

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-25 Methods: Keys to Growing in Christ

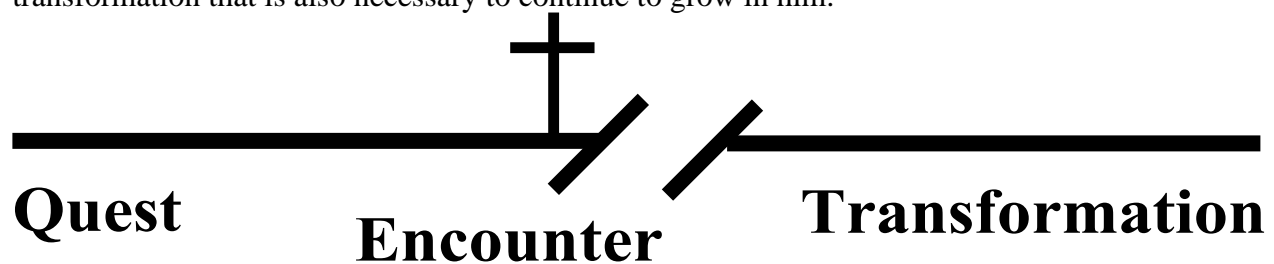
What are the most important activities that a new believer must do in order to grow in Christ? What habits are most needed for spiritual discipline?

You likely answered: study the Scriptures, pray, fellowship with other Christians, worship, tithe, or serve others. But the Early Church was clear that the most important practice was sharing their faith experience with others. Sadly, this common practice of a lifestyle of witnessing seems to have been lost in many churches.

If you limited these practices to just the things a *mature* believer must do to grow, what would they be? It would be surprising if you didn't give this answer: "A mature believer needs the same spiritual disciplines a new believer needs to grow spiritually." Therefore, what do your answers mean for those who want to mentor others in the faith? The basis for discipling new converts is to share with them the importance of these things in *your own* growth. If you are practicing these spiritual disciplines, it should be easy to share how important they are for new believers. They should 1) study the Scriptures daily (using olBi lessons), 2) pray regularly, 3) fellowship with believers, and 4) share their faith with others.

In other words, you need to share with them how important the Word of God is to your daily growth. Tell them how meaningful your prayer time is to your relationship with Christ. Share the blessings you have received from being a part of a local community of faith. Help them learn from the challenges and successes you have had in sharing your faith with unbelievers. The reality is that growing in Christ doesn't just happen by accident. You must be purposeful about following Christ.

Look at the image provided on the phone screen, showing the three phases of the conversion experience. For a review of these you may want to go back and listen to the discussion in the previous lessons (8-10). If we are not careful, we may focus too much on the encounter experience that is necessary to be born again. In doing this, we may fail to emphasize the ongoing process of transformation that is also necessary to continue to grow in him.



To bridge the gap between salvation encounters and discipleship, we need to understand that a lifelong process of change should follow conversion. Christians "are being transformed into his image" (2Cor 3:18). We are to be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). There is a danger in evangelism methods that focus solely on one event as the most important aspect of accepting Christ. They often fail to connect converts to local churches or faith communities to be discipled. Consider the following dilemma: why have so many prayed the "sinner's prayer," yet churches do not grow? Could this be because we focus too much on the conversions or numbers while overlooking the necessity of long-term lifestyle changes?

Perhaps part of the problem has to do with certain false concepts about the harvest. Remember the principles from the parable of the sower (Lesson 16). The main idea from that parable is that the condition of the heart determines the size of the harvest. There are four basic conditions of the heart that we see when sowing the seed of God's Word: 1) those who are hardened by sin and thus reject the Word, 2) those who make shallow commitments that don't last, 3) those whose heart is mixed with worldly desires, and 4) those who are open to the Word and yield much spiritual fruit in their life. This teaching of Jesus reminds us that we need to be realistic about the harvest from the hearts of unbelievers.

You may find at least four common unreal expectations concerning the results of evangelism.

The first unreal thing expected is that salvation will result in church membership. People wrongly think, "If people are truly saved, they'll become a part of our church." The reality is, many people who have an encounter with Christ go back to their former church. Or, God may lead them to another group that is better equipped to disciple them or closer to their home.

Another false concept is that baptism can only be allowed for those who are mature, after a time of testing. The New Testament shows a more immediate baptism practice. If new converts are dealing with sins like addictions, baptism can be a powerful way of bringing about their deliverance from such lifestyles.

Another weakness may be answered by finding a leader's real priority in their ministry. Is it the kingdom of God or the kingdom of man? Put another way, "Do we want sinners converted or just an increase in attendance?" The Lord will likely lead new converts to where they can be disciplined most effectively. We should rejoice that the harvest is being preserved and they are growing in the Lord!

Finally, we need to reflect on what indicates spiritual maturity in the life of the believer? Is maturity measured by church attendance, tithing, or agreement with the pastor? Or is it measured by changes in lifestyle, bearing spiritual fruit, and growing in their commitment to Christ?

Discipleship will likely involve many processes in the church. These will include: 1) one-on-one mentoring relationships, 2) some form of new believer's classes in a family atmosphere of learning and encouragement, 3) small group meetings that allow seekers to raise questions and receive answers, 4) support/nurture groups that help people to find strength in overcoming addictions, stress, and other challenges, and 5) prayer and deliverance meetings.

This lesson is **important** because it sets out the pathway for the spiritual growth of new believers. The lesson also deals with the role and expectations of the local church doing the witnessing. Some may be real; some unreal. True success is seeing believers becoming disciples of Christ and being "transformed into his image" (2Cor 3:18).

The **main truth** of this lesson is that growing in Christ involves four spiritual disciplines. These are studying God's Word, prayer, fellowship, and witnessing. More growth happens in partnership with a local church that is focused on maturing all believers.

Review Questions

1. What are the things a new believer should practice in order to grow in their relationship with Christ? [Pause 5 seconds.]

A. If you answered, “They should study the Scriptures daily, pray regularly, fellowship with believers, and share their faith with others,” you are correct.

2. If **mature** believers should be practicing the same four things that **new** believers should be doing, what are the consequences of this for our discipleship practices? [Pause]

A. If you said, “The basis for our discipleship of new disciples is to share with them the importance of these four disciplines in our own growth in Christ,” you are right.

3. What can happen if we focus too much on the encounter experience that is necessary to be born again? [Pause]

A. If you said, “We may fail to emphasize the ongoing process of change that is also needed to continue to grow in Christ,” you would be correct.

4. What are some of the forms that discipleship should take in the local church or community of faith? [Pause]

A. If you answered, “One-on-one mentoring, a new believer’s class, small group meetings, and support/nurture groups,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to review the three phases of the conversion process in Lessons 8-10 and the parable of the sower in Lesson 16. What are the implications for our thinking about the results of our evangelism efforts? Take some time and review the common false expectations concerning the results of witnessing. Consider how many of the forms of discipleship are available in your local church. How might you begin to create such venues to provide growth for new believers?