

NURTURING GROWTH

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Nurture is a word that appears in the Bible in connection with two relational roles. The first is parenting, for Christian parents are responsible for nurturing their children's spirituality, attitude, intellect, and health. The second is pasturing, for Christian leaders are responsible for nurturing believers to know closely, honor highly, and serve sacrificially the Lord Jesus with their lives.

This month's series of messages is about "Preparing the Fields," or turning our family's and friends' disinterest into spiritual curiosity. Today's topic highlights the role of *nurturing* a genuine faith in those who have begun to show a curious interest in spiritual things.

To clarify, nurture is not evangelism, it is pre-evangelism and it is post-evangelism. But without it, evangelism cannot take place.

We might ask, "After my friends and family begin seeking to know God, how can I help them get closer to finding Him and minimize hindrances?"

Be a Seeker

First, be a seeker yourself. You cannot help another if you yourself are not a seeker. Though we have found the Lord (or rather, He has found us), we do not yet know Him or show Him thoroughly; therefore, we should continue to seek Him. This is the path of all spiritual growth.

Philippians 3:12-15

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things.

Matthew 6:33

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Waking Up

When an unchurched person begins to seek God, it signifies a spiritual awakening. This never happens by accident. It is a sign that God is drawing them near!

Jesus clearly said, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me.*" (John 6:44)

If a seeker will respond to the magnetic power of God, He will show Himself and reveal His grace.

James 4:8

Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

With such an awakening, hunger and thirst for God begin to grow. It's not unlike waking up after a night's sleep. All night you rested peacefully. But now that you are awake, you begin to feel hunger and thirst. A seeker experiences a certain unrest, because new questions and unfamiliar desires begin to emerge.

Thirst

When a person is thirsty, what is the best thing you can offer them? Water! Think of water as the presence of the Holy Spirit. And nothing releases His presence like prayer!

Look for opportunities to pray with your seeker friend. Are they going through trials, is there sickness in their family, do they need guidance and wisdom from God? These are opportunities to help them by praying.

If the thought of praying with another person scares you, with such worries as, "What if God doesn't grant my request?", ignore it. Don't worry; trust God! Just pray with all your heart and leave it to God to work out the details. The fact that you take the time and the risk to pray with them will be counted as kudos for you, and God's answer will be the icing on the cake.

Hunger

When a person is hungry, feed him! The food of the human spirit is the Word of God. And for a seeker, it must be pre-digested, like a baby's milk, or broken down into tiny bits.

1 Peter 2:2-3

Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

When I say "pre-digested," I mean God's Word should be put into your own words, in common language, paraphrased according to your own experience.

Don't announce the Bible address (book, chapter, and verse), unless it is requested. You need to know where it can be found, in case you are asked, but to the novice, that extra dressing often distracts from the point you are trying to make.

Don't quote entire verses, if only a phrase is needed. Extra words will detract from the emphasis you want or confuse the matter by raising tangential subjects.

Patience

This analogy of waking up also offers some other important guidance.

Proverbs 27:14

Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.

Shouting, “Hallelujah!” when someone is just waking up, may not be received as good news. In other words, be gentle and appropriate. Be patient and courteous. Don’t make this about you!

Seeking Is a Process

Remember, seeking is not finding. Your objective is to help others find Christ as their Forgiver and Helper, but it may take some time. Don’t panic! The timing is in God’s hands — leave it there. If He’s not agitated, why should you be?

Psalm 27:8

*When You said, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You,
“Your face, O LORD, I shall seek.”*

Isaiah 55:6

Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near.

Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

The initial response is already past, but it usually takes time for their heart to become fully engaged. “Now” is the time to seek the Lord, but the next “now” will also be the time. It’s a today *and* tomorrow adventure.

Encourage the seeker also to be patient. Revelation may come like a bolt of lightning, but it needs time to settle in and be assimilated in order to be of real value.

[Can I just step off the path of this sermon for a few moments? I’d like to address the general subject of revelations.

Divine revelations are thrilling, impacting, fascinating. But God hasn’t called us to seek revelations; He has called us to seek Him.

In some circles, I hear far too much talk about prophecies and revelations. It feels like school girls saying to one another, “Have you heard the latest?!”

Apostle Paul was given numerous revelations — some were the kind for which you have no words to describe, simply stunning. But here is what he wrote about them:

2 Corinthians 12:6-7

If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won’t do it, because I don’t want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

If you’re a seeker of revelations, get ready for some torment — the kind that won’t go away! The reason for this was to prevent pride. Another reason was expressed by Apostle James:

James 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Each revelation increases the demand of holy obedience. Gathering fascinating revelations to share, without corresponding personal transformation is not only hollow spirituality, but it is dangerously deceptive — to yourself and others.

James 1:22-24

Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.

Receive revelations and try to implement them as the Holy Spirit helps you, but don't chase after them, or become fascinated by them. Only God Himself should captivate your heart and mind. "Delight yourself in the Lord," not in the things of the Lord.]

Now back to our regularly scheduled program, already in progress...

Encourage the seeker also to be patient. Revelation may come like a bolt of lightning, but it needs time to settle in and be assimilated in order to be of real value.

Urge them to think over carefully (that's code for *meditate*) the things they discover, and ask questions of God (and you, if they like). God loves to answer such questions when they are sincere, and when they are not sincere, He loves to reveal *that* to the seeker, and does it far more effectively than you or I could.

Psalms 69:32-33

Let all who seek God's help be encouraged. For the LORD hears the cries of the needy.

Luke 11:9

"And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you."

Covenant

2 Chronicles 15:12

Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul.

Without formalizing it, urge your seeker friend to commit themselves to searching for God (or "answers about their spirituality"). By so doing, you will add an important element of accountability to the process. *Someone* knows they are seeking, and is observing the process, and standing by to assist, as needed.

[Alcoholics Anonymous uses the phrase "God as you know him" to describe the seeker's objective. They start out not knowing what it is they are seeking; only that they cannot remain where they are. Little by little, you are helping to put a face, a personality, and a name on their quest.]

Final Thoughts

Continue the conversation. Keep checking in, gently.

Feed them appropriate spiritual food, in appropriate portions.

Introduce them to other Christians. Help them see multiple perspectives.

Invite them to participate with you in opportunities of fellowship, study, service, and worship.

The bottom line is this:

This is your spiritual service of worship. This is what you should be doing for God. Don't just believe... believe and live. And don't just believe and live... believe and live and share.

Acts 1:8

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere.

The first evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit may be speaking in unknown languages, but the purpose of the baptism is effectively telling others about Jesus.

This is our Year of Harvest!