

“The Only Evidence of Life”  
Luke 2:52; II Peter 3:17-18; Philippians 3:12-14  
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This sermon is the result of a request by our Minister of Education, Kathy Dobbins. She asked me to preach a sermon describing a spiritually healthy person. All of us have ideas about what it means to be healthy physically, mentally, and emotionally, but what does it mean to be healthy spiritually?

At first, I thought the best way to answer this question would be to hold up a biblical example and examine his or her life. Whom would I choose, though? Would I select Abraham because of his courage, Deborah because of her wisdom, Ruth because of her loyalty or David because he was so creative? Moving into the New Testament, should I pick Stephen because of his forgiving spirit, Peter because of his boldness or Thomas because of his honesty? How about lifting up Paul because of his determination, Mary because of her inquisitive nature, the Good Samaritan because of his unselfishness, or Barnabas because he was an encourager? I think you sense my dilemma. To choose one character would be so confining.

Then, it dawned on me. There is no single image of a spiritually healthy person just as there is not merely one example of a healthy person physically, mentally and emotionally. However, all healthy people have one thing in common. They are growing, maturing, improving. They are not satisfied with the status quo or held hostage to complacency. They are always looking ahead and exploring ways to make life better.

It was Thomas Scott who said, “The only evidence of life is growth.” He’s right. This is as true spiritually as it is in any other realm of life. Therefore, a spiritually healthy person is a person who is growing.

Perhaps that was why Luke wrote that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. Maybe this was why Paul informed us he was not perfect but was striving to become more Christ-like everyday. Surely this was why the last words Peter wrote encouraged his readers to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They knew growth was the only evidence of life.

Prior to moving to Atlanta, Jackie and I lived in the same house almost seventeen years. One of the hardest reasons to leave that house was because of the door frame in the kitchen. I know that sounds unusual but let me tell you why.

This was the place where we measured our children as they grew. Periodically, we would line them up and measure them. How happy and excited they would get, along with us, when they would see how much they had grown.

Of course, we dated and initialed each mark on the door frame and even when we painted, we would put the marks back. As a result, we could tell how tall each child was at different ages.

What if one of my children had experienced a problem growing? It would have been extremely difficult for all of us. I know because my brother and his wife faced it. They have two sons. The younger did not grow as expected. He is twenty-four years old now and barely five feet tall. He only reached that height because specialists in that field of medicine treated him with growth hormones. After watching what they went through, I’ll never underestimate the value and importance of growth.

This is true not only physically, but also spiritually. I am convinced that a spiritually healthy person must be someone who is growing and becoming that person God envisioned when He created him or her. A healthy person spiritually is someone that frequently takes an inventory of his or her strengths and weaknesses, celebrating the good and working to overcome the bad.

If you took an inventory this morning, what would it reveal? Where does growth need to occur in your spiritual life? Do you need to strengthen your relationship with God through more disciplined prayer? In order to be more Christ-like, do you need to know what Christ is like through the study of his words and life? Are you a better steward of your time, talents and resources than you were ten years ago? Are you a better mate, parent, neighbor, church member, role model, employee, employer or student than you were five years ago? Are you more or less sensitive to the needs of people around you than you were a year ago?

Let me be more specific. Name one bad habit you have overcome or one good habit you have begun since the New Year. Give the time and place you most recently went out of your way to help a total stranger. What was the last challenge that moved you out of your comfort zone and tested your resolve? Quote the last sentence you underlined in a book because you did not want to forget it? When was the last time you sat down with someone with whom you disagreed and asked them to explain their opinion? Name one thing you were taught as a child that you no longer believe. Share the name of the most recent person you forgave. When was the last time you said, "I'm sorry?" What was the last temptation you resisted? When is the last time you cried while praying because you were overwhelmed with your sinfulness? What could you tell your family about life today that you did not know last Sunday?

Growth is the only evidence of life. How alive are you?