

THE SECRET TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH (THAT NOBODY EVER TALKS ABOUT)

EPHESIANS 4:15-16

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I. INTRODUCTON

1. The fitness industry is at its peak right now. There are tons of products and exercise programs on sale that promise to help you shed the pounds and get shredded in months. There's P90X, Insanity, Billy's Bootcamp, Peloton. And the commercials for these products have tons of testimonies of people who lost a ton of weight and got in great shape. The message is clear: Use this product, and you'll get in great shape. So, why do so many people try these programs and don't see great weight loss results? It's because there is a secret about weight loss that nobody ever talks about. None of these commercials talk about this secret, or they mention it in the fine print. What's the secret? If you want to lose weight, exercise will only do so much; the real key is diet. You have to cut calories. You have to stop eating pizza and ice cream. You can exercise until you pass out, but you won't reach your weight loss goals until you change your eating habits.
2. Today I want to talk to you about a spiritual secret. It has to do with spiritual growth. It's a secret that nobody ever talks about. When we talk about the path to spiritual growth, to becoming more like Christ, it includes the following: Study your Bible; memorize Scripture; meditate on Scripture; read Christian books; listen to sermons; praying; fasting. These are all good and very important and very effective. But there's something missing from this list. And many Christians leave it out. Many Christians miss it. And that's why they're not growing. That's why they're struggling with sin. That's what we're going to talk about today.

II. TEXT: Ephesians 4:15-16

1. 15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. 16 From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

III. THREE INSIGHTS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1. I am commanded to grow.

- i. **Ephesians 4:15** "let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ."
- ii. If growth is commanded, then growth is not automatic. You never have to tell a kid to grow. They just automatically grow. But you do have to command Christians to grow because it is not automatic.
- iii. Many Christians don't grow. They are saved. They are heaven-bound. But they don't grow. They are stuck in spiritual infancy. They are spiritual babies, or spiritual adolescents.
- iv. Why don't they grow? Because they don't the things that are necessary for growth.

- v. Spiritual growth is not like physical growth, which is automatic. It is more like physical fitness, which takes discipline, and hard work, and sacrifice, and commitment, and persistence. Many Christians don't grow for the same reason that many people never lose weight and get in shape. They aren't willing to do those things that are necessary for growth.
- vi. What are the things that are necessary to grow? I already mentioned some of them. Read your Bible. Pray. Read good Christians books (check out my blog for a list of great Christian books). But even if you do all these things, there's something else required for growth that many Christians miss.
- vii. But the first insight about spiritual growth is that you are commanded to grow. It is not optional. God commands you to find out what it takes to grow, and then to do what it takes to grow. If are not striving to grow, then you are disobeying God.

2. I must be connected to the church to grow.

- i. **Ephesians 4:16** "From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body"
- ii. The Bible uses many metaphors for the church: the bride of Christ; the pillar and foundation of the church; the family of God; the temple of God. Here is refers to the church as the body of Christ. The church is like a body; Christ is the head, and the members are body parts – hands, feet, etc.
- iii. This verse contains a key insight about growth. "The whole body... promotes the growth of the body." The church promotes the growth of the church.
 - 1. The church promotes... growth. One of the essential purposes of the church is to help people grow spiritually. It does that through Home Group, through Sunday worship, through Bible studies, retreats, Bible Drill, prayer meetings, encouragement, fellowship, etc. But who does the church help to grow spiritually?
 - 2. The church helps its members grow. The people who grow as a result of the church's ministry are the people in the church. The church doesn't help outsiders grow spiritually. It doesn't help people who are unconnected and uninvolved grow spiritually. It's not that it doesn't want to. It just doesn't work like that. The people who benefit from the church's ministry of spiritual growth are the people in the church.
- iv. Thus, I must be connected to the church to grow.
- v. Don't misunderstand. You can be saved without the church. You can go to heaven without the church. You can be a Christian without the church. But you can't be a growing, healthy Christian without the church.
- vi. Many Christians want to skip this part about spiritual growth. They want to grow, but they don't want to make time for church. Or they don't want to

deal with the people at church. But you must be connected to the church to grow. “The whole body... promotes the growth of the body.”

- vii. To grow, you need the ministry of the church. You need Sunday worship. You need accountability. You need Christian fellowship. You need church discipline. You need corporate prayer, etc.

3. I must contribute to the church so that others can grow.

- i. **Ephesians 4:16** “From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.”
- ii. Let’s simplify this verse to make it easier to understand.
 - 1. “The whole body... promotes the growth of the body... by the proper working of each individual part.”
 - 2. The church helps people grow spiritually as each member contributes.
- iii. For the church to be effective at producing growing, mature Christians, each member in the church must do their part. Each member must contribute. Each member must find a way to help out through giving and serving.
- iv. I used this illustration a few weeks ago, but let me share it again. I’m a member of Cajun Fitness, and they have several types of employees. They have fitness instructors, personal trainers, salespeople, custodians, maintenance people, childcare workers, staff who make and sell the snacks, staff members who hand payroll and accounting, and then there are managers who hire and lead the staff. The mission of Cajun Fitness is to help their customers to get fit. Which of their staff help them fulfill this mission? Is it just the fitness instructors and personal trainers? No. The business only thrives and fulfills its mission as each part does its work. It’s the same with the church. For the church to produce growing Christians, everyone has to do their part – not just the preacher, or the worship leader, or the small group leader. Every member must contribute through giving and serving.
- v. There’s something else. Don’t think that we grow by receiving the ministry of the church, but we help others grow by contributing to the church. We grow by receiving the ministry of the church, but we also grow as we contribute to the church. You can only grow so much by receiving, and sitting and soaking. To keep growing, you have to start contributing.
- vi. There are four main bones in every organization. The wish-bones: Wishing somebody would do something about the problem. The jaw-bones: Doing all the talking but very little else. The knuckle-bones: Those who knock everything. The back-bones: Those who carry the brunt of the load and do most of the work. If you want to grow, then you need to become part of the backbone of the church – a contributor who helps to carry the load.

- vii. Have you heard of the 80/20 principle? It's been said that 20% of the church give 80% of the money, and do 80% of the work. But that 20% are the ones who benefit the most from the church. They are the ones who are growing, and healthy, and fruitful, because they are the most connected and contributing.
- viii. It's like the old saying: You get out of something what you put into it. The more you get involved in giving and serving at church, the more you will get out of it.

IV. BIG IDEA

1. Here's the big idea of these two verses: I will grow best when I am connected and contributing to the church. I will grow best when I am actively participating in church.
2. This is why we have a formal membership process at Church Acadiana. This is why we encourage people to join the church. What are you doing when you join the church? What does it mean to become a church member? Church membership is a commitment to active participation in the church.
3. We don't want people to join the church so that we can get more members. We want people to join the church because we know that people need to be connected and contributing to the church to grow. When people join the church, they are making a commitment to do that.

V. HOW TO JOIN CHURCH ACADIANA

1. Today, I want to encourage you to become a member of Church Acadiana. And I'm going to let you join this morning, without going to the Newcomer's Lunch.
2. The point of joining the church is to make a commitment to actively participate in the church. It's a commitment to be connected and contributing to Church Acadiana. Why? So that you can be a healthy and growing Christian.
3. What do you have to do to become a member of Church Acadiana?
 - i. You must be born again.
 - ii. You must be baptized as a believer.
 - iii. You must commit to the following:
 1. I will attend regularly.
 2. I will give regularly.
 3. I will guard the unity of the church. No gossip. Be a raving fan in public, and an honest critic in private.
 4. I will serve.
 5. I will seek to live a holy life.
 6. I will seek to join another church if I have to leave Church Acadiana.
 7. I will be open to accountability if I break this commitment.
 - iv. If you are ready, you can join the church today by signing the Membership Covenant and dropping it off.

4. Why is it important to sign your name? Why make a formal commitment to the church? Why isn't an internal, personal commitment enough?
- i. To encourage longevity. When you make a formal commitment to join a church, it leads to a longer stay at the church, and that's what you need. Sometimes leaving a church is the right thing to do, but most of the time it's not. Most of the time people church-hop for the wrong reasons. But it doesn't benefit you or the church when you church-hop, bouncing from church to church. To really benefit from the church, you need to stay there long enough to build deep relationships; to go through conflict; to walk through church-wide challenges and struggles; to find your unique contribution. That requires longevity, and you are more likely to stick around for the long haul if you will make a formal commitment to the church.
 - ii. To assess leadership potential. The church needs leaders. It needs people to shoulder responsibility – HG leaders, ministry team leaders, Lead Team members, board of directors, etc. And these leadership positions carry great responsibility and great power. Before we give someone power in the church and over the church, we need to know that that person truly loves the church, agrees with our vision and mission and essential beliefs, and plans to be here for a while. One of the ways we can learn these things about a person is through church membership.
 - iii. For church discipline. Church discipline is an essential mark of a biblical church. When a church member is living in blatant disobedience, the church is to take steps to restore that person. This involves sitting down with the person, pointing out their sin, etc. The question is, Who falls under the church's jurisdiction? Church members. As a father, I don't discipline everybody's kids; I discipline my kids. As a church, we don't discipline everyone; we discipline our members. We must, or we're disobeying Scripture. And that means we have to clearly distinguish between members and non-members, and the members need to know that they are members so that they are not shocked when they are held accountable.
 - iv. For official church business. A church has guidelines that it is legally bound to abide by. Some churches refer to these guidelines as the church constitution, or the church bylaws. For example, when our church makes certain big decisions, the membership must vote. To fire the pastor, the members have to vote. To hire a new pastor, the members have to vote. To take on major debt, the members have to vote. So, who gets to vote on these major decisions? Who has a say in these major decisions? Not just anybody off the street; that wouldn't be healthy. Only church members get to vote. But what is a church member, and how do you become a church member? This is why we have a formal membership process – so we can clearly distinguish between members and non-members for legal purposes.

There are some of you who are wonderful Christians; wonderful people; and I love having you at Church Acadiana. And I want you to become a member of the church so that your vote will count; so that your voice will be heard. What if a group of people in the church decided they wanted to fire me? Some of you are my biggest supporters, and you would stand behind me, but you wouldn't be able to because you're not a member.

VI. WILL YOU JOIN TODAY?

1. So, this is what today is about. For you to be a healthy Christian, you must be connected and contributing to the church.
2. So, I want to encourage you to make that commitment today – to be an active participant in the church.
3. I want you to fill out that card – membership covenant – and drop it off as you leave.
4. If you are already a member, I want you to reaffirm your membership today. Today is a reminder of why church membership is important, and of what the commitment is.
5. If you are not a member, you can join the church today. You don't have to attend the Newcomer's Lunch. You can skip all that and become a member today. Just turn in your Membership Covenant.
6. You may want to join today, but you need to be baptized first, or you need to talk to me about salvation – you're not sure if you are saved. If that's you, then I want you to fill out the Membership Covenant, and then circle what you need help with – baptism or salvation.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. There's a secret to physical fitness that people don't like to talk about. If you really want to lose weight, exercise is helpful, but diet is crucial. Less pizza and ice cream.
2. There's a secret to spiritual growth that people don't like to talk about. If you really want to grow, you have to be connected and contributing to the church. This is why the church exists – to help you grow. But you have to be connected and contributing.
3. That's what church membership is about. It's a commitment to be connected and contributing to the church; to be an active participant in the church.
4. Today, will you join the church?
5. People are members of all kinds of things these days: Costco, Sam's Club, Peloton, Amazon Prime, the fitness club, the DAV, etc. I'm not knocking those things, but think about what the church is. It's the body and bride of Christ. It is the pillar and foundation of truth. It is the family and temple of God. If there is anything worth committing to, it is the church. If there is anything worth joining, it is the church. If there is anything worthy of your membership, it is the church.
6. Why? Because you need it, and you're needed. You need to be connected and contributing to the church to grow; and the church needs your contribution so that it can be more effective.