

6 Dad's Patient Explanation Makes Us Grow

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, it seems. God is very upfront. He created us in His image (Gen. 1:26 – 27). That may seem shocking, considering where you are now, but think about it. You are a spiritual being, intellectual (think, reason, solve), relational (can give/receive love), and are morally consciousness (discern right from wrong). What does a real image of God look like? It's Jesus. "He is the exact image of the unseen God—the visible representation of the invisible" (Col 1:15 Amplified Bible). Whew! Long way to go? Of course we will never be God. The goal for us is not comfort or wealth but character development. And in order to make some progress God comes in a different form, His Holy Spirit. "As the Spirit works within us, we become more and more like Him and reflect His glory even more." 2 Cor. 3:18. "For this is the secret; Christ lives in you." Col. 1:27

This is a very subtle endeavor. God waits for you to act and somehow puts encouragement inside you. The Bible's metaphors on growth spiritually are often about things growing or a child growing. Three things are asked. #1 Let go of your old ways. #2 Change the way you think. #3 Develop new Godly habits. And then expect a lot of stumbles. God uses at least three positive ways to influence you. His Word, supportive people, and circumstances that catch your attention. Does it seem strange that growth is not entirely individual? You don't develop in isolation. It takes a church. Why? Because you need to learn the Love of Christ. And it happens slowly, at least for most of us.

Luther too. One might think that a brilliant person with such a newly upbeat understanding would change the world rapidly. But he was originally terrified of God as a "harsh judge sitting on a rainbow". He was enormously encouraged but thought that justification by faith only meant agreeing with God that we are loathsome creatures. Being sorry for sin is penance, like what Judas had. But your life must fall into God's grip. The more Luther thought about God's message in Romans and John, the more he realized it divides into two pieces, the Law we can't obey and Gospel that saves us. Law shows us our sin. Gospel shows our Savior and drives us towards trusting God—into His grip! And the gospel's grip is that God has grafted us to Himself with love. (John 15:1-17). When you realize that no matter what, God loves you so much He won't give you up, and will work in you to produce fruit—there is the life that will never fail (Rom. 8:28-38). Law and the love of the Gospel was the realization of the mature Luther that changed the world in Reformation. It made him dauntless and confident, five years after his revelation with Rom 1:17, Ps. 31. Jesus told a parable about this. The Kingdom of God is a priceless pearl worth selling everything to possess (Matt. 13). Marty had a story of his own.

Imagine you are an abused slave who is sold into prostitution. Then one day the crown prince of the kingdom comes into town, points at you and says, "There is my queen." Everybody laughs. Did the prince go nuts? It will never work, never last! But the prince takes you in, cleans you up. Still, you cuss a lot and act badly. (Law of the court wouldn't allow you.) But He sits down with you and says, "Everything that is mine is now yours. All your baggage, in turn, is now mine. I would

do this again a thousand times for just one person, You.” What will the new princess do? She will do her best to rise to the occasion. She will give to others as she has received. She will love the prince and tell everyone she can about his grace. Question: Could a prince ever get such a loving bride as this from the usual politically-arranged marriage?

To grow in Christ you gotta wanna. It takes discipline to be a disciple. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, Paul tells the Philippians (Phil.2:12). Change your habits, think in the ways God instructs in His Word (attitude and all). When you are immature, selfish, envious, volcanic in anger—or whatever you struggle with, stop, put on Christ and let His love go deep. Just like the princess in the story you will soon say like Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh is by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.