

A PLAN FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

By Andy Manning

Colossians 3:9-10

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Gabby Williams is one of six children. Even though she is the second oldest, she is the smallest. She has a very rare growth disorder called Syndrome X. Other than her hair and fingernails, she will never grow up. She will remain a child physically and mentally for the rest of her life.
2. Many Christians have a growth disorder too. You might call it SGD – Spiritual Growth Disorder. It is not physical, it is spiritual. In a way it is more tragic than Syndrome X. Little Gabby has no power over her growth disorder. It is not her fault. She was born that way. But SGD – Spiritual Growth Disorder – is a choice. Whether or not you grow as a Christian is completely within your power, but many Christians choose to remain spiritual babies.
3. Today we're going to learn a lot about spiritual growth. I hope to give you the tools and the motivation grow out of spiritual infancy, or spiritual puberty, to spiritual maturity.

II. TEXT

1. **Colossians 3:9-10** "9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator."
2. These two verses are at the end of a vice list. The last vice mentioned is dishonesty.
3. Then Paul gives the reason for putting vice to death: Since you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self.
4. Next Paul says that you are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.
5. This is another way of saying that God is growing you in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.
6. I want to point out eight facts about spiritual growth from this verse.

III. EIGHT FACTS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1. **Spiritual growth requires salvation.**
 - i. **Colossians 3:9-10** "9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator."
 - ii. The Greek verbs for putting off and putting on are stated in a way that indicates a single, unrepeatable event.
 - iii. Paul is referring to the salvation event.
 - iv. When you get saved, you make the decision to repent and trust in Christ. To put off the old self and to put on the new self. Then God saves you and gives you new life. And now you can grow spiritually.
 - v. Things that aren't alive do not grow. Plastic doesn't grow. Brick doesn't grow. Steel doesn't grow. Rubber doesn't grow. Glass doesn't grow. They don't grow because they aren't alive. Only living things grow.

- vi. To grow, you must first be saved. You must first be born again.
- vii. If you are not growing, then the problem could be that you lack salvation.
- viii. If you want to be saved, then you need to simply respond to the gospel:
 - 1. Creation: God love you and created you for a relationship with Him.
 - 2. Corruption: You are a sinner, and your sins separate you from God.
 - 3. Cross: Jesus died for your sins and rose again.
 - 4. Choice: You must choose to repent of your sins (put off and put on) and have faith in Jesus Christ.

2. **Spiritual growth requires the continuous decision to put off and put on.**

- i. **Colossians 3:9-10** “9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.”
- ii. When you got saved, you made the decision to put off the old self and to put on the new self. Paul says that this is the reason you must continue to repent. “Do not lie to one another, since you have putt off... and have put on....”
- iii. So, Paul is saying, “Since, when you got saved, you decided to repent of sin and obey Christ, then you need to continue to put off and put on.”
- iv. In verses 5-11 Paul gives us a list of vices to put off, and then in verse 12 and following he gives us a list of virtues to put on.
- v. If you want to grow, you must daily decide to put off sin and put on righteousness.
- vi. Some Christians think that spiritual growth is completely passive. All we do is have faith, and God does the rest. That is not true at all. Notice the language that Paul uses in this chapter in this chapter alone:
 - 1. Seek the things above. Col 3:1
 - 2. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Col 3:2
 - 3. Put to death what belongs to your earthly nature. Col 3:5
 - 4. Put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, etc. Col 3:8
 - 5. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, etc. Col 3:12
 - 6. Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you. Col 3:16
- vii. This is not a passive experience. The Christian life is a battle. It is a war. It is a war with the flesh, the world, and the devil.
- viii. If you want to grow, you must get serious about repenting of sin and obeying God’s word. You must make a daily decision to do that.
- ix. The reason many Christians are not growing is that they have stopped repenting. They have stopped obeying. They have stopped putting off and putting on.
- x. When I got married, I made a commitment to love my wife as Christ loves the church. That’s why Lydia agreed to marry me; because I was committed to that ideal. But that wasn’t the end of the story. That was just the beginning. Now, to have a healthy marriage, I have to continually commit myself to loving her as Christ loved the church. I have to continuously put off those practices which hurt her, and put on those practices that help her. Marriage

begins to deteriorate when a husband and a wife stop putting off and putting on.

- xi. When you got saved, you committed your life to Christ. And then God saved you. But to grow and have a healthy relationship with Christ, you have to continue to commit your life to Christ; you must stay committed to putting off and putting on.
- xii. One **commentator** put it like this: “The imperative is to become in practice what you have already become in Christ. You have already put off and put on; now you must continue to do so. You have become a child of God, now you must act like it. At salvation, Christ killed the old self and created the new self. Now you must do those things in your daily life.”

3. Spiritual growth is God’s will for your life.

- i. **Colossians 3:9-10** “You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.”
- ii. You are “being renewed.” God is renewing you, changing you, transforming you, growing you.
- iii. This shows us that spiritual growth is God’s will for your life.
- iv. Spiritual growth is for everyone. Not just some Christians. Not just church leaders and pastors and missionaries. It is for everyone.
- v. Many Christians ask, “What is God’s will for my life?” But they don’t really want the answer to that question.
- vi. I’ve asked Lydia what she wants for her birthday, and she has said, “I would like for you to take the kids and give me a day all by myself.” And I’ll laugh and say, “No. What else do you want? Do you want to go out to eat?” You see, I don’t really want to know what she wants for her birthday.
- vii. Many Christians are like that with God. They say they want to know God’s will, so God says, “I want you to grow.” Then they laugh and say, “No, seriously. What is your will, God?”
- viii. God really wants you to grow. To become a mature, fully-devoted Christ-follower.

4. Spiritual growth is inevitable.

- i. **Colossians 3:9-10** “You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.”
- ii. Whether you like it or not, you are being renewed. God is growing you. You will grow. You are growing.
- iii. This is wonderful news. You may feel like you are not growing, but you are being renewed. You may be discouraged at how long it is taking you to grow, but you are being renewed. You may wonder if you’ll ever grow and put those sinful habits behind you, but you are being renewed. God is growing you.
- iv. However, the speed, the ease, and the degree that you grow are up to you.
- v. When a young man goes to basic training, the drill sergeant will develop him into a soldier. By the end of the two or three months, he will be a soldier. However, the speed, the ease, and the degree of his growth as a soldier

depends on him. If the young man does his best, and follows instructions, and has a good attitude, and stays out of trouble, then he will grow faster, basic training will be easier, and he will be a better soldier. But if he has a bad attitude, and does the bare minimum, then growth is going to be slower, and harder, and he is not going to be as good of a soldier.

- vi. God is your spiritual drill sergeant. He is going to grow you. But the speed, ease, and degree of your growth are up to you. If you follow His instructions, and have a good attitude, and do your best, and stay out of trouble, then you will grow more, and faster, and easier. But if you do the bare minimum, if you have a bad attitude, then growth will be less, and slower, and harder.

5. Spiritual growth is an ongoing process.

- i. **Colossians 3:9-10** "You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator."
- ii. "You are being renewed."
- iii. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, this applies to you. This will always apply to you. Whether you are a baby Christian, or a seasoned Christian; whether you have been a Christian for forty years, or forty days, you are being renewed.
- iv. Some Christians think that you can reach a state of spiritual perfection. Not until you get to heaven.
- v. You will never stop growing. You will never stop needing to grow. You will never arrive. You will never reach perfection until heaven. You will never be able to stop putting off and putting on. You will never know it all. You will always have room to grow.
- vi. Some of you are looking forward to retirement one day. The day that you can stop working. But the truth is that you never really stop working. You may retire from your job, but you will always have work to do. My parents have been retired for years now, and they haven't stopped working. They have changed the kind of work that they do. But they are always working on something. They are always fixing something; mending something; building something; renovating something; moving something; cleaning something; cooking something; helping someone. The day you stop working is the day you die.
- vii. You will never stop needing to grow. There will always be something to work on. Something to learn. Some vice to put off. Some virtue to put on.

6. Spiritual growth is a work of God.

- i. **Colossians 3:9-10** "You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator."
- ii. "You are being renewed."
- iii. The emphasis here is on God's work in you. God is renewing you. You are not renewing yourself. Spiritual growth is a miracle of God. It cannot be manufactured.
- iv. But it is not completely passive either.
- v. Spiritual growth is a partnership.

- vi. It is like farming. The farmer cannot cause the growth. But he can create the conditions for growth. He can plant, water, apply fertilizer and pesticide and weed killer, he can plant in the right place, and in the right season, and he can pray. But in the end, only God can cause the growth.
- vii. In the same way, you cannot grow yourself. Only God can grow you. But you can create the conditions for growth. You can put off and put on. You can pray. You can read your Bible. You can be active in church, etc. When you do your part, God will do His part, and growth will occur.
- viii. Just remember this: If you don't think you are growing, it is not because God isn't doing His part. You are being renewed. Are you doing your part?

7. Spiritual growth requires Biblical knowledge.

- i. **Colossians 3:9-10** "You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator."
- ii. "You are being renewed in knowledge."
- iii. This verse makes it clear that spiritual growth hinges on Biblical knowledge. To grow you must study and learn your Bible. We see this repeated in several places:
 - 1. **1 Peter 2:2** "Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that you may grow up into your salvation,"
 - 2. **Romans 12:2** "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."
 - 3. **John 17:17** "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."
 - 4. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** "16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."
- iv. You cannot grow beyond what you know.
- v. Knowledge does not mean you are mature, but you cannot grow to maturity without it.
- vi. **Thomas Watson** "We must know his will before we can do it; knowledge is the eye to direct the foot of obedience... ignorance the mother of error."
- vii. I'm not a body builder (obviously), but I know that if you want to build muscle mass, you have to increase your calorie intake. I was reading about champion weight lifter Eddie Hall. He had to eat 12,500 calories a day to train for competition, five times what the average man consumes. If weight-lifters don't eat a ton of calories, they will lose muscle.
- viii. If you want to build your spiritual muscles, you have to increase your Biblical diet. You need to read, and study, and learn God's word.
- ix. An easy way to start with Bible reading is to take the New Testament and read one chapter a day. That's how I started when I was in the sixth grade. Every night before going to sleep I would get in bed and read a chapter from the New Testament, and I would highlight along the way.

- x. **Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** “If I do not feed on this Book, well then I simply cannot grow. There is no need to argue about this matter. You will find invariably that the people who do not grow in grace are the people who are neglecting to read their Bible. On the other hand the people who have grow have been regular daily students of this Book. It is the food of the soul provided by God Himself.”

8. Spiritual growth is becoming more like Christ.

- i. **Colossians 3:9-10** “You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.”
- ii. God is renewing you in knowledge to look more like Him in your character, conduct, and convictions.
- iii. Here is my personal definition of spiritual growth: Spiritual growth is becoming like Christ, loving God and others more and more.
- iv. Christians are in a battle. The world wants us to become like it, and God wants us to become like Him. The world says, “Act like this. Dress like this. Talk like this. Go to these places. Buy these things. Do these things. Don’t do these things.” But God is saying, “Act like me.” To grow, we have to forsake the world and focus on imitating Christ.
- v. Many Christians are not growing because they are comparing themselves to the wrong people. They are just trying to stay ahead of their lost friends, or keep up with their church family, or they are trying to imitate their pastor. But these are the wrong standards. The standard is the very character of God.
- vi. One time the Pharisees asked Jesus if they should pay taxes to Rome. Jesus asked them to show him a denarius (a Roman coin worth one day’s wage). Jesus asked, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then Jesus said, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s (see Mk 12:13-17).”
- vii. What if Jesus were to ask people about you, “Whose image is on him? Whose image is on her?” Would they say that you look like Jesus, or that you look like just like the rest of the world?

IV. A PLAN FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- i. Before we close, I want to give you a plan for spiritual growth. Anyone and everyone who grows to maturity in Christ does these eight things at a bare minimum.
1. **Purposeful development.** People who grow want to grow, and they have decided to grow. They have made it their goal to grow.
 - a. Question: Is it your goal to grow?
 2. **Praise and worship.** People who grow attend church regularly and praise God with passion and enthusiasm.
 - a. Question: Do you praise God passionately?
 3. **Practical Bible teaching.** People who grow attend church regularly where they listen intently to practical Bible teaching.

- a. Question: Do you bring your Bible to church and take good notes of the sermon?
- 4. **Private time with God.** People who grow have a daily quiet time of prayer and Bible reading.
 - a. Question: Do you have a daily quiet time?
- 5. **Percentage giving.** People who grow tithe.
 - a. Question: Do you tithe?
- 6. **Personal ministry.** People who grow are involved in accomplishing the Great Commission. They have people they are evangelizing, and people they are discipling.
 - a. Question: Do you have people you are witnessing to, and people you are discipling?
- 7. **Positive relationships.** People who grow have close friendships in church with others who motivate them to go all out for Jesus.
 - a. Question: Do you have close friendships with mature Christians in your church?
- 8. **Passionate obedience.** People who grow are passionate about being obedient to God in all areas of life.
 - a. Question: Have you repented of all known sin in your life?

V. CONCLUSION

- 1. If you can answer yes to all eight of the above questions, then you are on the path of spiritual growth. You will grow fast; you will grow a lot. And you will become more and more useful to God.
- 2. But if you can't answer yes to all of the above questions, would you make a decision today to make a change? Make a decision today to do what is necessary to grow spiritually.
- 3. Let me close with some encouragement. You will grow, if you keep striving to grow.
- 4. This past year was Reiton's first year in Bible Drill. The Bible Drill season starts in September, and then it goes all the way through April. Eight months. Reiton had to memorize 25 verses, ten key passages, and the plan of salvation. He had to be able to quote the verse and reference without any mistakes. And he had to learn all the books of the Bible by heart, and he had to learn how to look up any book in the Bible in under ten seconds. Back in September, he was green. Not only did he have to memorize verses, he had to learn how to memorize. It was tough. There were weeks that went by when I couldn't see any progress. And then there were weeks when we saw a little progress, but not nearly as much as we wanted to see. Many tears were shed. But Reiton did not give up. He kept at it. He practiced on his own for 20 minutes a day, five days a week; he worked with his mom several days a week; and then he met with me once a week. And eventually, gradually, it started to click. A couple of weeks ago we had two Bible Drill Competitions. The first Drill you are allowed to make twelve mistakes. Reiton made two mistakes. The second Drill allows eight mistakes. Reiton missed only one. He did awesome. And it is just amazing to see how much he has grown over just eight months. But that's what happens when you make a commitment to grow, and you keep working on it.

5. You will grow. Some days you won't see growth. Some days you will see what looks like regress instead of progress. Other days you will see growth, but not as much as you want. Don't get discouraged. Keep working the process. Keep up with your daily quiet time. Stay engaged in church. Keep reading your Bible. Keep putting off and putting on. And God will grow you.