

STEWARDING LIFE AND GROWTH

This past week I have been made aware that we are at a crossroads. I believe that God is calling us to make room for growth – and this means making room for change. Everything that God has made goes through stages of growth. Growth in the kingdom is cyclical (has stages)

Two pictures:

Wheat – Seven Stages

- The seed - When wheat is first planted it looks dead and small.
- The sowing – Seed is planted in the ground, it disappears and rots (winter comes – no sign of life)
- The Germination - In the spring a small blade pierces the ground. It can barely be seen
- The Stalk – In the first stage, there is a lot of growth, it's fast and all looks the same- straight up!
- The leaves – Second stage the leaves grow out from the stalk, it's more complex – straight out!
- The fruit – takes the most energy from the plant (some leaves die off to produce it)
- The harvest – The fruit matures, the leaves die, the stalk dies

Butterfly

- Egg – the mature butterfly lays an egg on a branch (the winter comes)
- Caterpillar – (larva) this fat animal can only crawl on branches – eats everything - gets real big
- Chrysalis – Suddenly changes activity, becomes slow can't move well - builds a cocoon
- Dormant – Seems to be lifeless, (winter comes)
- Emergence – a different animal slowly breaks out of the cocoon.
 - o The wings are crinkled and the body is small and frail
 - o It looks awful, can't do much.. just crawls out and remains perched on a branch
- Butterfly – the wings dry and suddenly as it flaps its wings it flies away
 - o Monarch butterflies migrate over 2000 miles in two months
 - o Multi-generational migration
 - o Each Butterfly only lives 6-8 weeks
- Eggs – The mature butterfly mates and lays eggs

LIFE IN THE KINGDOM: MULTIPLICATION

- 1. ANYTHING THAT IS LIVING WILL GROW
 - o God has made things so that they don't remain the same
 - o Every living thing that God has created has a growth cycle
 - Birth, growth, maturity, fruitfulness, degradation, death -> New life
- 2. THE STRUCTURE WILL CHANGE – BUT THE LIFE MUST BE ALLOWED TO GROW & MULTIPLY
 - o THE STRUCTURE OF AN ORGANISM IS FOR SUPPORTING LIFE
 - The Life must never be wasted on preserving the structure
 - o THE STRUCTURE CANNOT BE PRESERVED WHEN THE LIFE HAS MOVED ON
 - God has a plan
 - o THE STRUCTURE MUST CHANGE WHEN THE LIFE HAS TAKEN A NEW FORM
- 3. GOD'S AIM WITH ALL LIVING THINGS IS MULTIPLICATION
 - o ALL GOD CREATED THINGS ARE DESIGNED TO PRODUCE LIFE AND MULTIPLY
 - PLANTS, ANIMALS, BIRDS... HUMANS, EKLESIA.. ETC..
 - o ALL THINGS ARE NOT THE DESIGN OF GOD AND DETER OR DESTROY LIFE
 - SIN, DISEASE, DYSFUNCTION,
- **IT IS OUR AIM AS BELIEVERS TO DISCERN THE DESIRE OF GOD FOR GROWTH AND MULTIPLICATION**
 - o IT'S NOT ABOUT WHAT LOOKS GOOD OR IS COMFORTABLE FOR US..
 - o IT'S ABOUT WHAT GOD IS DOING IN AND AMONG US
 - o God will bless anything that conforms to His desire for LIFE, GROWTH and MULTIPLICATION

2Co 3:17-18 (NKJV) Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. [18] But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**

- God's plan is to transform us from one "glory" (fullness) into another "glory" (fullness)
- Our GOAL is the life of Jesus

JESUS LIFE STAGES

- **Laid aside** His divine glory – Made himself nothing
- **Born** - Made in the image of men – born as a baby
- **Submitted** to God, grew in favor with God and man
- **Lived** a sinless life- An example for us all
- **Crucified** and died
- **Descended** - Took captivity captive
- **Resurrected** – came out of the tomb
- **Ascended** - to the heavens at the right hand of God
- **Reigning** – in heaven

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- Descend – from heaven with a shout
 - Reign – on the earth for 1000 years
 - o New earth – New heaven We will reign with him

The organization that is called the church in America appears to have become more focused on structure than on life.

- We have focused our attention on doing the things that create an audience
- Our structure has been tailored to meet our natural desire to see more people come

The growth of everything that God made means that change must come for growth, maturation and fruitfulness must come.

THE PHARASEES WERE NOT BAD PEOPLE... THEY JUST RESISTED THE MOVE OF GOD

Mat 23:27-28 (NLT) "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. [28] **Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

- They were not righteous like everybody else... they just pretended to be righteous

Jesus mission – The Lost Sheep of Israel

Mat 15:21-28 (NIV) Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. [22] **A Canaanite woman** from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!" My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." [23] **Jesus did not answer a word.** So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." [24] **He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."** [25] The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. [26] **He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."** [27] "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." [28] **Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."** And her daughter was healed at that moment.

- JESUS STAYED ON MISSION – WITHIN THE LIFE THAT GOD GIVES
 - o HE KNEW THAT THEY GENTILES WOULD COME IN..
 - o HE KEPT HIS MISSION FOCUSED AND POWERFUL – DID NOT EXPAND IT MORE
- WE MUST STAY ON MISSION – STAY WITHIN THE LIFE THAT GOD GIVES US
 - o We must know what season we are in

- We must operate according to the call of God that He has given to us
- We cannot change the vision or direction of what God according to preference
- **WE MUST FOLLOW GOD ACCORDING THE LIFE HE IS PROVIDING**
 - **God will change direction in accordance with His character and word**
 - No change will be out of his character or against His word

Council of Jerusalem – THE EARLY CHURCH FACED GREAT CHANGE

Act 15:1-31 (NIV) Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "**Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.**" [2] This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question....

[4] When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

[5] Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "**The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.**" [6] The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

[7] After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. [8] **God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.** [9] He did not discriminate between us and them, **for he purified their hearts by faith.** [10] Now then, **why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?** [11] No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

[12] The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. [13] When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. [14] Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. [15] The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: [16] **"After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it,** [17] that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things'— [18] things known from long ago. [19] **"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. [20] Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.** [21] For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

[22] Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. [23] With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. [24] We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. [25] So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— [26] men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [27] Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. [28] **It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: [29] You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.** Farewell. [30] So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. [31] **The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.**

- The question they asked each other "What do we see God doing?"
- They agreed with what God was doing and did not resist it
 - THEY ALLOWED THE STRUCTURE TO SUPPORT THE LIFE
 - THEY DID NOT USE THE LIFE TO SUPPORT THE STRUCTURE