

Let's Grow in our relationship with God.

By Rev. Edgar F. Solís

Growth is an essential reality for all living beings. Everything that lives on this planet grows. Today's Bible passage from the letter of Peter reminds us that it is essential to grow in our salvation. In this regard, we need to remember that our salvation is not just a state or a ticket to heaven. According to John Wesley's theology, salvation must be understood as a relationship with God than a condition of the soul.

According to the New Interpreters Study Bible, the letter of Peter is *one of the most beautiful and compelling books in The New Testament. It contains a profound Christology, the church's vision, and ardent instruction of Christian life in the world richly expressing the meaning of The Gospel. The nature and purpose of the letter is: to exhort its audience in their Christian living.*

The author sketches a vision of The Christian life rooted in God's saving action through the death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus. Peter assures the first readers of their salvation and reminds them of the hope this generates for the community. The community is to Live a life of integrity, risking suffering and alienation if necessary, but also willing to give a transparent witness of hope and good works to the world around it. Another crucial element of Peter's audience's context is that the Christian communities were suffering the first manifestations of persecution from the Roman empire.

Hence, how is it that Peter is saying to this group of believers, "you may grow into salvation"?

Well, here is where I can find crucial parallelism between our physical and spiritual growth.

When raising children, many factors influence their growth and development.

According to experts, the major factors affecting the growth and development of people are:

Genetics, environment, exercise, and nutrition. This morning I'll share a parallel between some aspects that affect our physical and spiritual growth. There are many, but this morning I'll share these three.

Environment:

The environment plays a crucial role in the development of a person, and it represents the overall physical and psychological stimulation they receive. The physical surroundings and the geographical conditions of the place the person lives in are also a factor. Human, social interaction and relationships with family and peers come under the environmental factors that influence early childhood development in a major way. All of this contributes positively to people's healthy development.

Exercise:

As a person that had developed a discipline of exercise, I have also learned that muscle size increases when a person continually challenges the muscles to deal with higher resistance levels or weight. This process is known as muscle hypertrophy.

Muscle hypertrophy occurs when the fibers of the muscles sustain damage or injury. The body repairs damaged fibers by fusing them, which increases the mass and size of the muscles, making the person to grow, and get healthy and strong.

Nutrition:

Nutrition is probably the most important factor in healthy growth and development. A balanced diet, rich in vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbohydrates, and fats, provides everything that a person's body needs to grow properly. Peter reminds us to, "like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk so that by it you may grow into salvation." Malnutrition can cause deficiency and diseases affecting growth and development in a major way. On the other hand, overeating

can also lead to obesity and many other health problems in the long run, such as diabetes and heart-related problems.

The parallel of these three factors can help us to ensure how we are in our relationship with God.

Here, there are some rhetorical questions that each one of us must honestly answer:

- What is the most important relationship that I am taking care of in my life?
- How is it with your soul this morning? How is your relationship with God? Is it getting better? Is it steady? Is it stagnant?
- If your relationship with God is not growing, what do you need to do?

Three pastoral advices:

1. You have some control over the environment in which you are living; let's be aware of what are the environments in which you are surrounded, not only your physical environment but your spiritual and emotional atmosphere. If it is clean and pure, you will be fine, but if your environment is toxic, imagine the consequences.
2. Do you want to be healthy and strong? How do you make your "muscles" strong? Avoiding exercise? Comfort and laziness won't produce strength in your spiritual growth. Let's practice all the means of grace that we have at hand: Prayer, Bible Study, Fasting, and Holy Communion. Etc.
3. What are you eating? If I want to grow in my relationship with God -- I believe we all have heard "we are what we eat" -- It is really important to nurture our spirits and souls with the word of God, worship, and spiritual means that will strengthen our inner life.

Dear Church, this is the time of growing in our relationship with God!

Let's grow into salvation! Amen!

