

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will teach from the Bible what is a disciple of Jesus Christ. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: **A DISCIPLE GROWS CONTINUALLY**. Growing is normal for all living things and also for every Christian. If you don't grow spiritually, you will surely die spiritually. We will consider who has responsibility for growth. Then we will discover the growth stages of a Christian. Finally, we will draw some practical growth lessons.

(S) **POINT 1. THE HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR GROWING SPIRITUALLY**

In the parable of the sower in Mark 4:3-8 we read, "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered, because they had no root. Other seed fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on the good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

Let me explain the parable of the sower. This parable emphasises the human responsibility for spiritual growth. The four kinds of soil represent four different kinds of hearts. It does not represent four different kinds of people, but the same person who may have one of these four different kinds of attitudes in his heart towards the Word of God. At different times in our lives, you and me can have one of these different kinds of hearts and consequently respond differently to God's Word during those times.

One. The hardened soil of the path represents this person at the times when he has "an unresponsive heart" He does not want to hear God's Word or accept it when he hears it. *He does nothing with God's Word*. So the devil quickly takes God's Word away.

Two. The rocky soil represents this person at the times when he has "an impulsive heart". He enthusiastically accepts God's Word. During meetings, he is very excited and emotionally affected by the message and the personal appeal of the speaker. He does not think about the meaning of the words or about the consequences. Impulsively he jumps up to accept God's Word, to accept Jesus or to make some decisions. But when the people in the world begin to threaten him and persecute him because of God's Word, *he loses interest in God's Word* and stops to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Three. The soil, which has many thorns or roots from other wild plants, represents this person at the times when he has "a pre-occupied heart". He has given so much room in his heart to worry about his daily work and life, or to dream and plan how to make more money, or to enjoy all the pleasures of life, that *his heart has no room left for God's Word*. He is so pre-occupied with the things of this world, that he gives no time to meditate on God's Word or practise God's Word. God's Word is choked and so this person cannot grow to maturity or bear any fruit for God.

Four. The noble and good soil must therefore represent this person at the times when he has "a responsive, serious and well-prepared heart". A person with this condition and attitude of heart is the exact opposite of the first three conditions and attitudes of heart.

In contrast to the first soil, whenever he hears God's Word, *he listens carefully to it and tries to understand it*. He wants to understand God's Word, so that it may save him and change him.

In contrast to the second soil, whenever he hears God's Word, *he first considers the cost of believing and obeying these words*. He counts the cost, because he wants to persevere being a believer, even when he faces difficulties or persecution.

In contrast to the third soil, he prepares his heart. *He keeps his heart clean and free from worries, money and pleasures*. God's Word can only work in a responsive, serious and well-prepared heart, causing this person to grow to maturity and to bear lots of fruit for God.

(T) **POINT 2. THE DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY FOR GROWING SPIRITUALLY.**

In the parable of the seed growing in secret in Mark 4:26-29 we read, "Jesus also said. This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces corn - first the stalk, then the ear, then the full kernel in the ear. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

Let me explain the parable of the seed growing in secret. This parable emphasises the divine responsibility for spiritual growth. While the parable of the sower teaches us that we have a great responsibility, the parable of the seed growing in secret teaches us that God is doing a sovereign work in us!

When a farmer sows seed into the soil, he knows that his responsibility is to lead water to the seed, to loosen the soil, to protect the seed from birds and to pull up the weeds. But a farmer can do nothing to make the seed grow! He has no control over the processes of germination and growth. For days he sees nothing and then suddenly one morning he sees tiny sprouts coming out of the soil! And every day he sees how they grow taller and taller. Then he sees that the stalk is beginning to form an ear. Day by day the ear grows bigger. Finally, one day the farmer sees that the corn is ready to be harvested. He does not wait to harvest, because the rain or sun may destroy the harvest. So he immediately puts in the sickle and cuts the corn, threshes the corn and brings the precious seeds into his storehouse.

The farmer knows that the seed grows by itself. But how the seed grows, he does not know! He does not know how a tiny seed can use dead soil to change into a plant that bears exactly the same kind of seeds as the one that was planted!

(S) What is the relationship between these two parables?

(T) The parable of the sower **emphasises the human responsibility** with regard to spiritual growth. The seed cannot sprout, grow, and bear fruit unless it falls into good soil, that is, into a good and clean heart. The meaning is that the Word of God bears fruit only when the heart responds favourably. The message of the first parables is that at any given time in my life the condition and attitude of my heart will determine how I respond to God's Word. And the way I respond to God's Word will determine how much fruit I will bear. Therefore I need to be 100% committed to hear, read, study, memorise and meditate on God's Word.

The parable of the seed growing in secret **emphasises the sovereignty of God** with regard to spiritual growth. God's Word in the heart of any person will do a mighty work in that person's life. He will grow and he will bear much fruit! The message of the second parable is that God sovereignly establishes his kingdom and kingship (reign) in the heart of people. Therefore I need to be 100% dependent on God for what he is doing in my heart.

(S) **POINT 3. THE GROWTH ILLUSTRATION.**

When you walk outside, you see many things that are growing. Flowers and plants grow. Trees that were planted two years ago are already taller than you. The Bible speaks very much about growing. The "parable of the seed growing in secret" describes the growth of the kingdom of God in terms of the growth of a plant. What other lessons can we learn from this parable?

The first lesson we learn is that all living things grow and must grow to survive. A rock in the field does not grow. The machines we make and the clothes we wear cannot grow. They cannot grow, because they are dead things. But flowers, plants and trees grow. Animals and people grow. All these things grow, because they are living. Whenever living things stop to grow, they begin to die. Living things cannot stand still and remain the same. Living things must grow or they will die. Likewise, Christians must grow spiritually or they will die spiritually.

The second lesson we learn is that all living things go through different stages of growth. In the Bible illustration, the corn goes through five stages of growth: First the one seed becomes a sprout, then a stalk, then the ear is formed, then the full kernel in the ear, and finally the harvest of many seeds! Likewise, a Christian also goes through different stages of spiritual growth.

(T) **POINT 4. THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH STAGES OF A CHRISTIAN.**

In Hebrews 5:11 - 6:3 we read, "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for mature people, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, the eternal judgement. And God permitting, we will do so."

Which three different kinds of Christians are described? The three kinds of Christians are *infants* in verse 13, *the mature* in verse 14 and *teachers* in verse 12. Let us discover together what are the characteristics of each of these three Christians.

(S) **First. The characteristics of infant Christians.**

Verse 11 says that these Christians find it hard to understand certain Bible teachings, because they hear the words of God, but it does not enter their understanding. They make no progress in understanding the Christian truths in the Bible by themselves. Verse 12 says that these Christians need milk, not solid food. This milk refers to the beginning of the elementary teachings of the Bible. Just like a mother chews and digests solid food to produce milk for her baby, in the same way many pastors and teachers today continue to give milk to the Christians in their church. These Christians are not ready to read and study the Bible by themselves. They still need teachers to explain to them the easy teachings of the Bible. An example of these easy teachings is in chapter 6 verse 1 and 2: These Christians again and again repent from their old sins and make a new commitment to trust in God. And they have to be taught about Christian baptism and the Second Coming of Christ. Verse 13 says that these Christians are not skilled in the teachings of righteousness. This means that they do not know the teachings of the Bible. They are also not able to discern what is right and what is wrong in God's eyes and so they constantly ask their pastor or teacher or other Christians what is right and what is wrong for Christians to believe and to do.

(T) **Second. The characteristics of mature Christians.**

Verse 14 says that mature Christians will eat solid food. The writer is talking about spiritual food. While the mother gives milk to an infant, the mature person himself must take solid food. While milk is easy to swallow and digest, solid food takes a lot of chewing before it can be swallowed and digested. Therefore, a mature Christian takes responsibility for his own spiritual growth and behaviour. A mature Christian reads and studies the Bible by himself. He also applies the truths of the Bible to his own life. The mature Christian exercises his spiritual life by putting the truths of the Bible into practice. The truths of the Bible must become his habit and his character. Verse 14 also says that the mature Christian is able to discern what is good from what is evil in God's eyes. The mature Christian uses the Bible to find out what is right and what is wrong. He builds up his own convictions and also builds up his own value system that is based on the Bible. He uses the Bible to find out what a Christian must believe and do in every important area of life. The mature Christian looks for answers to his questions in the Bible.

(S) Third. The characteristics of Christian workers.

In this Bible passage we can discover only one characteristic of a Christian worker. Verse 12 says that a Christian worker is a *teacher* for others. He helps infant Christians to grow to mature Christians. Therefore, if anybody desires to become a Christian worker or teacher, he should first grow to Christian maturity. In 1 Corinthians 3:5-11 the apostle Paul says, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should *be careful how he builds*. For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

(T) In 1 Corinthians 3:6 two kinds of Christian workers are described: one worker *plants* and another worker *waters*. Paul planted. His task was to sow the seed of the gospel and to plant churches. He travelled and preached the gospel. The people, who believed, formed a house-church. In this way Paul also planted the church at Corinth. Afterwards, Apollos came to Corinth and he cared for the new believers. Acts 18 tells us that Apollos was a learned man and had a thorough knowledge of the Bible. He probably taught the Corinthian Christians and helped them to become mature Christians. This means that in every church, some Christian workers should be more involved in evangelism and in starting new house-churches, while other Christian workers should be more involved in shepherding, teaching and training these new believers to become mature Christians.

(S) In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 Paul says the same thing in other words. Paul preached the gospel about Jesus Christ to the Corinthians and the Corinthians accepted Jesus Christ into their hearts and lives. In this way Paul became the expert builder who laid the foundation of the church at Corinth. The true foundation of every church can only be Jesus Christ. Afterwards, other Christian workers like Apollos came and build further on that foundation. Therefore, the two important kinds of Christian workers in God's Kingdom are those who *win the lost* and those who *build up the saved*.

(T) In 1 Corinthians 3:5 the Bible says that the Lord Jesus Christ assigns to each Christian worker in the church his special task. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who assigned to Paul the task of planting and to Apollos the task of watering. They did not choose their tasks themselves, neither did another leader like a pastor or elder tell them what task they had to do in the church or in God's kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is the Head of the Church and he still assigns to every Christian his special task in the church or in the kingdom.

(S) POINT 5. PRACTICAL GROWTH LESSONS

First. Every Christian must grow.

The apostle Paul and the apostle John and the writer to the Hebrews all state very clearly that every Christian must grow. Being a Christian is not only a status, but also a process! Being a Christian is like making a long pilgrim's journey and never settling down until we come into the presence of Jesus Christ.

(T) Second. Every Christian should grow to the next growth-stage.

The Bible speaks of three growth stages: the child-stage, the mature-stage and the worker-stage.

The child-stage. If you are still a new believer in Christ, then you need the following. You need the *beginning teachings* of the Bible. You need a group leader to help you to grow. Your goal should be to grow in maturity. Your goal is to become a real disciple of Jesus Christ.

The mature-stage. If you are a mature follower of Christ, then you need the following. You need to take responsibility for your own spiritual growth and behaviour. You need to study and apply the Bible by yourself and together with other Christians. Your goal should be to grow in fruitfulness. Your goal is to become a worker of Jesus Christ.

The worker-stage. If you are a Christian worker, then you need the following. You need to continue to grow in knowledge, skills and disciplines of a Christian disciple. You need to serve God by winning the lost and/or building up the saved. Your goal should be to glorify God, extend God's Kingdom and influence people for God.

(S) POINT 6. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Evaluate yourself. Which of the above mentioned characteristics describe you the most? Are you still an infant spiritually? Then grow to spiritual maturity! If you are already mature, then become a worker in God's church or kingdom!

Second. See the workbooks "Go and make disciples" and Internet on www.etc.

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to "Discipleship training on the air".