



Spiritual growth is an invitation and opportunity for those that follow Jesus.

When we think about how spiritual growth happens, the first thing that comes to our minds are the typical habits of going to church, prayer, reading the Bible, having a quiet time, journaling, etc.

While these are important, one practice we don't talk about much is allowing the circumstances of daily life to be the path to spiritual growth.

Let me explain.

I worry and get anxious A LOT. When it comes to just about everything. My business, family, friends, the past, the future...you name it.

I'm learning to pay attention when my mind and heart get anxious. I'm beginning to notice how I feel in that moment. I usually get tension in my jaw, and struggle with racing thoughts that are seemingly out of control.

I'm learning to notice what's going on in the moment. Pause. Take a breath. And surrender my anxiety or worry to God in that moment. I let go and focus on the real calm presence of God right then and there.

The more I do this when life triggers my anxiety and worry....the more peace and calm I experience.

It's a habit. It's a process. Over time, I've grown significantly in this area.

I believe this is a huge part of spiritual growth. Allowing life's circumstances to be your path.

Use this youth group lesson, based on Matthew 13:1-9, to help students grow in their spiritual lives.

The lesson starts off with one of Jesus's parables, and first stresses this important truth:

If you genuinely take God's message to heart, desire to grow in your relationship with Him, and back up that desire with action...then you GROW!

Then, the lesson talks about how to allow life's circumstances to be a path to spiritual growth.

- Nick Diliberto, *Ministry to Youth*

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Written by Eric Mendoza

Bible: Matthew 13:1-9

Bottom line: Spiritual growth is both an invitation and an opportunity.

TEACH

Spiritual growth is something that every follower of Jesus can be a part of. It is both an invitation and an opportunity.

Let's take a look at a parable in the New Testament.

A parable is a story that Jesus would tell so that others could understand what Jesus was trying to say.

He referenced concepts that the people of the time would understand.

In this case, he talks about sowing seeds – something farmers could relate to.

Basically, Jesus is talking about what is necessary for something to grow.

Read Matthew 13:1-9.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.

Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.

Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "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 thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

Ask: What do you think Jesus was trying to say?

Allow a few responses from students.

I want you to notice there was a large crowd of people there.

So many people were there that He had to get in a boat so that everyone could see Him.

Then, He told a parable.

Jesus knows the audience He is speaking to, and there were a lot of people present who had to grow their own food to live.

They had to farm, and he was teaching them in a way that they could understand.

This parable was challenging to understand, and so Jesus had to explain what it meant to them.

Let's read his explanation of this parable.

Matthew 13:18-23.

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.

This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Jesus uses the example of growth in comparing it to our relationship with God.

In verse 19, Jesus says if the seed is thrown on the path or if you listen to the message and the evil one, there is no lasting spiritual growth that takes place because the evil one snatches it away.

In verse 20, Jesus says the next seed is thrown onto the rocky ground.

In this instance, Jesus says it's like a person who hears the Word of God and is excited, but since they didn't root themselves in the word of God, they fall away.

The plant only lasted a short time and withered away in the rocks with no soil to take root.

This would be like a person who hears God's Word and says that's great, but then eventually, they turn away from it.

There is no lasting spiritual growth in that.

In verse 22, it talks about seeds that were thrown among the thorns.

The plant would grow, but eventually, the thorns would steal nutrients away from the plant that is supposed to produce fruit, and the plant would die.

In this instance, the person let the difficulty of life and distractions around them to overtake any spiritual growth that would have taken place.

They might have grown a little, but eventually, they stop, and no new growth takes place.

In verse 23, it finally talks about the person that is spiritually growing.

If you genuinely take God's message to heart, desire to grow in your relationship with Him, and back up that desire with action... then you GROW!

Let's go back to grapes.

I know I keep coming back to the grapes; it might be because I'm hungry.

If you want to take a grape seed to make more grapes, you need to plant it in the proper place.

You have to water the soil and remove anything that might try to steal its nutrients.

You have to give it the opportunity to grow.

When it grows, it will produce more grapes.

The same thing is true in your life.

One way spiritual growth happens is by creating a healthy environment around you. Like planting seeds in good soil.

Spending time with other Christians can help you grow spiritually and deepen your relationship with God.

Sometimes you will need to remove toxic people from your life so that they don't choke out your faith.

When you pray and spend time in God's Word, you will grow closer to Him.

Those are all some pretty basic things you've probably heard before.

Another way maybe less talked about is to use the circumstances of everyday life to help you grow spiritually.

Let me explain.

(Note: Feel free to use an example of your own here.)

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I'm learning to notice what's going on in the moment. Pause. Take a breath. And surrender my anxiety or worry to God in that moment. I let go and focus on the calm real presence of God right then and there.

The more I do this when life triggers my anxiety and worry....the more peace and calm I experience.

It's a habit. It's a process.

Over time, I've grown significantly in this area.

I believe this is a huge part of spiritual growth. Allowing life's circumstances to be your path.

Maybe you don't struggle with worry or anxiety. It could be something else for you.

Whatever it is...

- Pay attention when life circumstances come up that trigger something disturbing to you.
- Notice how you feel.
- Surrender the situation to God. Let go.

This is just another way you're creating good soil in your heart that will lead to spiritual growth.

I encourage you to give it a try.

WRAP UP

Spring is here, and if you truly want something to grow you will put it in the right soil, you will water it, you will remove any weeds that might steal its nutrients, and you will do your best to make sure it grows the way it was intended to.

The same is necessary for spiritual growth.

Plant yourself in God's Word, water yourself in prayer, remove any bad habits, and use everyday life as a path to growth.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does spiritual growth mean to you?
2. How have you experienced spiritual growth in the past?
3. What's a difficult situation you're facing right now?
4. Could that situation be an opportunity for growth? Why or why not?
5. In your own words, what does it mean to surrender to God?