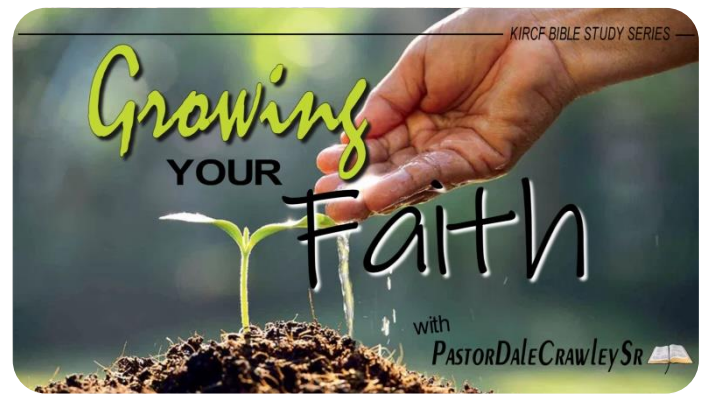


1- GROWING IN FATH

“We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.” -- 2 Thessalonians 1:3 (NIV)



God expects us to have faith and to grow in faith! And if we really believe God and live according to that faith, then God will be

pleased. And we're going to be blessed! But *lacking* faith and failing to live by faith *displeases* God. Why? Because God's honor is at stake!

So how do we dishonor God by a lack of faith? When we disbelieve God, we are in essence saying to God ... *"I don't really believe You'll do exactly what You say you will do. And I don't really believe that You are what You say You are."*

- And God's response to that is, *"I am a promise-keeping God!"* The truth of the matter is ... God has never failed once—He's always kept the promises He's made to human beings. And He always will!

Hebrews 11:6 tells us why faith is so important to God: ***"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*** Faith is one of the key qualities God is looking for in us, so it only makes sense that we learn how to grow in faith.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is an unshakable belief and trust in God and the promises of God! Faith also involves God's commands. We are expected to put such confidence in everything God tells us to do ... that we actually do it! The Apostle Paul rejoiced that the new Christians in Thessalonica ***were growing in faith.*** What does it mean to grow in faith?

Simply put, to grow in faith means to grow spiritually. **It is to mature in both knowledge and trust of God, and in godly living.** Ultimately, it is to become more like Christ. Just as a person grows physically from infant to mature adult, a Christian's life is designed to grow spiritually from baby to mature Christian. In 1 Peter 2:2-3 we read, ***"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."***

At the moment we receive Christ as our Savior, we are “born again” spiritually into God’s family. But just as a newborn baby requires nourishing milk for growth and good development ... so also a baby Christian requires spiritual food for growth.

“Milk” is used in the New Testament as a symbol of what is basic to the Christian life. That is, just as a baby grows, its diet also changes to also include solid foods. With this in mind, read how the writer of Hebrews admonished the Christians:

Hebrews 5:12-13 speaks against believers who had failed to grow in faith: ***"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child."*** To grow in faith involves growing in God's Word and its application.

Paul also used similar words to condemn some of the practices of Christians in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Paul also noted that he began with feeding them "milk" or with spiritual basics. Yet they were still not ready for solid food, as their maturity was lacking.

This lack of spiritual maturity was displayed in jealousy and internal conflicts. We can see, then, that growth in faith manifests not only in our relationship with God, but also in our relationships with others.

Growing in faith requires both time and effort. God ultimately causes the growth, yet He expects us to follow His ways and seek to grow, becoming mature followers of Jesus who can help make disciples of others.

The analogy between a human baby and a spiritual baby breaks down when we realize how each baby matures. A human baby is fed by his parents and growth is natural. But a baby Christian will only grow as much as ... he purposefully reads and obeys and applies the Word to his life. Growth is up to him!

- ***There are Christians who have been saved many years, but spiritually they are still babies. They cannot understand the deeper truths of the Word of God!***

It is also interesting that Scripture highlights ***a certain amount of time is involved to become spiritually mature.*** The apostles were with Jesus for over three years before they began to minister to others with the appropriate maturity. Paul also commanded that church leaders were not to be new converts, because *"he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil"* (1 Timothy 3:6).