

10 AREAS THAT SHOW SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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HOW WE JUDGE A COMPANY, BUSINESS OR CHURCH TODAY

Bottom line – numbers

Church = attendance, budget

GOD DOESN'T LOOK AT THAT

Don't know the size of any church in the Bible
Do know if it is healthy or not – what God looks at!!!

How can we tell if a church is healthy and growing?

How can we tell if we are healthy and growing?

We are to be GROWING Christians, but just what does that mean?
We talk about spiritual growth a lot, but don't define it.

MEASURE TDDGGM each 6 mo see how growing

Tape measurer

Standard to measure selves?

2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Knowledge = mind

Grace = experience

The standard we use to judge the success of a company or business today is the bottom line, the numbers that show how much profit they made. Unfortunately we carry that standard over to the church as well. Many feel that the more people who attend a church and the larger the church budget the greater the church. That is not how God evaluates churches though.

I have been pastoring the same small church for over 30 years. There were several times in the early years when I wanted to quit, when I thought we weren't successful because we continued to stay small. God taught me that the way He evaluates the health of a church has nothing to do with the number of people who attend or how much money it has. After all, we don't know the size of a single church in the Bible. We do know if they are healthy and growing spiritually, but we don't know their size because to God that isn't important.

What does God expect from a healthy church? How can we tell if a church is healthy and growing? How can we tell if we as individuals are healthy and growing? We are commanded to grow (2 Peter 3:18), but just what does that mean? How can we measure our growth?

When my children were young we measured their growth every 6 months. We would mark on a chart how tall they were and we could see how much they had grown since the last time. We don't have that kind of measuring stick to tell if we or our church is growing, but we do have some standards in God's Word which can help us measure growth. I want to give you 10 of them. See how you are doing compared to them, and see how your church is doing as well.

1. Do you yearn more and more for heaven, think about it, etc?

Philippians 1:21-24 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men ... while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

As you grow spiritually, you will think more about heaven and look forward to it more and more. When we are new Christians heaven is a nice but vague place, but the closer we get to God the more we look forward to being in heaven with Him.

As we become more like Jesus this world and the things of it are less important. The sin and suffering become more and more distasteful to us. We think often of heaven and being in perfection with God for all eternity?

The things of this earth fade but our heavenly home becomes more and more real.

Do you yearn more for heaven than you used to? That is a sign you are growing spiritually.

2. Are you becoming more loving in how you treat others?

Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

1 John 4:20-21 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Do you find you re becoming kinder to people, more patient and compassionate that you were? Are you more sensitive to the needs and hurts of others? Does your heart ache for the trials and difficulties others face?

Do you find you are genuinely interested in others? That you are more willing to do what you can to help those in need?

As we become more like Jesus we love others as He loves – totally and unconditionally. That’s how He loves us. Its only natural that as we grow to become more like Him we find ourselves loving people more like He does.

Are you becoming more loving in how you feel about and how you treat others? That is another sign that you are growing spiritually.

3. Are you more aware of God’s work in your life?

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

As we grow we will recognize God’s hand in our life more and more. At first we see the big things He does, but as we grow closer to Him we start noticing that everything that happens is because of Him.

Do you give Him credit for the little things as well as the big things in your life? Are you more aware that He is in control of all that happens, the difficulties as well as the good things? Are you less willing to give yourself credit for what you accomplish and quicker to give God credit?

As we grow we become more aware of how much we need God. He doesn’t need us to do His work, He can get along fine without us. We could do nothing without Him, though. If God withheld His grace and help from your life, what would it be like? What could you accomplish for Him on your own, without His help?

Are you becoming more and more aware of God working in all areas of your life? That is a sign of spiritual growth.

4. Does God’s Word have a greater place in your life than it used to?

1 Peter 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Psalms 119:9-11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. 11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Do you find the Bible is more important to you? Do you appreciate it and turn to it more than before? Do you remember God's promises and think of them during the day? Do you have an increasing number of favorite Scriptures you turn to in difficult times?

Is the time you spend reading the Bible more and more precious to you? Are the truths you read in the Bible having a greater influence in all areas of your life? Do you find your life changing to conform to what God says in His Word?

As we grow so does our appetite. That is true of children, and its also true of Christians. All growing things need a source of food, and the Bible is the food source for our soul.

Do you find your love of the Bible growing? Is it more influential in your life than it used to be? If so, that is a sign of spiritual growth.

5. Is your worship more God-centered and frequent than it used to be?

Job 1:20-21 Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

Psalms 100 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations

Do you find yourself worshipping more than you used to? Does praise to God naturally come to your mind throughout the day? Do you feel closer to God than you used to when you worship?

When we are new Christians we enjoy worship because it makes us feel good. Praising God is great and very enjoyable for us. But the purpose of worship isn't so that we feel good. It's so that God feels good! Worship is all about God, not all about us! As we grow our worship focuses more and more on Who and what God is. We worship when walking outside, sitting at home or laying in bed. Worship becomes a part of our every day life. It isn't just something we do when singing on a Sunday morning.

Do you find yourself thinking of God and His greatness more than you used to? Does worship naturally flow from you throughout the day when you think of He love for you or all He has given you? Do you feel more closely connected to God when you worship than you used to? This is a good sign you are growing spiritually.

6. Are you more sensitive to sin than you used to be?

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Rom 7:14-19 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

As young Christians we are aware of things that are sin, things we shouldn't think or do. But as we grow closer to God we begin to see sin in more and more areas of our life. We start recognizing that our selfish motives and prideful attitudes are sin. We become more and more aware of how far we fall short of God's perfection. Instead of becoming more and more like Jesus we feel less and less like Him.

When Paul was a new Christian he wrote that he was the least of all apostles. Later he wrote that he was the least of all Christians. Toward the end of his life he wrote he was the least of all people. Do you see the progression? As he grew he became more and more aware of his own sin and failure.

Are you more sensitive to sin in your life than you were? Are you more aware of when you sin and more bothered by it? Are you less apt to give yourself credit for things you do? Do you thank God more and more for His grace in your life? Are you more appreciative of His free forgiveness than you used to be?

Becoming more sensitive to sin in your life is a sign you are growing spiritually.

7. Are you quicker to forgive others who hurt you?

Matt 6:14-15 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Col 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Do you find that you are quicker to forgive people than you were a few years ago? Are you less likely to argue or seek revenge against those who hurt you? Do you forgive people as soon as they hurt you and not wait for them to apologize first? Do you forgive them as soon as the offense takes place?

Jesus is our perfect example of forgiveness. He forgives us immediately and totally, even before we ask Him for forgiveness. As we become more like Him we will find ourselves being quicker to forgive others. They may hurt us on purpose or accidentally, but our first response is getting to be to quickly forgive them.

Do you find yourself quicker to forgive than you were in the past? That is a good sign that spiritual growth is taking place.

8. Are you becoming more aware of how great and powerful God is?

Ps 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Isa 64:8 Yet, O Lord , you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

2 Cor 12:10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Phil 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Is God 'growing' in your life? We know God doesn't grow, He doesn't get bigger. He is as big as He can possibly be and He has always been that way. But when we grow in our faith we become more and more aware of what a wonderful, awesome, all-powerful God He is! As we see evidence of His sovereign control day after day our concept of Him gets larger and larger.

Does God seem greater to you now than He did in the past? Are you continually seeing more and more ways He controls everything? When God gets bigger in your life your faith and trust in Him grow as well. We have big faith in a big God, but only small faith in a small God. Is your faith and trust in God growing as well? That shows that God is becoming greater and greater in your life.

If you are more aware than you used to be of how great God is, you are growing spiritually.

9. Is your prayer life becoming more personal and stronger?

James 5:16 The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Jeremiah 29:12-13 *Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

Matthew 7:7-8 *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Do you find yourself talking to God more than you used to? Is prayer more natural, something you do throughout the day without even realizing it at times? Does talking to God about things come naturally to you, something that automatically happens? Are your first thoughts about asking God for wisdom or taking to Him about the problem you are facing?

Do you find yourself talking to God about all kinds of things, not just asking Him to do things for you? Is your prayer more centered on God Himself instead of what you want Him to do for you? Do you feel more comfortable praying than you did in the past?

When a relationship grows people learn to communicate better. Do you find your prayer life becoming more personal and stronger? If so, you are growing spiritually.

10. Do you find yourself better able to recognize His voice when He speaks to you?

John 14:26 *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

John 10:4, 16, 27 *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ... I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*

Acts 9:11-15 *The Lord told Peter, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.*

Do you find yourself more interested in listening to God, in wanting to hear from Him, instead of just being interested in telling Him what you want Him to do for you? Do you recognize that what God has to say to you is much more important than what you have to say to Him?

Are you better able to recognize when God is speaking to you? Can you better tell His voice from your own thoughts and from Satan's counterfeits? Do you have a stronger and stronger desire to want to hear from Him and listen to what He says?

Do you give God credit for the thoughts and ideas, the wisdom and guidance, the conviction and comfort He speaks to you each day?

If you are better able to recognize when God speaks to you then you are growing spiritually.

These 10 standards can help you see how and where you are growing. Look at each one carefully, pray about where you are at and if you are growing in this area. If you find one where you haven't been growing as you should than you can focus on that so you can grow in that area.

Remember, it is God who brings about the growth in us as we allow His Spirit to work in us (John 15:1-8) and produce His fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-26). Just as a parent oversees the maturing of his child, so our heavenly Father oversees our growth. His promise is that He will work in us as long as we are on this earth so that we continue to grow more and more like Jesus (Philippians 1:6). What a blessing and what a privilege that is. God expects us to grow, but He doesn't expect us to do it on our own. He will bring that about as we follow Him.

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