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Seven Signs of Life

4. Growth: The Inevitable Result of Healthy Life

Sermon Series Focus

- In biology we learn that there are *seven* processes of life that identify all living organisms. We could also view these as “signposts” to a healthy living organism.
- We're using these seven signs as a diagnostic tool for assessing your own spiritual health as a disciple, as well as the overall health of our church.
- Is this an area in my life that needs the Spirit to bring fresh vitality? Is this an area in our church where we need to give attention? What is God saying to me about these seven signs? Where can I (we) use his healing touch?

Seven Signs of Life

1. Movement: Prove You're Not Dead
2. Respiration: Breathing God's Breath
3. Sensitivity: Our Spiritual Awareness
4. **Growth: The Inevitable Result of Healthy Life**
5. Reproduction: Multiplying Life, Creating the Future
6. Excretion: Getting Rid of the Junk
7. Nutrition: A Diet That Makes a Difference

Healthy Conditions for Spiritual Growth

- Good Soil—healthy relationships & environment
- Safe Temperatures—high invitation & challenge
- Proper Sunlight—reception of divine favor & love
- Clean Water—Biblical instruction & devotion
- Oxygen—prayer & sensitivity to Spirit



Jesus, Gospel of John 15:1-4 NIV

¹ I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

* “true vine” – Psalm 80:8-18

John 15:5-8 NIV

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

“The urgent question, then, is this. How do we “remain” in him? What does it look like in practice? We must remain in the community that knows and loves him and celebrates him as its Lord. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. We can’t “go it alone.” But we must always remain as people of prayer and worship in our own intimate, private lives. We must make sure to be in touch, in tune, with Jesus, knowing him and being known by him.

And, though it always hurts, we must be ready for the Father’s pruning knife. God is glorified, and so will we be, by bearing good quality fruit, and lots of it. For that to happen, there will be extra growth that needs cutting away.”

N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone* (pg.71)

Obstacles to Spiritual Growth

Obstacles to church growth:

1. Fear—the loss of familiarity, comfort, safety & control
2. Nostalgia—living in the past, holding tight to what was
3. Cynicism—disdain for culture, distrust of new people and “new” ideas (elitism and exclusivism disguised as righteousness)

Obstacles to personal growth:

1. Loving your way more than Christ's (Lk 9:23-26)
2. Lack of faith to persevere through difficulties
3. Content at worshipping at the altar of ideas

Hebrews 6:1-3 NIV

¹ “Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so.”

What “Maturity” Looks Like in the NT

- It is *not* simply the acquisition of knowledge or stimulation of the cerebral cortex (brain)
- It is moving from knowledge about Christ to the implementation of his teachings, work & mission

Paul, Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Hebrews 6:1-3 MSG

“So come on, let’s leave the preschool fingerpainting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ. The basic foundational truths are in place: turning your back on “salvation by self-help” and turning in trust toward God; baptismal instructions; laying on of hands; resurrection of the dead; eternal judgment. God helping us, we’ll stay true to all that. But there’s so much more. Let’s get on with it!”



“We don't believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true.”

Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*

“We do not enjoy being disciplined. It is painful at the time, but later, after we have learned from it, we have peace, because we start living in the right way.”

Hebrews 12:11 NCV

Paul, Colossians 2:6-7 NLT

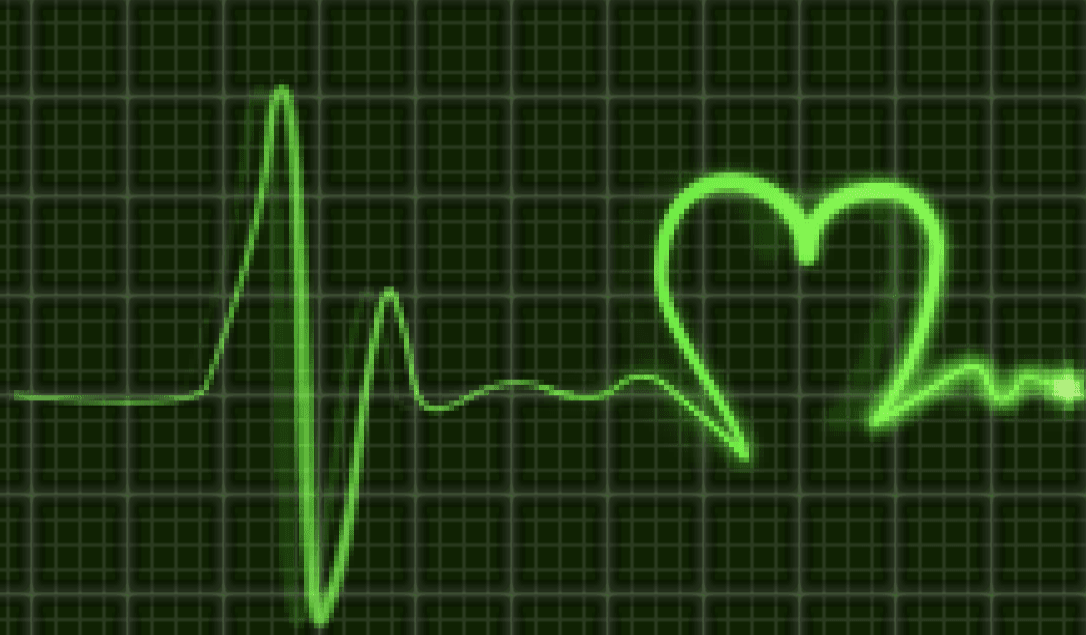
⁶ And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. ⁷ Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

An Invitation to Grow Down Into Christ

- What personal concerns do you need to intentionally take to the Father and ask the Spirit to conform you to Christ? Are you willing to listen and obey what he says?
- Where in the corporate mind and ministry of our church do we need to address unhealthy thinking and behaviors that are keeping us from growing Up, In, and Out? Are we willing to listen and obey what he says?
- The path of discipleship is not easy, but it is fulfilling and rewarding when we willingly submit to the way of Christ.

“Only the man who follows the command of Jesus single-mindedly, and unresistingly lets his yoke rest upon him, finds his burden easy, and under its gentle pressure receives the power to persevere in the right way. The command of Jesus is hard, unutterably hard, for those who try to resist it. But for those who willingly submit, the yoke is easy, and the burden is light.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*



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Sermon audio & slides in PDF can be downloaded at:
www.christiansburgmennonite.org