

The Cone Of Spiritual Growth

1 Peter 2.2

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The Need To Grow

God's desire is to have a personal and intimate relationship with you. However, this wonderful relationship is not automatic. Just being a Christian does not guarantee that you will experience all that God has provided for your Christian life. Living a fulfilled life in Jesus Christ does not mystically happen. It is the result of a continuous and purposeful process, and it takes time.

Consider this:

1 Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

We will not want to consider every aspect of this verse right now. However, focus on the word grow. It presents a key aspect of the Christian experience. Being a Christian is something we grow into. I have often told new Christians that they have been "Born-Again" and there are some things that they must do in order to become the healthy and mature person God wants them to be.

Our spiritual birth is similar to our natural birth in at least one very important way. A new-born baby has to mature, and a spiritual babe in Christ must mature as well. A baby cannot walk until it first learns to crawl. It cannot run until it learns to walk. It cannot eat meat until it learns to deal with milk. A new Christian needs to understand that they may be mature adults, but as new Christians, they must grow into the mature spiritual Christians God wants them to be.

Another similarity is clear as well. Christians do not mature overnight. It takes time. There is no secret formula or special lesson that can teach a Christian to be spiritually mature. However, there are some things that are essential to every Christian's growth, and it is each individual's decision to either grow or remain a babe in Christ. As I could not force my children to grow, neither could I force a new Christian or a long-time babe in Christ to grow. If the Christian will do those things that are essential to their spiritual growth, then they will grow.

One must also understand that growth is not selective. God does not choose to allow some Christians to grow, while others do not. Any Christian that will take the time to do the basic things required for growth will grow. If I feed, clothe and teach my children, then they will grow physically and mentally and will probably be healthy. Likewise, if we will discipline (train) ourselves as Christians, then we will grow spiritually.

Four Types of People In the New Testament

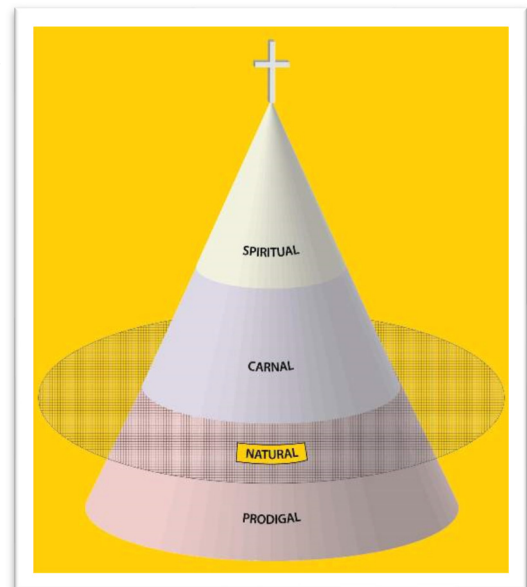
1 Corinthians 3:1-3 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. ² I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. ³ For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

In the New Testament we find four types of people referenced. There is the Spiritual Christian, the Carnal Christian, the Prodigal Christian and the Natural Man. Everyone in our world falls into one of these three categories. The cone illustration helps us to understand the relationships between these three types of people and where they stand in respect to Almighty-God. The difficulty arises when one tries to determine where one is best classified. We have the tendency to think better of ourselves that we ought.

The illustration as a whole represents everyone that exists in God's creation. Whether you are lost or born-again you lie somewhere within this illustration.

The Natural Man

The Crosshatch Circle in the middle of the cone, that has Natural written in it, is representative of everyone who is in our world without Christ. This is the plane of natural existence. Some men walk at the far outreaches of this circle, as far from God as one can get. These are the most vulgar and godless people. These are those who do things that seem unconscionable to us as human beings. If one were compelled to believe in evolution, these individuals would make for good arguments that human beings are nothing more than brute beasts or animals. However, other lost men and women live their lives walking in this circle, but they walk very close to the base of the yellow cone. These people are good moral people, many of them attend Church and know their Bibles, but they have never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior and therefore have never stepped unto the cone of the redeemed.

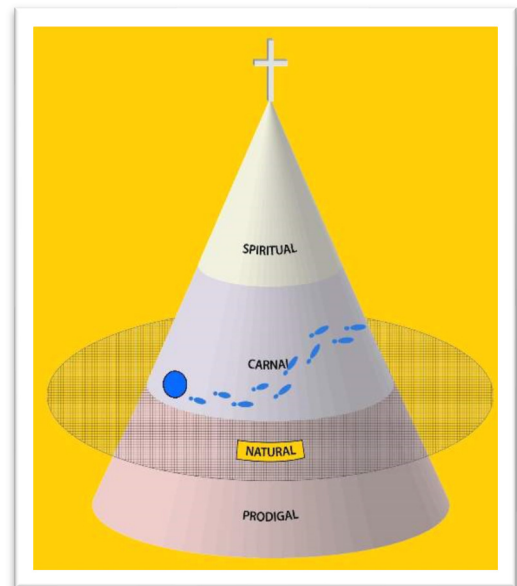


The Carnal Christian

The Yellow Cone contains three types of people. Notice that at the top of the cone is a cross, this cross represents the presence of Christ. The higher one climbs up this cone the closer one gets to our Lord Jesus Christ.

When an individual first accepts Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior they step over the line at the base of this cone, onto the Cone of the family of God. At this moment the individual is born-again into the family of God. A new relationship has been established for this person. Where they once were God's creation and servant as a Natural Man, they are now adopted into God's family (Gal 4; John 1.12) and now have a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Please note that there is no other way step upon this cone, and enter God's family, than through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the dot at the bottom of the cone. This represents the new Christian. As this individual has just accepted Christ he starts at the bottom of the cone, far from Christ, but closer than he was before he found Christ. Now this New Christian's spiritual journey begins. For many Christians, the child of God will merely walk around the bottom of the cone. There is never an attempt to climb up the cone and come nearer to their Lord. A couple of reasons for this static condition come to mind:



1. **A Lack of Discipleship** – The new Christian has never been taught that he or she needs to strive to grow spiritually so that they might have the joy and comfort of walking near to their Lord. They simply do not know that there is any such thing as Spiritual Growth, or perhaps they mistakenly believe that spiritual growth just happens, kind of like physical growth; but we all know that a person can grow physically without growing intellectually. Hence, time passes and the grossly carnal Christian looks like he or she did when they first accepted Christ. The truth here is that the Church of Jesus Christ has a responsibility to disciple those who come into the Kingdom of God and those who are born-again must endeavor to grow spiritually.
2. **A Lack of Discipline** – A second reason that a new Christian fails to grow up in Christ is that they personally fail to do those things that they need to do in order to draw closer to their Lord Jesus Christ. What do they need to do?
 - **They need to read, study and meditate on the Bible every day.** The Word of God is the Christians spiritual food. Fail to feed yourself spiritually and you will wither up and die spiritually.

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

1 Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

- **They need to pray daily** – Prayer involves talking to God and listening for God. It is communication with God, and it is essential to a Christian's spiritual well being.

Ephesians 6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

- **They need to be involved in a local Church** – One cannot believe that they can spiritually grow in Christ if they are not actively a part of the Body of Christ. The Bible reveals in 1 Corinthians 12 that God has placed you into His Church body, so you must avoid the idea that somehow you can exist without the body God has made you a part of. Could your arm continue to exist if it were not attached to your body? Of course not!

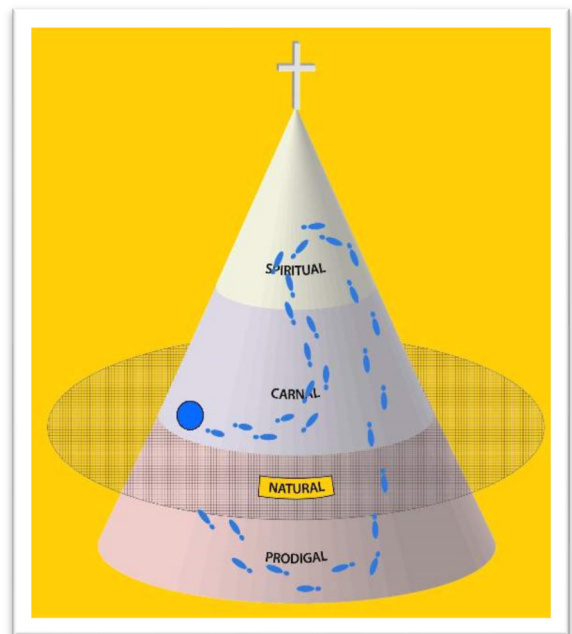
Ephesians 4:11-16 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ¹⁴ That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: ¹⁶ From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Hebrews 12:25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

These are only three of the basic staples that every Christian needs in order to grow spiritually and climb up the Cone toward an intimate relationship with their Lord. There are many more that you will learn as you are disciplined by your Church.

The Spiritual Christian

As one learns to grow in their relationship with Christ, and exercise themselves for the purpose of spiritual growth, there will come a point where they will cross the line that moves them from being a carnal Christian to that of being a spiritual Christian. When does this happen? The best possible explanation here would be when one is more like Jesus than they are like the world. One thing seems certain here, if you think you are spiritual Christian, then you probably are not.



The interesting reality of this position is that a spiritual Christian would probably never call themselves fully matured, because the one fact that seems to grow upon one who has earnestly

endeavored to be conformed to their Lord's image is that they never feel worthy of Christ. They see more and more of their human struggle when they compare themselves to their glorious Lord and never really feel like they have achieved the stature they seek. However, this does not discourage them, because the contentment, peace, compassion, and thrill of dwelling near to Almighty-God is more than one could hope to describe and help but desire. The carnal Christian can only think about what he might have to give up to draw near to Christ, while the spiritual Christian cannot fathom what he would lose if he were to walk back down the Cone into carnality.

The Prodigal Christian

Notice that there is a portion of cone that is below the crosshatch plain of the Natural Man. This is the position of a prodigal Christian. While some may argue that there can be nothing like a prodigal Christian, it is hard to explain it away when one diligently considers Scripture. The prodigal Christian is one who is living in willful disobedience to God, and because of this rebellion they stand far from God in their existence. They are born-again in that they have willingly accepted Christ as their personal Lord and Savior; but because of their presumptuous sin they are spiritually separated from God.

Examples of this condition might include:

- Jonah, who willingly rebelled against God and then through a course of divinely orchestrated events ended up performing God's will, even while never fully submitting to God's plan. Read the book of Jonah for the Scriptural account.
- The Christian of 1 Corinthians 5. This chapter records that there was a man living in blatant immorality in the Church. Paul rebuked the Corinthian Church and ordered that they put this man out of the Church. Notice what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5.5:

1 Corinthians 5:5 *To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Clearly, Paul felt this man was saved, but was in need of correction, and severe correction if necessary.

- The Prodigal Son of Luke 15.11-32. Many claim that this son was a lost man, but in the account he is always referred to as a son. One cannot become a child of God without accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. What about the phrase “. . . my son was dead . . .” in verse 24? Any Christian living in open rebellion against God will be so miserable they will seem like they are dead. They may even wish for death.

You need to hear this very clearly. Our Heavenly Father loved us enough to take us just the way we were, sin and all; but He loved us too much to leave us as we were. He wants us to be good children, and He works to that end. If you rebel and become a prodigal, you must know that your Heavenly-Father is going to correct you!

Read Hebrews 12.5-11

If you go the wayward way and end up in presumptuous sin, which is open rebellion against God; your Heavenly-Father is going to correct you. Not because He is mean, but because He truly loves you. You need to understand that living under the chastising hand of God is not pleasant, but it is needful. It is not the place you will want to be. However, if you end up in that position, everything that God will bring you through will be for the purposes of repentance, renewal, and reconciliation with your Lord.

In your Christian Journey you may wander up and down upon the Cone of your Christian experience, but you may never step back off of the cone. If you choose to dwell at the bottom of the cone you will look more like the world than you do like Christ. There will be those who will look at you and doubt your salvation. There may even be times when you doubt your salvation, but if you have been truly born-again you can never be lost again. You may live a miserable life that may actually cause you much pain and suffering, even more than your lost counterparts experience on the natural side of life. This is because a carnal Christian will experience the chastisement of their Lord (Hebrews 12), not because your Heavenly-Father wants to hurt you, but because He wants you to grow up. So why don't you stop your spiritual suffering, and start growing up spiritually in your Lord.

The ultimate truth of this illustration is that you cannot hope to grow spiritually in Christ until you first become a Christian. Carrying a Bible, going to Church, praying, and confessing your sins do not make you into a Christian. The only way you can step onto the Cone is to realize that you are a sinner, acknowledge that Jesus suffered, died and physically rose from the dead for your sins, and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Personal Lord and Savior. Once you do this, then you have stepped into a new relationship with God, and you can now begin to grow up spiritually in Christ.