

FTBC

GROWTH TRACKS


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Welcome to Growth Tracks which is FBC's program designed to set the disciple on the firm foundation spiritual maturity.


In 2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV) Paul writes "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".

The key to growth in our spiritual lives is encountering the glory of God through the person of His Son who is His perfect image. The more our hearts are filled with the knowledge of Him the more our characters are moulded, the more our hearts are filled with His love and more our lives will be directed towards the purpose for which we were created....to glorify Him. Each chapter is designed to provide a progressive track to show the face of Christ through selected but key passages in the Bible laying down the bed rock foundations of faith that will form the basis for a life -long learning and growing in to the likeness of Christ. Prayerfully follow these chapters and His Spirit will propel you into a trajectory of robust growth and spiritual transformation. Learn how to read the bible by tackling whole passages of Scripture rather than piece meal verses. See how principles from the passages will be translated to everyday life. For those disciples going into the Gamma program these presentations will help bridge the gap between the Alpha Beta programs and the more in- depth Gamma discipleship program.

For those who prefer to listen and see the contents of this book you can go to our website at [www.fbc.com .my](http://www.fbc.com.my) and each chapter will be presented in a series of slides at the resources section of our site under the title "Growth Tracks"



MODULE 10



WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The best place to start off, looking at the work of the Holy Spirit is in the Book of John chapter 3. In this part of the gospel, John describes a scene where by a prominent theologian, Nicodemus, who is also incidentally the member of the Sanhedrin, which is the highest ruling body of the Jews at that time. He comes in the middle of night because he is afraid of being seen by his other colleagues, comes to Jesus to inquire about eternal life. Jesus tells him that he has to be born again. Nicodemus answers in chapter 3:4,

John 3:4 (ESV) Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

He clearly misunderstands Jesus, he thinks Jesus is telling him to be born again which is a physical rebirth, but Jesus doesn't mean that. He says in verses 5-6, Jesus

John 3:5-6 (ESV) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

So when Jesus talks to Nicodemus about eternal life, he says it is brought about by the spirit of God. It is not done physically. There are no forms to fill up, no application forms to complete. There is no signature to put your hand on to. It is something which is completely spiritual, but we cannot see it.

Jesus goes on to describe further about the spiritual new birth.

John 3:7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Being born again is like being born the first time. You cannot really control when or how you are born. Here we actually have someone like Nicodemus, he is the finest human specimen in the Book of John, he is a theologian, member of the Pharisees, he is rich, he is gifted, he has got all the knowledge and all experience and all the understanding of gifts and social standing and all the power in society. You would have thought, a person like that would be in the best position to find a good standing with God, an eternal life. Of all the people in Israel, the person who have deserved most to have eternal life would be Nicodemus, but Jesus says it doesn't depend on your knowledge, your experience, your work, your understanding of the gifts and your social standing or your power. It is something beyond your physical control.

Jesus insistence for spiritual rebirth can best be explained by the example of different orders of life which we find in this world of ours.

Plant Life: The lowest order of life is the plant life. Plants experience life and reality in a limited fashion. They absorb sun, photosynthesize the nutrients and they have limited senses. They cannot hear music or fear much of their environment. In other words, they have a limited experience of reality which is much more than just sunlight and water.

Animal Life: As we move up in the order of life, we come to the animal life. Animal life is a life like plant, but much more than the plant. Animals experience a greater appreciation of reality compared to the plant. If you play music, the animal can respond to music whether it is loud or soft, scary or soothing. Animal can respond to danger posed by predators, whereas plant will not be able to respond to danger or even perceive danger.

Human Life: Finally, we come to the third order of life which is human life and humans like us can experience the most of reality. If you play music, the humans can differentiate between jazz or classical music. The human can look at the sunset and whilst the animal can feel warm to the sun the human can appreciate its beauty, concepts of justice and sacrifice and loyalty are experienced by humans but not by animals who cannot experience or appreciate that depth of reality. Even concepts of past, present and future cannot be appreciated by animals, they only live in the present but they cannot think about the future. Humans, because they are of higher order of life can experience this.

So if a human is struck by a stroke and lies in a coma we say he/she is alive but has regressed to a lower order of life because he/she no longer experience the higher order of life a normal human is capable of. When a human acts in a manner entirely based on instinct and impulse like some sociopaths or criminals, we say they are behaving like animals because they have no regard for human qualities or beauty or pity or love.

Spiritual Life: Finally, there is the final order of life which is the spiritual life. It is when we are spiritually alive that we are truly able to experience this aspect of reality. As mere humans, we have 5 senses hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste. As spiritual beings we are able to respond to God, we can respond to His love, be aware of his providence and care in our lives. We can respond to His guidance and speaking into our lives.

Paul best describes the human condition of being spiritually dead in Ephesians,

Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV) And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Paul describes spiritual death; we are no longer responsive to God. We are actually, as far as God is concerned, we are dead to him and he to us and we are actually not following what he wants for us in our lives. We are following Satan, the prince of the power of the air at work in us as human beings. When we live by instinct, following the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of body and mind, we live as we please because we are no longer spiritually tuned and aware of God or responsive to God. This is a condition called spiritual death, which is the reason why we need to be spiritually reborn.

Spiritual rebirth begins in the heart of an unbeliever person.

John 16:8-14 (ESV) And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged

What Jesus is saying is that the work of the Holy Spirit is one of conviction. Conviction means an uncovering within our hearts, a realization of something to which we must respond to. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin that it is an offense against God. It is God's honor which is impugned. He convicts us of righteousness, our right standing before God and all the things that we do in order to live up to the God's standard actually falls far below that which is required and that we are woefully naked and unrighteous before God. It convicts us also of judgment that the world is judged, that the ruler of the world is judged, Satan is judged and the world will end with its defeat.

THE CONCEPT OF SIN:

Let's deal with the concept of sin. The first work of conviction in a person's heart is of his sin. Sin is missing the mark, essentially living a life independent of God. We were created by God for God and when we decide to live to please ourselves we break with our design. We were made in the image of God to reflect God to glorify him and when we sin when we move away from that goal. The Spirit convicts us that we are moved away from our original design. We do not have to be a mass murderer or a thief of a criminal. The Spirit convicts us that if we live a life apart from God we have sinned. Only the Spirit can drive home this awareness of sin with its consequent regret and emotional pain into a person's heart and unless this happens a person cannot be spiritually reborn. The awareness of the gravity and the pain of sin must come first genuinely into the heart and this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at the verse again

John 16:8-14 (ESV) And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;

Now this is the most crucial part about sin, not only missing the mark but refusing to believe in the son of God, Jesus Christ, who came into the world as the Savior of the world. When God so sends us his Son, our responsibility is to receive Him, to believe in Him. The ultimate sin that we are guilty of is actually the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit convicts us of this sin in our lives.

There is a second work of the Holy Spirit, it convicts us not only of our sin but it convicts us regarding our righteousness or our "apparent righteousness". To understand the concept of righteousness, we need to go back to the Garden of Eden. In the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible where man and woman were totally innocent, totally perfect in God's eyes, walking with Him in fellowship and then they declared independence. They sinned against God. There were consequences of sin because where they could once stand in the full glare of the unshielded glory of God and converse and walk and live with Him every single day, now they could not, they have to hide and shrink away as sin cannot be in the presence of a Holy God.

Genesis 3:7 (ESV) Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

They knew they were not perfect anymore. They knew they were unrighteous and therefore they had shame. They couldn't even look at each other in the eyes. So therefore they put fig leaves together, to cover their private parts. In a sense this is the first case of your proverbial "do it on your own" righteousness. The sowing of fig leaves to cover themselves, to give the selves some semblance of righteousness.

Ever since that day, all of mankind have been involved in sewing our own "fig leaves" for ourselves, to make us acceptable to God, acceptable to each other, to build up our self-esteem. We do that by religious righteousness, we do that by secular righteousness, we do that by psychological righteousness.

Religious Righteousness: During the time of Jesus, he had encountered lots of religious righteousness from the Pharisees at the time. Their righteousness was based on apparent compliance to the letter of the law, which they followed very closely in order to gain some semblance of righteousness. Jesus demonstrated very clearly in the book of John where that kind of righteousness was worthless because their focus was on the legalistic letter of the

law completely missing the spirit or main focus of the law

- When Jesus healed a lame man in John 5, instead of thanking him the religious leaders went against Jesus because they were upset that Jesus apparently broke the Sabbath law of prohibition against any kind of work. The intent of the Sabbath law was for the well-being of mankind in terms of rest from the work week to enjoy God hence the prohibition against work. Jesus healing of the lame man was done in accordance to that principle for the well-being of man as there is no better well-being than complete healing of a man lame and suffering from birth. In their zeal to construct a superficial righteousness based on the outward conformity to the law which they construed only in terms of not working on the Sabbath the Pharisees completely misread the intent of law and broke the spirit of the law themselves with their cruel disregard for the well-being of the lame man. Such was the righteousness of man, superficial on the outside and inside devoid of any meaning.
- When Jesus healed the blind man in John 9, instead of glorifying God of because what Jesus has done, they instead try to downplay the miracle and insisted that the man was never actually blind despite all evidence to the contrary. Although they proclaimed to love God and follow His law, they plotted to murder Jesus. Some of them who are actually in John 12 had come to believe in Jesus dared not come out in open because of their fear of excommunication.

Jesus showed time and time religious righteousness was not true righteousness, it was leaky and as transparent as the fig leaves used to cover up Adam and Eve's genitals.

The book of Isaiah confirms what God thinks about our righteous deeds,

Isaiah 64:5-6 (ESV) You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

The actual original Hebrew actually says that our righteous deeds are like menstrual cloth, it is dirty, it is bloody, it is useless, it is not really righteous, it is not clean, it is dirty.

Here is another recent picture of religious righteousness. There was a school in India which was torched by religious mob, resulting in tragic death of 30 people. They burned the whole school down but they left the goddess of learning sitting outside completely untouched. They were religious to the letter because they were respectful enough to spare the goddess but at the same time thought nothing of killing dozens of innocent lives.

There was also a recent report on sexual abuse in institutions in Australia. As a result, there were 15,000 people who were actually interviewed by the commission and 2500 reports made to the police of sexual abuse. The report also detailed abuse in churches of other denominations besides Catholics, but they concluded that the greatest number of alleged abuse perpetrators were found in Catholic institutions. The commission concluded that 7% of priest who worked in Australia between 1950 and 2009 had been accused of child sexual abuse. Outwardly these priests wore the robes of holiness but inwardly they were religious predators. This is religious righteousness.

Secular Righteousness: Now aside from religious righteousness, we have secular moral righteousness. We all have worldly concepts of righteousness, of what makes us right in the eyes of God. How many of us have heard; I don't steal, I don't rob, I pay my taxes or most of it at least ...so I am a good guy. We have a particular sense of personal righteousness which we hold to and is the basis of our self-esteem. We hear of the neighbor who left his

wife and kids and ran off with his secretary and in our minds ...”there is a bad man, how cruel and unthinking and how immoral”. That’s not us, we are righteous.

Psychological Righteousness: Then there is today’s psychologist who give you psychological righteousness. When you have done something wrong, they advise you to deny everything, the pain will go away, shift the blame to someone else preferably your spouse, accept yourself as you are or take credit for being at least being honest at least and free.

These are the ways in which we build our fig leaves, so that we could respect ourselves and feel that we can stand in front of God. The Holy Spirit will come in and convict us that these religious, psychological and moral righteousness are actually quite useless and until the spirit breaks these barriers down, you will not be aware of your own sin.

JUDGMENT:

The last area where the Holy Spirit will convict us with regard to is actually in verse 11

11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged

The Holy Spirit therefore comes in and shows us that we have sinned and that there is nothing that we could do in our own moral or religious righteousness to save ourselves . The final outcome will be judgment and hell because the ruler of this world Satan has already been judged and defeated by Christ on the cross.

Only when there is true spiritual conviction of sin, the worthlessness of our own meagre resources in constructing our own “righteousness” and we find that we are truly facing eternal judgment, that we would finally come to the cross. Only the conviction of the Spirit will drive us to cross and convince us that our only hope is to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ who paid for our sin in order to have spiritual rebirth.

The Spirit then makes us the adopted sons of God.

Romans 8:14-17 (ESV) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

We are adopted, we are part of God’s family, we are part of God’s family, we are called the adopted sons. We have that kind of intimacy that allows us to call God, “Abba” which is the Hebrew equivalent of our own contemporary term of endearment like “Papa”

Let’s read on the same chapter,

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The work of the Holy Spirit is in adoption. It transforms us into God’s adopted children and the Spirit speaks to our spirits within us. It gives us the kind of quite assurance that we are children of God and we have a future as heirs of the Almighty king of the universe, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Finally, the Holy Spirit gives us an eternal lifetime guarantee. Paul says in Ephesians 1:13-14

13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised

Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Notice the terms used here, the Spirit is that which seals us. In ancient times the wax seal with imprint from the signet ring is the guarantee that the contents of the letter have been protected from tampering. The seal is the guarantee.

Hence on earth Holy Spirit is sent into our hearts that gives us the sense that we are His sons, we are heirs, also gives us assurance in our hearts that our salvation is guaranteed because we have received the Holy Spirit.

REVISION:

1. The Spirit gives spiritual rebirth. We can't be born again with our own physical efforts or knowledge or experience, it only comes directly from God.
2. God does this by the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin and righteousness, or how useless our righteousness is and how impending judgment will come upon us and when we are convicted of that, we then turn to our Lord Jesus Christ and accept him as Lord and Savior.
3. Once this happens, the spirit makes us adopted sons of God and assures us in our hearts of our actual status as heirs.
4. Finally, the Spirit is our guarantee of salvation.

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean when John writes “ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”
2. Can you share with the rest how you first became a Christian? Was there ever a sense of conviction of sin?
3. If a person becomes a Christian without a clear cut conviction of sin what do you think there is a danger of?
4. Look at John 16:11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. Why is it important for the Spirit to convict us that the ruler of this world is already judged?