

Here's what some are saying about this book...

Why are some congregations growing more than others? Why are some local congregations active and zealous, while others struggle just to keep the doors open? Undoubtedly the factors are many, but growing, zealous churches are filled with growing, zealous Christians who truly love the Lord and are on fire for His cause.

In his class book, Inside Out, Carl (Mac) McMurray, challenges us to look within - grow our spirits - develop our inner persons - so that we will be the kind of growing, zealous individuals that can make a difference for the cause of Christ.

Mac's workbook is well written and easy to read. The questions at the end of each chapter are valuable in facilitating the class discussion. Our class enjoyed his practical illustrations which often stimulated discussion and triggered other thoughts or examples from the students.

Most importantly, Mac's work is scripturally sound and challenged us to overcome our spiritual lethargy and truly grow into a people "zealous of good works." Our congregation enjoyed the book very much, and I believe your group would benefit greatly by fitting Mac's material into your curriculum plans.

Wilson Copeland, Lake Gibson congregation, Lakeland, Florida

Inside Out

**By
Carl McMurray**

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SPIRITBUILDING PUBLISHING
15591 N. State Rd. 9, Summitville, Indiana, 46070

COVER PHOTO: Denali National Park, Alaska.
By Carl McMurray

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LESSON 1 WHY IS THIS STUDY NEEDED?

A new birth is an exciting time. Parents and grandparents are thrilled at what they have done, what has been given them, and what lies before them. Our cup runs over with hopes and dreams flowing from the potential of this new son or daughter. The future holds many different roads that can be traveled, however. The one we want our children to walk, of course, is the one where they grow into obedient, mannerly, deeply spiritual adults. We want them to be hard workers with complete educations who know how to make time for the beautiful woman or wonderful man they find and choose to marry, while at the same time being fully committed to the Lord and His kingdom. There are other paths that are walked in the future though. Sometimes there is tragedy as a young life is lost to illness or accident. And sometimes we learn to just “make do” in life because our children (or we) never grasp the full potential of a talent or education which was within their reach.

A spiritual birth is like the above. There is a time for rejoicing and excitement and zeal and intense effort on behalf of the “young one.” Teachers and those influencing the “birth” feel proud and excited about their part. There is education and activity ahead to help him/her develop and mature, but then something happens. Sometimes it is tragedy as a spiritual disease (such as jealousy, regret, covetousness, or lust) finds a home and kills the child of God. More often, however, what happens is much like life itself. The child of God simply reaches a spiritual plateau. He may decide he is just like everyone else so there is no more need to press forward. Perhaps he comes to understand he will never be completely perfect, so he might as well stop trying. Whatever the reason, one’s potential is never fully reached, zeal dies, and growth either stops or slows so as to become immeasurable. Attendance at worship may be regular and the desire to go to heaven is still present, but worship itself often becomes a hollow exercise without any real joy or excitement. Interest in the Scriptures begins to wane and Bible classes seem pointless. More and more often we will begin to hear faultfinding and

complaining rather than praising and giving thanks. And it is truly sad when we realize that this grumbling is coming from our own lips.

I don't know how it got started, but there is a gesture I noticed being used by the Russians when I was over there which describes the above spiritual situation in the lives of many. When faced with problems they believed to be insurmountable the Russians would hold up their hands, shrug their shoulders, and ask, "What's to do?" then go about their business. Whatever the task was that needed to be done would be simply dropped, no matter how important or time sensitive the task. It would be treated as some kind of impossible mission. I'm afraid that we might be as fatalistic as Russians in this area. We know there's a problem, we feel something is lacking, but we don't really see much answer in those around us. We don't know what to do ourselves so we spiritually shrug our shoulders, determine nothing can be done and go about our business. How sad for us, for those we could influence, and for the church of Jesus Christ.

The answer is right in front of us if we will but look and see. Our zeal, our interest, our excitement, and our joy in being children of God was/is greatest when we're growing. When we were changing, learning, and practicing our new faith – it had a great deal of meaning for us. When we first saw our brethren as helpers, partners, and family members, we would have bitten our tongue off rather than complain or find fault with them. When we get back to "growing" then our spiritual lives will get back to "going." We will not be able to sit still on our plateau. Just as it is almost impossible for a healthy child to sit still (they simply have too much energy, curiosity, etc.), likewise the growing Christian will find it difficult to be apathetic, bored, and mediocre about things. He won't be able to sit still; life simply holds too many opportunities that must be explored now.

TWO CONSIDERATIONS ON GROWING

There are two aspects to Christian growth that I believe are important for us to notice and think about. First, have you noticed that most of the personal changes that we make in our lives are made when we are young? I would

suspect that most of us change more from age 10 to 20 than we do the rest of our lives. When we “settle down” in the physical world, it becomes difficult to make changes. The responsibility of a job, a spouse, children, etc. may force us to continue walking in the path we have chosen. Not so, spiritually. One wonderful aspect of growth in Christ is that it can be “jump started” at any time. We may go through periods of staleness and discouragement, but we don’t have to stay there. There is no indication that Peter was addressing himself simply to young Christians when he wrote his two epistles. Quite the contrary in fact. Yet in both letters he exhorts them to grow.

In 1 Peter 2:1-3 his directions are in the context of putting away the attitudes of this life that actually inhibit growth. These are attitudes like malice (an evil spirit toward another), deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. These sinful heart diseases act like cancers to the child of God, halting healthy growth and weakening the system for other diseases. Peter encourages his readers to “long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” In a garden, weeds and pests must be removed as well as water, light, and fertilizer added for the plant to grow. In growing a child we surely consider food, exercise, rest, and study as necessities. But we must also give care that dangers are avoided and hygiene followed to avoid disease. So it is with spiritual growth. There are things to add that will help us toward spiritual health (we hope that some of these are the subjects of this book) and there are things that must be put away so that growth is not hindered. Peter he says put this first list away so that you can focus on the second, the directions to be found in the word.

In his second letter the apostle closes with the admonition to be on guard and not carried away from the faith, 2 Peter 3:17-18. The best way to be in this condition seems to be for them to be growing in the grace and knowledge of the Saviour. This is an interesting turn of phrase because the two are actually intertwined. We cannot grow in grace and ignorance. Likewise, we should not grow in knowledge without making changes that make us more Christlike, i.e. appropriating more grace or favor (as Jesus himself grew in God’s favor, according to Luke 2:52). Our conclusion then is that we grow in grace when, and while, we grow in the knowledge of our Lord. Again we note

that it is not to new Christians that Peter sends this admonition, but to those who are “scattered,” i.e. to Christians all over Turkey who were there either because that was their home, or more likely, because they had been persecuted and forced to flee their homelands for less civilized areas. These servants of God may have been discouraged and even fearful at times, yet the Holy Spirit’s directions for them was to keep defeating the world, be on their guard, and grow. This same admonition would apply in any age and it certainly applies in ours today.

The second important thing to see here is that this growth never really needs to stop in this life. Yes, we let it stop, if we’re not paying attention to warnings like Peter’s. And the Devil is certainly always looking for ways to distract us from spiritual things and get us caught up in the things of this life. In fact, he is so effective at it that he doesn’t even see the need to update his tool chest. 1 John 2:15-17 lists the three main distractions that the Devil uses. He used all three on Eve at the beginning. He used them to lead the Israelites into the sin of grumbling. He used them to weaken the Kings and rulers of Judah. He even tried the same tricks on Jesus as our Lord began his ministry and he finally ran into one wise enough to see through the deception and say “no” to the temptations. But it doesn’t have to be this way. It is not decreed in the unchanging heavens that we must stop growing. What can be fantastic to us if we develop the right attitude is that every time we learn something, God can provide us a new way to use this knowledge and expand the experience of learning. There is no end to the experiences and opportunities, which are available to us, if we will make ourselves available to God. Growth doesn’t have to stop, but if it does it can be started again! Isn’t the grace of God a marvelous thing as he provides for our needs in this life?

Paul noted that the outward man is definitely decaying day by day, in 2 Corinthians 4:16, but the same verse tells us our inner selves should be “renewed” in the same time period, that is, day by day. Our prayer in this study should be for inner renewal. For the growth that lends to us the youthful exuberance and energy of spirit which rightfully belongs to every child of God. Let me note just a few things that are natural to the environment of growth, things which should probably be noticed in our lives also, day by day.

When a family grows, i.e., a couple has children, there are several things involved in the ideal situation. I know that not all physical families will go through this because sometimes people become parents by surprise and sometimes even when it is not a surprise some people just haven't put the thoughtfulness and prayer into their family situation that they should have. In the area of spiritual growth however, we can think this thing out and act in accordance with wisdom if we wish. No one is born accidentally into the kingdom of God and the same concern and thought that moves one to this place can move one in a continual motion of progress if that is his or her desire. Consider a few things that will add strength and depth to our purposing in ourselves to grow...

Desire. We've already looked at Peter's words where he instructs the child of God to "long for" the word and resulting growth. Although sadly, sometimes one is born into a family where no child was desired. That is not so with God's family. The physical child must struggle to grow in such a dark environment. The spiritual child however is under no such compulsion. If he loses his desire to grow, he simply stops and dies, quietly and sometimes unnoticed. The Christian must continually work on his desire to grow.

Planning. Wise parents think about children before they ever arrive. It has been said that parents who wait until a child is born to talk about training and discipline have already waited 9 months too long. Likewise the forward thinking Christian will not just drift along and leave his growth to chance. He will plan for it by feeding himself properly, taking advantage of opportunities to be with other Christians and study together and read on his own. He will exercise himself by trying new activities, volunteering his assistance, getting involved in the work of the local family of God, and fellowshiping with brethren. There are too many other ways that an individual can see to his own growth to mention here. Perhaps sharing some of your own ideas in a class setting would be an encouragement to others.

Communication. In a family wise mates communicate, parents need to communicate with children, and vice versa. In the church of God Christians need to be talking up, talking over, and talking with one another. We need to

be praising one another, talking down sin, and encouraging the faint hearted and struggling. There are too many congregations where hard questions are discouraged and even rebuked and suggestions are simply ridiculed. Any eldership that discourages open communication and fails to be open itself in all their decisions and leadership roles commits some grievous errors. First, they're failing to model leadership to the flock and therefore failing in their role of maturing more leaders. This is why in many congregations there are whole generations of men unfit for leadership. They were never matured spiritually. Secondly, they are encouraging a sense of frustration and stifling growth that has been seen in many cases to end in great explosions in the congregation where some young Christian or faint hearted one may become discouraged and even turn from the faith. At the very best these ugly divisions hurt the cause of Christ in the area where the church is located, sometimes for years to come. Spiritual scars remain for decades. Many times this could have been avoided if we had just troubled ourselves to communicate.

Work. Many times throughout the New Testament we are told to be "diligent." That is, we are to put forth effort. Growth is no different from any other responsibility in that way, it will take effort. It takes effort to communicate, effort to plan, effort to grow. That translates in our world as time and/or money, two very precious commodities. Ephesians 4:16 teaches us however that the body grows from that which every joint supplies. The supplying of your effort will go a long way in bringing the congregation that you identify with as family, to maturity and effectiveness.

There are many volumes on the book shelves today dealing with church growth and that subject is certainly important. But the real key to church growth, this author believes, is individual growth. When a congregation is full of spiritually healthy Christians who love one another deeply and show it, who practice their faith outside the walls of their local assembly halls and demonstrate the character of Christ in their daily walk then the growth of the local congregation will be a moot point, not even worthy of discussion. The world will line up at the door when Christians start waking up and living like they really believe they are going to heaven and they want everyone to go with them. God bless your studies.

QUESTIONS ON LESSON ONE

1. What are some things that might lead a Christian to “level off” in his or her spiritual growth?

 2. What is usually the time of greatest growth for the Christian? Why?

 3. List three things that you believe hinder spiritual growth and please explain the dynamic behind each that causes the hindrance.

 4. Name the three tools that Satan uses to separate us from God, and please give an actual example of how each one works.

 5. Please give three things that you believe will encourage spiritual growth. The ideas given in the lesson are fine, but see how many others you can come up with.

 6. What four things are absolutely necessary to personal spiritual growth?

 7. What dangers can arise when communication lines are not open?
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