

Chickening Out

Getting Past Growing Pains

October 29, 2023

Today we're learning what it takes to grow into God's kingdom as God's kid. Cuz every member of God's family is *meant* to mature until fully *grown* to have what it takes to make our way *home*. And **since none of us are grown-ups, all of us need check-ups**. Cuz like *all loving* parents, our Father want to *assure* there's nothing *hindering* the healthy *development* of *His* most precious possession. So the question for us *kids* is: **Are you still growing?** And how do you *know*?



Well, before we get to that, I gotta tell you – I was so *excited* to hear Aaron speak last week and so *happy* to hear how much *everybody* loved him. But, I was *surprised* it went so well week *one* – cuz in *my* experience, new pastors are more of an *acquired* taste.



In fact, just the other week, a couple of *long-time* His-Placers asked me if they could share some encouragement without *me* taking *offense* – so I *pretended* that was possible and said, **“Sure!”** And they told me that years ago when I first started *preaching*, they weren't real *excited* about my Sundays and maybe *skipped* a few. And *right* before I ran away to join the circus, they *quickly* added, **“But we just love you now and are excited to hear you speak!”**



So how do you think I *felt*? Offended? Well, what if I told you I've had this *exact* conversation with at least 7 or 8 other members over the last few years? Do you think I felt *extra* offended? *No!* Cuz **every time our ego gets beat down, the truth gets turned up!** And the less I worry about *me*, the better I could actually *hear them* – and they *really* were offering an *incredible* encouragement; **they were saying I've grown!**



And when I hear what that *means*, I'm not *offended* – I'm *thankful!* That's an *inspiring, uplifting*, and (thanks to the blunt delivery) *trustworthy* perspective that couldn't be more *valuable*. They gave me my *checkup* and made me *confident* that *this kid* was alive and well. And that's *huge* news cuz down here, **if we're not growing up, we are going down.** In this broken world, it's when things stay the *same* that we should get *worried*.

And that makes every honest and uncomfortable checkup of the utmost importance, cuz **a painful truth is worth more than a comfortable lie.** Just imagine if your doctor only gave you the news you *wanted* to hear instead of the *diagnosis* you *needed* to *live!* It's the same reason:

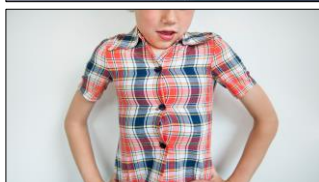
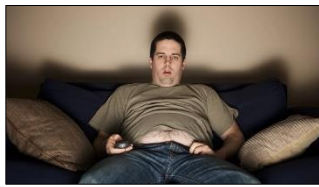
Wounds from a *friend* can be trusted, but an *enemy* multiplies *kisses*. [And it's those honest assessments about growth – that bring growth. And because of others] - Proverbs 27:6 NIV

Speaking the truth in *love*, [however hard it is to hear] we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ. - Ephesians 4:15 NIV

Because **all life-giving growth happens when we're challenged, not soothed**. I mean, do muscles get bigger in the gym or on the couch? Well *spiritual* growth works the same way; **coddling with comfort kills** while **constructive criticism builds**. And yet, we *like* to surround ourselves with a culture of *unchallenging* agreement because, in the *moment*, it *feels* good.

[Like those in the OT who preferred the comfortable lies to painful truths, saying:] Do not prophesy to us *right* things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy *deceits*. - Isaiah 30:10 NKJ

[And then there's those in the NT who we're warned will want the same thing:] People will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their *own* desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear ... But *you*, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work. - 2 Timothy 4:2-3, 5 NIV



Hardship and work?! Aww nuts! The big reason we prefer confirmation over criticism comes from our dislike of discomfort. We're wired to want what's *easy*, and when we're *wrong*, it takes *effort* to make things *right*. No wonder when someone suggests we've made a mistake, we'd rather call *them* into question than *ourselves*. Even though, the *irony* is, we all know **it takes mistakes to make things better!**

Reminds me of the young exec hired by a Fortune 500 company to replace a retiring CEO. On his first day, he pulled his predecessor aside and asked, "**So, what's the secret of all your success?**" And the old guy says, "**I can boil it down to two words: right decisions!**" "**Well, sure, but how do you make right decisions?**" "**One word: experience.**" "**But how do you get experience?**" And the old executive just smiles and says, "**Two words... wrong decisions.**"

Just ask the world's richest man, **Elon Musk** and he'll tell you the same – cuz making *mistakes* is a *key* component of all *his* success! In fact, the way he overtook *America's* space program was *ignoring* NASA's *overly-cautious* approach to engineering. *Instead*, he just kept blowing up rockets as fast as he could *make* them, *knowing* we *learn* from mistakes!

And with each *explosive mistake* the *lessons* piled up, until SPACE X outpaced everyone else! And when asked about the success, Elon cited the *process*, and said: "**If things are not failing you are not innovating.**"

But *again*, *criticism*, *work*, *mistakes*, and *failure* are all *unpopular* cuz they're all *uncomfortable!* And even though they're the *best* tools we can use to make things *right*, **it's hard to look past the potential pain of making a change**. I mean, we've been conditioned to *avoid* it every second we've stayed *alive* cuz **pain usually means something's going wrong with us**. So it's common sense to think *celebrating* pain is *insane!* But **there's one pain that means something's going right with us; growing pains**. They're the rare pains that reveal we're actually getting *better* not *worse*. And in *physical* growth, they just *happen*; with or *without* our consent. *Spiritual* growth, however, is a whole different ball of wax.

Because **spiritual growth is up to us**; at a certain point we have to *decide* whether we're willing to risk *more* pain to gain that *growth*. And in case you missed it, humans really *dislike discomfort*.



So how do we *develop* the discipline to *choose* the growth we *want* in spite of the *pain* we don't? Well, we've got to build a *convincing* case that tips the scales and *makes* spiritual growth *worth* the pain. And that means **we're gonna need a compelling picture of the purpose, process, and product of spiritual growing pains** to inspire us to *endure* them. And *guess where* we find that. You guessed it, chickens ... along with God's Word of course! So, let's start with **purpose**. **Why does spiritual growth have to hurt?** Well, we're told:

[God] has given us *new birth* into a *living* hope ... and into an *inheritance* that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept **[not here, but]** in *heaven* for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power *until* the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the *last time*. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith ... may result in praise, glory and honor. - 1 Peter 1:3-7 NIV

[Cuz, as Paul adds] Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. - 2 Corinthians 4:17 NIV

There's that horrible "**hardship and work**" again, but at least we've confirmed the *reason* for all the uncomfortable criticism and mistakes; **they grow us**. And *knowing* that pain's *purpose is to prepare* us for life in *perfection*, makes it feel a lot more *tolerable*.

So, what about *chickens*? Well, *now* we *also* know that this world is our *incubator* "**shielded by God's power**" and *its* purpose is to provide a safe place to *grow* through *struggle* to *gain* the *strength* to *survive* the other *side*! And *that* sounds like an egg to me! Cuz, like the chick in its *egg*, we start off in this world so *feeble* and *fragile* that **life outside an incubator means certain death!** And the same way *premature hatching* only produces scrambled *eggs*, *premature perfection* produces scrambled *humans*. Which is exactly what *happened* back at the beginning in the *Garden*! So in the end, the *purpose* of growth is all *we and chickens* ever wanted: **to get to the other side!**

But, even though the *real life* waiting on the other side *is* alluring, the growing pains *along* the way *aren't!* And to *convince* ourselves to push through, it helps to know the **process**. Cuz we like to know what we're signing up for – so, **how does spiritual growth happen?** *Testing*. Because *testing* is the *process* of *challenging* and *measuring* that pushes us to grow. Like testing how much we can bench press; **each test simultaneously reveals our strength and increases it!**

[And here's a hint on what to expect from God's tests] No temptation **[testing]** has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted **[tested]** beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted **[tested]**, He will also provide a way out **[Oh good!]** so that you can endure it. **[Oh No!]** - 1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV

Did you catch that? Cuz God's being *honest* and *upfront* about His *tests* – and He's *not* saying if you *can't* pass them you *can* skip them – He's just saying He'll make sure you get you *through* them. Cuz, He wants you to *grow up* and *come home* and **all growth comes from enduring not avoiding!** And the more *difficult* something *is* to *endure*, the more *growth* it *produces*. So if what doesn't *kill* us makes us *stronger*, guess what God *gives* us? What *almost* kills us! *Isn't that nice?* Well, yeah – cuz pushing us to our *limit* is the *best* way to build our strength. So, like an annoyingly *effective* personal trainer, **God keeps us growing by keeping us uncomfortable!** In fact, God designed this whole *world* to *become* more uncomfortable the more we *grow!* Just like an egg.

Cuz like a *chick*, our growth makes us *cramped* and *confused* and we start to feel *desperate* from the *discomfort* down here. And when we *see* we're *outgrowing* what our *egg* has to offer, we're *forced* to face the uncomfortable *anxiety* of our *ugliest* option: **breaking out!** But because our *egg* is all we've known, it's hard *not* to *entertain* the idea of *staying* and *suffocating!* Cuz **there's nothing that makes us more uncomfortable than the unknown.** So how do we break free?

Well the only way we'll ever summon the strength to pull the trigger on such a painfully scary step is confidence. **We need to KNOW exactly what this process is going to actually produce.** So **what's spiritual growth creating?** The children of God. And how can we be *sure?* *Jesus.* Cuz He endured all the *same steps* to assure us that the *product* of all our pain is both *worth it*, and *real.*



Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.
[Cuz He proved what growth could produce for us!] - Luke 2:52 NIV

He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And ... He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! - Philippians 2:7-8 NIV



[Because] During the days of Jesus' life [down here] on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears [just like us! And] ... Son though He was, He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him [By breaking out!] - Hebrews 5:7-9 NIV



Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. - Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV



[Cuz] [Jesus] has been tempted [tested] in every way, just as we are – yet He did not sin. [So, since we've seen how it's done] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, [by breaking out of the world that we've outgrown] so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. - Hebrews 4:15-16 NIV

So are you growing? Well, **the symptom of spiritual growth is confidence not comfort.** And it *shows up* in our *checkup* when our confidence in the *other side* starts making us *uncomfortable* on the *inside*. So if *you're* not there yet, seek some *friends* willing to speak the *truth* in love, ask *God* to put *your life* through *His test*, and learn *Jesus' story* of success that proved the *purpose* in the *process* of growth *does* produce something *perfect* that's worth the *pain*. Cuz then, when it's time break on through to the *other side*, you won't *give in*, you'll *chicken out* of here without hesitation!