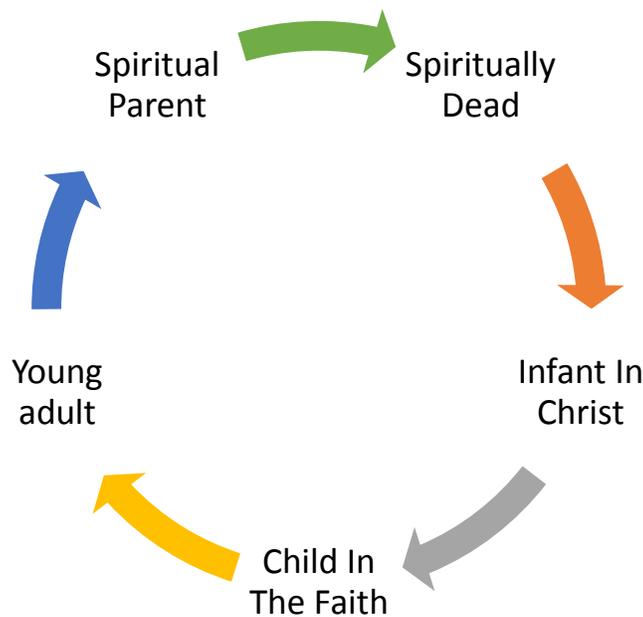




5 Phases of Spiritual Growth



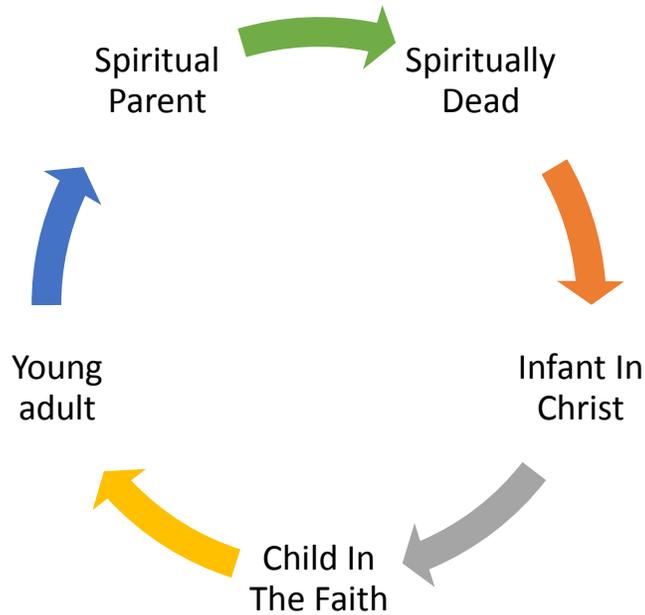
Ephesians 4:11-16 (ESV)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

- **Lesson:** Equipping the saints to identify where they are in the 5 phases of spiritual Growth.
- **Key Passages:** Ephesians 2:1-5, 4:11-16; 1 Peter 2:2; 1 John 2:12-29, 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-13
- **Writer:** Ginny Porter
- **Hear the Word:** This lesson is available on audio

Introduction

It was not this way from the beginning, but when Adam and Eve sinned and were cast out of the garden, death came to every human being born; the mortality rate is 100%. The evidence of this is clear by the fact that the first child ever born was a murderer. Who did he kill? He murdered the second person born - his own brother. The ramifications of what happened in the Garden of Eden remain today. Every living soul is born spiritually dead. If we remain in this condition (once born) we will be eternally lost. To alter this sad state requires a miraculous birth - a ***spiritual birth***! Throughout the Bible are found earthly realities that parallel spiritual truths. For example, when we're born physically there is a natural growth process. This teaches us that the same is true when we are born again and become part of the family of God. The Kingdom of Heaven will not grow numerically unless the Body of Christ (The Church) follows the same growth pattern spiritually. Where are you in the 5 phases of spiritual growth? Let's look at the growth chart.



Phase 1

Spiritually Dead

Ephesians 2:1-7 (NIV)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

As we saw in the introduction, every human being is born in the same condition - **spiritually dead**. It takes something living to bring life to something that is dead! **The Word of God is alive and living and active**, and faith comes by hearing and **hearing by the Word of God!** (Hebrew 4:12-13; Romans 10:9-18) But, how can people hear unless someone brings them the gospel? Whose responsibility is it to bring this good news to those who are spiritually dead? The ones who are alive **In Christ**, His ambassadors, that's who! And *if* you are alive, that is **YOU!** (2 Corinthians 5:15-20) Therefore, evangelism is the first part of making disciples. If you want to learn to evangelize, then follow someone who is following Jesus. He said, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:18-20) People usually fish in a pond, lake, or sea, (symbolic of the world) not a fish bowl (symbolic of a church building). However, this does not exclude evangelism in the Church. If this describes you, we invite you to go to phase number one and hear the Good News messages, **The Gospel of the 3 Crosses, The Well Who Came to The Woman, or Alabaster Box**. The lessons in phase number one are all Gospel stories. (You can hear the message on John 3:1-20 and the testimony of Frank Lucido in the audio section of our website.)

John 3:3-7 (ESV)

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Digging Deeper: Matthew 4:19; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 2 Corinthians 5:15-20; Romans 1:16, 10:9-18; Acts 1:8; 20:20-21; 1 Peter 1:22-25

Phase 2

Infant in Christ

1 Peter 2:2-3 (NIV)

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

In 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, Paul describes the new birth this way: we once were in Adam and his death, but now we are placed ***in Christ and His life***. Hallelujah! This birth is miraculous indeed. This person is a new believer, or an ***infant in Christ, so who is going to care for this baby?*** If they are going to grow and thrive, they must be cared for by adults who are themselves spiritually healthy. Babies are full time work. No matter the age this person is when they receive Christ, it will require some time invested to really get to know them. The best way to do this is to ask questions. You will find some of these questions in the **Spiritual Growth Survey**. The Greek word used for ***equip*** in Ephesians 4:12 comes from the word translated as ***restore***, or to “*mend what is broken.*” If you do not work with her to find out what is broken, then you will never help her grow to maturity. Like a new born baby, she does not know anything about the Heavenly Father or who she is as a new person in Christ. If this person does not have a desire to learn or grow, they will never be a true disciple and follower of Jesus. This is the sad condition of most of the professing church. You cannot disciple someone who is not teachable. If you try, you will have just made expenditure not an investment.

Never make assumptions on where someone is spiritually. All though they attend a building of worship on a regular basis, this does not equal true salvation. (There is strong Biblical evidence that these who are called “carnal Christians” have never had a true salvation in the first place.) For example, in Acts chapter eight, there was a man named Simon who was in the church, but he was not a true believer. He had what Paul called vain belief, but it was not true saving faith. (Acts 8:9-23; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3) See the lesson titled **Perishing in the Pew**. The lessons in phase one are tools to help us see if we have *Biblical evidence* for assurance of salvation. (See the Lesson: **Assurance of Salvation / To See is to Know**)

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 (ESV)

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Digging Deeper: Hebrews 5:11-6:2; 1Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, 15:1-22; Acts 8:18-22; 1 Timothy 1:1-11

Phase 3

Child in the Faith

Hebrews 5:11-14 (NIV)

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 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.

When Peter was reinstated after his denial of the Lord, Jesus asks him three times, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (Matthew 26:31-35; John 21:1-17) Jesus told Peter, and all of us, how to demonstrate true love for Him. He makes a clear-cut distinction between babies and those in His flock that have reached maturity. He instructs Peter to, "Tend My Lambs" (babies) and, "Feed My sheep" (adults).

Being a grandmother has given me so much joy and it has also given me the opportunity to observe things I missed when my own children were growing up. As I write this I have two granddaughters. Naomi, my first grandchild, who has just turned two, and her sister Ada is six months old. It is amazing how fast they grow and change. When I look at baby Ada, Naomi looks more and more like a little girl and yet they both are totally dependent on adults to care for and protect them. The same is true for someone who is a **child in their faith**. And like a child, they will most likely be self-centered. They need someone to teach them to understand that life is not all about themselves; it is all about the **Lord Jesus**. If you want to disciple someone who is a child in their faith, they must have the desire to grow and show a willingness to learn.

There is a cost to being a true disciple of Christ and a level of commitment that must be clearly understood on the front end. (Luke 9:22-26) In addition, you will expect them to reinvest these truths into the lives of others. You will be teaching them to live in obedience to the Word of God. (Matthew 28:18-20) The disciple maker will be held to the same standard; therefore, we must live what we teach, because we will be tested! (Romans 2:21) The lessons in phase number three are all about learning what it means to abide in an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Ephesians 4:14 (ESV)

...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Digging Deeper: John 21:15-17; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 John 2:12-14; 18-2; 3:1-24; 4:1-21

Phase 4

Young Adult

2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV)

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

A woman who is at this level is **a young adult in her faith** and has moved past the self-centered lifestyle and is focused on serving God and others. In the physical realm, when we reach young adulthood we have the capability to reproduce. What happens when a person has reached the age where they can reproduce physically, but emotionally they are still a child? It happens every day. Children having children is not healthy. It is the same in the spiritual realm. This unhealthy pattern must be broken within the body of Christ. His remedy to fix this dysfunction is through spiritual adults, parenting the children in His family! He called it disciple making, and he modeled it for us with His twelve disciples.

1 Corinthians 11:1 (HCSB)

“Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ.”

A young adult who is spiritually healthy has been well equipped by another adult in the faith. They will be living the lifestyle of a reproducing disciple maker because they are obeying all that the Lord commanded them. His last command is to make disciples of all nations! This person will be investing their **life** and **God’s Word** into others. Of course, if they have children and grandchildren, this is where it starts and because you are “doing life” with others in your home, your children will be receiving on the job training. (Psalm 78:1-8) For this process to reach the next generation, this person will be closely following the example and the truth that they were taught. (2 Timothy 2:1-2) Just remember, we can only lead someone else to the maturity level we ourselves have attained. The lessons in phase number four are to help us understand the importance of being part of the Family of God.

Word Search:

 **Imitators /examples** in Greek: #5179 tupos-a die, a stamp, scar, shape, style or resemblance, a sampler, type, a model for imitation, pattern-print.

Follow/imitate in Greek #3401/3402: *mimetes* or *mimeomai*-(a mimic); to imitate-follow.

Philippians 3:17 (EVS)

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Luke 6:40 (HCSB)

“A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.”

Digging Deeper: 1 Timothy 3:8-11; 4:6-12; 5:3-16; 1 John 2:14; 1 Timothy 1:1-13; 4:6-16; 2 Timothy 2:1-15; Philippians 2:19-22

Phase 5

Spiritual Parent

1 John 2:12-14 (NIV)

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Many of us were not raised by our birth parents. The ones who loved us, cared for us, and raised us *are* our true parents. Likewise, when we are born again into God's family, we need godly parents who will love and care for us also. He never intended that His children be left as orphans. In God's family, He gives us **spiritual parents**, who invest their life and God's Word into others; they are disciple makers. These people are **not super Christians** or **perfect people**. They are lifelong learners and followers of Christ. They, as every believer, are in the process of sanctification. They are willing to share their struggles, as well as victories, with other imperfect people. Physical age is not as important as spiritual maturity. The spiritual parent lives a life of God dependence, knowing full well that apart from Him they can do nothing. Therefore, they know they must abide in Him and His Word. They stay connected to Him through the life giving relationships they have within the body of Christ. This includes continuing to learn and follow the lead of others who are following the Lord Jesus in obedience to the Great Commission. This person will bear much fruit, not only in their lifetime, but through their spiritual descendants future generations will follow them to heaven. The two determining factors of fruitfulness are: **abiding** in and **obeying** the **Lord Jesus Christ**. In the context of spiritual relationship, this parent will have children in the faith **with them** all their lives as they impart an abundance of Biblical wisdom. They are following the pattern Jesus left for them always fishing for men and women and teaching others how to fish. The lessons in phase number five are purposeful to cast the vision of Biblical disciple making.

2 John 1-4 (ESV)

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

Digging Deeper: 2 Timothy 1:5; 3: 10-17; Titus 1:4-10; 2:1-15; 1 John 2:13-14; 2 John 1:1-4; 1 Thess. 2:7-13; John 15:1-16

In the physical realm, as well as the spiritual, we never stay in the same place. We move forward growing and learning or we go backwards. God wants His children to grow not wither away! Through discipling relationships the family of God will grow spiritually and only then will it grow numerically. Following the Lord Jesus and obeying His last command will not only ensure the spiritual growth of each believer who is in the process, but also the exponential growth of the Kingdom of God! As we mature we will reproduce, becoming the "Good Seed" and future generations will reap what we have sown. Serving as vital links, or **pearls attached**

to a strand, we are passing on the Gospel treasure from generation to generation until God's Kingdom comes! (Psalms 78:1-7) Dietrich Bonhoeffer the German theologian said, "A truly righteous person lives for the next generation."

Think on These Things

1. As you look at the 5 phases, can you identify where you are?
2. Can you think of any obstacles that have hindered your spiritual growth?
3. Who are the individuals who have helped you the most to grow in the knowledge of God through the Word of God?
4. Keep in mind that you can only lead some else to the level you have yourself have attained. Who are the people around you that you could disciple?

Pearls of Wisdom

Ephesians 4:15-16 (ESV)

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.