

The Christian's Growth Chart

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Do you remember when you were a kid how you always wanted your mom or dad to measure how tall you were and see how much you had grown since the last measurement? Maybe they marked it in pencil on a door frame somewhere in the house and dated it. That way you could keep track of your growth over the years. And you probably even compared yourself to your mom or dad, eager to match their height or maybe even pass them by! Chances are, you probably kept (or are keeping) a growth chart for your own children.

But what would happen if a child showed no signs of physical growth? If the child's height was the same year after year, even though that child shouldn't have reached his peak height? We would be concerned and wonder what the problem was.

Similarly, in other areas of our life, it's important to keep growing and getting better. There's a quote I've heard attributed to many an individual (I tried in vain to find the proper origin) that is correct no matter who said it first: "When you stop getting better, you stop being good." Think about that for a moment. No matter what the context, whether it be business, sports, medicine, health, relationships, or your spiritual life, if we cease trying to get better, then we are soon bound to not be good in that area.

Everything left to itself tends towards decay. Nothing gets better on its own. In fact, it doesn't even stay constant. Rather, it regresses. A once strong bodybuilder who no longer exercises won't keep the same muscle mass and strength levels that he once had. A business that doesn't improve and stay up-to-date with its customer base and technology will soon fade into irrelevance. A doctor that doesn't continue to learn about new studies or breakthroughs in medicine will not be giving his patients the best treatment possible. A baseball player who doesn't practice or is unteachable won't be on a team very long. And a Christian who stays satisfied with his current level of spirituality will not be pleasing to God and will likely miss out on numerous benefits and blessings, possibly even eternal salvation.

The Hebrew writer was concerned with the lack of growth the Christians he was writing to were exhibiting. Instead of growing and getting stronger, they were regressing and getting weaker and were in danger of departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12). They should have, by the time of the writing of the epistle, been further along in their spiritual lives than they were. Instead of being able to teach others about the faith, they were still in need of the basic gospel message (the milk). They couldn't handle the harder, weightier, and more profound aspects of the gospel (Heb. 5:12-14).

The Bible is replete with admonitions to keep growing as Christians and producing fruit. Complacency and apathy are always frowned upon. You may say, "I want to be a better Christian." How would you measure that? What growth chart would you use?

One mistake we tend to make is using the wrong growth chart. We may have compared our growth physically to our siblings or our parents, eager to be taller than they, but that doesn't work

spiritually. We might compare ourselves with other Christians and with the world, but that's the wrong growth chart. Each person must answer individually to God. God will not, on Judgment Day, compare us to any other human. It's easy to find someone else who is less spiritual than we are, or point out someone else's faults and gloat to ourselves or others in a self-righteous manner that we're not guilty of such sins (Luke 18:10-14). But others aren't the standard. They're not who we are to compare ourselves to.

There is but one standard, one truth, and we all fail to match that standard. Jesus is that standard as he was sinless and lived his life completely for the Father and for you and me. We continually fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), but that doesn't mean we shouldn't keep growing and striving to reach the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

While we can't match the stature of Christ because of our sins, that's our goal. And our growth should be measurable. The way we are today should be much better than the way we were last year. If we're no different now than we were in the past, then we're not growing, and frankly, we're not even staying constant. Rather, we're regressing.

What does your growth chart look like? Is there change? Are you excited about it? Are you getting closer to the standard of Jesus Christ? Forget not the words of Peter: "...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).