

Spiritual Growth within a Church



By Pastor Ivan Leung

Although we are living in a western society that emphasizes individualism, no one is meant to be alone. Humans naturally adopt a communal lifestyle, enjoying the amicable interactions that fruitful relationships bring. In truth, intimate relationships are a key element to the growth of human beings. I once taught at a special school that focused on children with maladjusted social and emotional issues; this experience allowed me to understand the importance of a healthy environment for the growth of a child. In addition to a balanced diet, every child requires love, safety, acceptance, and encouragement to grow. As a result, if children enjoy loving parents at home and build loving friendships at school, they are then capable of building a positive

and healthy image of themselves in an environment that is filled with love, safety, and acceptance.

In the same way, Christians need to establish a deep and meaningful relationship with God and fellow believers for spiritual growth. The Bible does not promote individualism; rather, it emphasizes the concept of community. Within a community, believers grow through their relationship with God and with one another. **Therefore, I strongly believe that the church is a spirit-filled community where believers gather together to seek spiritual growth.** Through church activities such as Sunday worship, fellowship, Sunday school, prayer meetings, small group gatherings, and choir, believers are capable of fulfilling the following: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:16) Because of this, **God established His church on earth to provide us with a spiritual home, desiring us to continually grow in His home.** His desire is for each and every one of his believers to grow in Him (1 Peter 2:2, Hebrews 6:1) and it is also a message that is emphasized within our church: **"to be a growing community"**.

Paul mentions in the book of Ephesians that believers should lead a life that reflects God's blessing. He first mentions that as the body of Christ, everyone should do their best in their works of service, build the church, and be a witness of God's unity in their lives (Ephesians 4:1-16). Therefore, Paul strongly emphasizes

the importance of church life because it is an integral component to spiritual growth. In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul states that when we seek growth in the church, there are four clear objectives.

1. We must be faithful in our service to the Lord

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Ephesians 4:11-12) Paul points out that there are five special talents that are used to build up the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. God provided these talents to those whom He chose for the purpose of His work, so they may complete it. The term "to complete" stemmed from a terminology used by surgeons, which means to re-attach broken limbs and repair dislocated joints; in essence, to "re-unify" the body. Paul refers to completion as preparing, training, and providing, in order to equip the believer to renew their lives and achieve their best in their works of service, leading to unity as a body of Christ.

Therefore, the objective for these people is to build up the spirituality of believers, by spurring them to grow and transform them from being mentored to mentoring. Thus, building the body of Christ is a goal that all believers should strive for. As long as we are members of the church, we should partake and build this spiritual home.

2. We must seek a deeper understanding of the truth

Ephesians 4:13a-14 “Until we all reach unity in the faith..., then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” When Paul notes of the truth in Ephesians 4:12, “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”, he immediately thought of the importance of unity. Paul knows that if the church is not united, the church will not build up and grow, even if the believers possess talents from God. The Corinthian church experienced a similar situation. There were believers that possessed many talents in the church, but they were not united in their hearts. They got into arguments and took sides amongst each other, resulting in the church experiencing not the difficulties of spiritual growth, but adversities. This was a church that crushed the heart of Paul.

Where does unity come from? Paul speaks, “We can build unity in the truth.” Everyone comes from a different family background and experiences; however, we all have the same need to know, believe and follow the Word of God. This is how we can achieve unity despite our differences. Therefore, we ask God to give us a heart that thirsts for the deeper understanding of the truth, and to put the truth into action, so that everyone may reach unity in faith.

Today, the church’s slogan is “Back to the Bible!” The church focuses on spreading the truth at the pulpit, teaching the Word of God in Sunday School, and understanding God’s Word with the guiding of the Holy Spirit. Each and every one of our brothers and sisters should also seek for a deeper understanding of the Bible to become a mature Christian.



Growth requires us to ceaselessly seek renewal and to desire to know Christ more, so that Christ’s image fills within us as our old self withers away.



The Bible is the solid foundation for believers in their lives and in their service. “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3)

3. We must cultivate mature Christian character

Ephesians 4:13b “...in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”. Paul’s emphasis on how believers must “reach unity in faith” in Ephesians 4:13 refers to knowing Jesus Christ; thus, the New Chinese Version Bible translates it as “until we all hold the same belief and knowledge of Jesus Christ”. How do we get to know Jesus Christ? It is through the Word of God. What is the outcome of knowing Jesus Christ? Paul’s statement in verse 13b gives us the answer: “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”.

In Ephesians 4:13, Paul points out three guidelines to establish the body of Christ: 1) to hold the same belief and knowledge of Jesus Christ; 2) to become mature; 3) to attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. These three guidelines are not independent of one another; rather, they are interdependent and each guideline is a progression to achieving the next. If a believer wants to become mature, the church must hold the same belief and knowledge of Jesus Christ. How does one reach maturity? To reach maturity implies the attainment of the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Paul again emphasizes that we must strive for a life of maturity, and to live in Christ’s image. Therefore, growth requires us to ceaselessly seek renewal and to desire to know Christ more, so that Christ’s image fills within us as our old self withers away. This is the growth that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4: to be more like Christ in our behavior and actions. Because of this, our spiritual growth and our knowledge of Christ is intimately related: when we know Christ more, we grow more and our behavior and actions are more like Christ; if we know Christ less, we grow less and our behavior and actions reflect less of Christ.

4. We must build fruitful relationships

Ephesians 4:15-16 “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Paul points out that all believers can continuously grow through the fruitful relationships developed within the church. He first stresses our relationship with Christ: “We will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” so that human relationships can be “joined and held together by every supporting ligament”. “Joined and held together” holds the following meaning: God sees the needs of every individual and places us with one another according to His will.

“Joined” is a very meaningful word as its origins are from architectural terminology. Instead of using cement and wires, Israelites from earlier times use to move rocks from the mountains to build homes. After a rock has been moved, it requires sanding in order to smooth out the bumps and edges. In the minds of the designer and the construction worker, they have a blueprint that they follow so that they can shape the rock exactly the way they want it to look like. Once the sanding is completed, the rocks are stacked securely on top of one another, while supporting the rocks within close proximity in order to ensure that the house is solid. Paul takes this example to describe the different parts of the body of Christ. When we join together, we create a strong church that does not falter.

Paul stresses that fruitful relationships can not only build churches in unity, but can also help believers to grow spiritually. That is what he refers to as being “held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself in love, as each part does its work”. Thus fellowship with brothers and sisters plays an integral part in growing spiritually. Meaningful interactions with brothers and sisters can not only support personal spiritual growth, but also support fellowship and church growth.

The message spoken by Paul in Ephesians is not only a meaningful sermon, but also a sharing of his own experience. God placed different people throughout Paul's life, who created a positive ripple effect not only within Paul's spiritual walk with God, but also in the lives of the believers that were with Paul. Barnabas was one of the people who were placed in Paul's life.

Barnabas was Paul's companion, who he confided to. Barnabas was

sent by God to be the spiritual mentor of Paul, making a lasting impact in Paul's spiritual walk and service to the Lord. From the interactions between Barnabas and Paul, we can see that Barnabas mentored Paul's spiritual walk, which in turn affected the lives of those who surrounded Paul in his later days when he became a mature Christian. Barnabas even influenced the growth of the church as those impacted by Paul continued to impact others within their community. This is the outcome of true spiritual growth stemmed from fruitful relationships.

Dear brothers and sisters, are you a Barnabas, helping others to become Paul? Have you noticed God placing a spiritual companion by you since you came to know the Lord? Praise God for these brothers and sisters!

They supported or are continuing to support and encourage you in your spiritual walk, so that you may mature and grow to be a blessing for others as well.

It is important that our spiritual walk continues to grow today and everyday. The path to maturity is a process that will last for a lifetime. Thank you, God, for providing us with a spiritual home. May God protect us from turning away from our spiritual homes, so that we may continue to seek spiritual growth, “leaving the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity” (Hebrews 6:1). As we grow and mature, let us build up and strengthen the church together and face life's challenges in unity.

**Blessings,
Pastor Ivan Leung**

A Father's Prayer for His Son

Douglas MacArthur's Prayer

Build me a son, O Lord,
who will be strong enough to know when he is weak,
and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid;
one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat,
and humble and gentle in victory.

Build me a son whose wishes will not take the place of deeds;
a son who will know Thee.....
and that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge.

Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort,
but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge.
Here, let him learn to stand up in the storm;
here let him learn compassion for those that fail.

Build me a son whose heart will be clear, whose goal will be high,
a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men;
one who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past.

And after all these things are his, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor,
so that he may always be serious, yet never take himself too seriously.
Give him humility, so that he may always remember
the simplicity of true greatness,
the open mind of true wisdom
and the meekness of true strength.

Then, I, his father, will dare to whisper,
"I have not lived in vain."

- General Douglas MacArthur

Upcoming Church-wide Camps

Please continue to pray for the upcoming church-wide summer camps at the end of June:

Kidz Kamp 2009

For children grades 1 to 6.
Friday June 26 to Monday June 29
at Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford

Teens Camp 2009

For teens grades 7 to 12
Friday June 26 to Monday June 29
at Capernwray Harbour Bible Centre,
Thetis Island, BC



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Cantonese & Mandarin Church Summer Camp 2009

Friday June 26 to Sunday June 28
at Trinity Western University, Langley

This year's theme:
"Walking Together in Christ"

Invite your Cantonese-speaking and Mandarin-speaking friends and family to the camp this year. More information at the registration table in the foyer. Early-bird deadline is June 7th. Please register as soon as possible.

Community Days

Knight Street Community Day

Saturday June 13, 2009
11 am - 3 pm

All are welcome to join us in this community-oriented event. Invite your family, friends, and neighbours for this fun-filled day.

Please see poster to the right for more information.

Also coming in July will be...

Fraser Lands Community Day

Saturday July 25, 2009
at our VCAC - Fraser Lands Church location. More details and info to come.

A colorful poster for Knight Street Community Day. The title "KNIGHT STREET Community Day" is written in large, bubbly yellow letters with a blue outline. Below it, the date "JUNE 13, 2009 - 11AM - 3PM" is printed in blue. The location "where: 3330 Knight St. parking lot + basement" is listed, with a note "(corner of Knight St. & 17th Ave.)" in smaller text. A "what:" section lists activities like "inflatable slide, bouncy castle, bungee run, dunk tank, game booths; hotdogs, cotton candy, popcorn, ethnic East meets West food tasting court; info about community services, balloons, crafts, specialty booths and more!". The "cost: free!" is written in large, bold letters. The bottom of the poster features illustrations of a hotdog, a green drink with a lime wedge, a pink balloon, a yellow balloon, and a building labeled "VCAC".

KNIGHT STREET Community Day
JUNE 13, 2009 - 11AM - 3PM
where: 3330 Knight St.
parking lot + basement
(corner of Knight St. & 17th Ave.)
what: Join us for great fun on the inflatable slide, bouncy castle, bungee run, dunk tank, game booths; hotdogs, cotton candy, popcorn, ethnic East meets West food tasting court; info about community services, balloons, crafts, specialty booths and more!
cost: free!