

God wants us to GROW UP into maturity. The normal state for all created things is to grow according to their internal programming (seed) If we're not growing something's wrong. God's vision for us in Ephesians 4:13-16 is that: **'we all come to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; no longer children, tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine,.. but may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-Christ-from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body..in love.'**

It's God who gives the growth (1Corinthians3:6) So, we grow in grace as we walk in fellowship with God and receive the supply of His life. But much of this comes through our fellowship with each other. We're growing up into Christ. God's purpose for us is to be like Jesus, who shows us what we should be like. So God uses each situation and problem as an opportunity to help us grow to be more like Jesus. (Romans8:28,29)

**The process of spiritual growth is parallel to natural growth.** Words used to describe stages of childhood are also used for believers in their spiritual growth as children of God. Natural and spiritual children have similar characteristics at each stage. We all have to go through a growing process. We can't be fully mature overnight.

**1. 'Brepheos' = 'a newborn baby' (Luke2:12; 1Pet2:2)**

**2. 'Nepios' = 'one without power of speech', a baby up to 2 years.** (Matt21:16; 1Cor3:1,Heb5:13, Eph4:14) Babies are innocent (no past), teachable and also selfish. They are focused on their own needs and are easily upset if their needs are not met. They are very dependant on others.

**3. 'Teknon' = 'a little child'- pre-teen (from 3-8) (1Jn2:1,Gal4:19)**

**4. 'Teknon' = 'a child' (from 8 to 14)** (Jn1:12, Rom8:16;Eph5:1; 1Jn3:1,2) This involves adolescence-a time of great growth and change. There is a danger of overconfidence and pride in their new-found maturity, strength and knowledge. Still very vulnerable to foolishness and peer-pressure. 'Children of God' emphasises the fact that we are born of our Father God.

**5. 'Huios'** has no corresponding English word. It is translated as **'SON' and means a fully grown, fully mature son.** (Rom8:14,19, Matt5:9,44,45; 2Cor6:17,18) To be a 'huios (SON) of God' speaks of our coming to perfection (maturity) The focus is not on our birth but on the end result. It means to be perfected in love, to be like Jesus. When a father thought a boy had reached the point of manhood he formally and publicly ADOPTED him as his SON. 'Adoption' in Bible times has a different meaning than today. It means 'to place as a SON' The father pronounced him as his SON and gave him a special cloak. Jesus' adoption was at his baptism (Matt3:16,17) A full grown SON was like his FATHER. He knew his father, followed and imitated his father's ways, received his teaching, proved himself reliable and obedient and so now he responded to situations just as his father. Thus the father trusted his boy to fully represent him and act in his name. People were to treat the SON as if he were the father. This equality of FATHER and SON was why the Jews were upset when Jesus claimed to be THE SON OF GOD. **The aim of our spiritual growth is SONSHIP.** We're babies/children becoming SONS. We're to walk in a degree of sonship (maturity) in this life but our full adoption and manifestation as God's SONS is future. **What God has started in us He will bring to completion.** He will clothe us in our resurrection body and present us as His SONS to all creation, filled with His glory, perfectly conformed to the image of our elder brother Jesus! (Rom8:14,15,19,23; Gal4:5; Eph1:5; John3:1-3, 1Thess5:23,24; Jude24)

**Physical growth happens to all at the same rate. But spiritual growth is not automatic like this.** You can have Christians 10 years old and more still in diapers! It's OK for a baby to act as a baby but not for a 20 year old to suck his thumb! It means they haven't grown as they should. Their response patterns are still childish, because they haven't developed mature ways to handle problems. We should be past the baby stage after 2 years. Paul often found believers were still babies when they should have grown up. **'Brethren, I couldn't speak to you as to spiritual (mature) people but as to carnal (flesh-ruled), as to BABES in Christ. I fed you with MILK and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?'** (1Cor3:1-3) Spiritual babies are carnal (selfish) and this shows in immature reactions to people and situations (envy and strife). If babies feel bad they make a fuss and blame others. They are focused on personalities rather than the Word. (v4) Paul realised they were not ready for the MEAT of the Word but as babies needed spiritual MILK. As with natural growth spiritual growth depends alot on the right diet. **The Word of God is our spiritual food necessary for growth.**

**But growth comes by food and exercise, by hearing and doing the Word.** As we hear and then build our life on the word, putting it into everyday practice, we grow into maturity. In Hebrews we see Christians who've heard a lot of teaching but are still babes because they haven't applied it: **'We have much to say, and hard to explain, since you've become dull of hearing. By this time you ought to be teachers (spiritual adults), but you need someone to teach you again the 1st principles of the oracles of God; and have come to need MILK not SOLID FOOD. For he who partakes only of MILK is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a BABE. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age (mature), who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil'** (Hebrews5:11-14) MILK= the basic principles and teachings of the Word. As we receive the milk and live on it, we absorb it's strength and are built up to a place of maturity where we can eat solid food. **The basic doctrines give understandings and ways (techniques) for living and responding that enable us to grow in maturity.** We will cover these in this series. As parents trains children how to think and act in a more 'grown-up' way so God by His Word teaches us.

**MILK must be absorbed before we can grow out of babyhood into childhood**, where we eat the SOLID FOOD that brings us to full maturity. This milk is now described: 'Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to MATURITY, not laying again the foundation of (1) repentance from dead works and (2) of faith toward God, (3) of teaching, (4) of baptisms, (5) of laying on of hands, (6) of resurrection of the dead, and (7) of eternal judgement and this we will do if God permits' (Hebrews6:1-3)

The MILK is compared to a building's FOUNDATION which must be laid as the first step in it's 'growth' upwards. In building the house of our life to glorify God we must know and apply these basics or we'll stay spiritual babies. (Matt7:24-27) The building of character (spiritual growth) is like the building of a house. Babyhood = laying the Foundation, Childhood = the growing superstructure, Sonship= the completion, the full manifestation of the Designer's plans.

The Milk of the Word is the material we use to build the foundation of our spiritual lives. It is essential for growth. Thus: '**As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby**' (2Peter2:2) Babies have such a desire for milk, for they know they need it to grow. We should never lose our hunger for the word for it is the source of our growth.

**To better understand our spiritual growth we must understand our SPIRITUAL BIRTH.**

A key law of creation is that **everything reproduces after it's KIND** (Gen1) The same is true spiritually. (John3:6) (In the Bible 'son of' means 'to share the same nature as.')

God created men, animals and plants with SEED within them. This SEED contains their very own nature, their spiritual genetics (DNA), their blueprint. Now the SEED, correctly planted produces something of the same KIND or NATURE as the original. The amazing thing is that we are BORN OF GOD. (John3:3-7; 1Peter1:3; James1:18; Titus3:5; John1:12,13) We are BORN AGAIN from DIVINE SEED-THE WORD OF GOD: '**Born again, not of corruptible SEED but INCORRUPTIBLE, through the WORD OF GOD which lives and abides forever.**' (1Pet1:23)

God is our actual Father. We are born of His seed! When the seed (word) of God was planted (accepted) in our heart a new thing was begotten within us-A NEW SPIRIT, the NEW MAN (Eph4:24; Col3:10) '**If anyone is in Christ-a new creation! old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new. All things are of God**' (2Cor5:17,18) Like a baby this reborn person has no past, his sins are remitted and has a new start. The reborn spirit is made from Divine seed which is perfect and incorruptible.

**Whatever has been BORN OF GOD (the new-man) does not sin, for His SEED remains in him; and he can't sin, because he has been BORN OF GOD.** (1John3:9) '**We know whatever is BORN OF GOD doesn't sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one doesn't touch him.**' (1John5:18)

**Spiritual growth is the growth of what God has done in our SPIRIT into our SOUL (mind) and BODY.**

It is the life and nature of the SEED transforming our whole character (ways of thinking and acting) according to it's blueprint, so that the Divine Nature of love dominates our whole being. The nature of our spirit is '**love, joy, peace...**'(Gal5:22) As we express and bring or show forth our new nature this is the fruit of our spirit. This measures our spiritual growth. (Spiritual growth is not the growth of our spirit in size, but in it's control of our character. As we grow more of the life and nature of our reborn spirit is expressed through our soul and body.) Trusting in the flesh (mere human effort and energy) is of no avail.(John 6:63) Flesh produces flesh but spirit produces spirit.(John3:6) Spiritual growth comes from the energy of the Word and the Spirit. (John 6:63) '**What matters is the new creation**' (Gal6:15) What matters for spiritual growth is being born again, knowing it and living out from the new creation. What's of the flesh (the leaves) will ultimately be destroyed and what's left of us (the fruit) will be what's been produced by the Word (seed) and Spirit of God. (1Pet1:23-25). So: '**As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby**' (2Pet2:2)

**GROWING UP SPIRITUALLY (2)**

**We are born of God!** (1Peter1:3, Titus3:5) God is our actual Father and we are born from His seed-the word of God (1Pet1:23-25) **This is the rebirth of our spirit by the impartation of God's life.** We possess eternal life as children of God. At first we are spiritual babies and God wants us to grow up into maturity. As bread is our food for physical growth so God's Word is our necessary food for spiritual growth. (Matt4:4) In particular a baby needs to take in the MILK OF THE WORD in order to grow(1Peter2:2) Spiritual growth is the growth of the New-Creation Man (our spirit) in it's transforming our soul (mind) and actions, so that God's nature (love) dominates our thoughts, words and actions (our character) **Growth is a process that happens as we hear and do the Word.** There are no shortcuts; it's not automatic.

We see this in 1Corinthians3:1-3 '**I, brethren, couldn't speak to you as to spiritual (mature) men, but as to CARNAL (flesh-ruled), to BABES in Christ. I've fed you with milk, and not meat: for you were not able to bear it, neither now are you able. For you are yet carnal: for as there is among you envying, strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as (unsaved) men?**' Here are Christians who hadn't grown up as they should because they weren't living from their new-creation spirit, walking by faith in the Word and what it says about them. Rather they were carnal- living by and from the flesh (in their own strength) The mark of being flesh-ruled is being self-centred resulting in pride, envy and strife. Thus they were still babes and were not ready for

the meat of the word, for they hadn't yet absorbed the milk. They hadn't put into practice the first-principles of the Word (the milk = baby food)

This is confirmed by a similar passage in Hebrews, where Christians can't take in the meat: **'You are dull of hearing. For by now you ought to be teachers, you need one to teach you again the FIRST PRINCIPLES of the oracles of God; and are those who need MILK, and not strong meat. For everyone that uses milk is unskilful (unpracticed) in the word of righteousness (they haven't put it into practice) for he is a BABE. But strong meat belongs to them of full age, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.'** (Hebrews5:11-13) The MILK is the FIRST PRINCIPLES of the Word which when absorbed by hearing and doing it causes us to grow into maturity where we can eat meat. We stay babies until we apply these basics of the Word. These are the foundations we must lay in our life before we can build higher. We can only build as high as our foundation in the basics is strong and deep.

He now describes the MILK-outlining 7 areas:

**'leaving the elementary principles of the TEACHING of Christ, let us go on to maturity; not laying again the FOUNDATION of REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS, and of FAITH TOWARD GOD, of doctrine, of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement.'** (Hebrews 6:1-2)

**REPENTANCE from dead works and FAITH IN GOD.** Dead works are works of the flesh (done in our own strength) including our efforts to save ourselves. The Bible makes clear that flesh just produces more flesh which is of no value to God and leads to death. The first principle of the christian life is to realise you can't save yourself or live this life in your own strength. We must change the whole source and basis for our life and transfer all our trust to God and His grace. Before we trusted in self (our own strength, ability, performance, righteousness) for everything. This made us self-centred and self-orientated. We lean on what we've done or will do. Our mind is fixed on self (resulting in pride or despair) and both are roads to death. (Prov14:12) We must turn from this way to trusting God as our Source of life, strength, love etc, looking to Him and depending on Him. This is how we start to walk by faith, living in, from and by the Spirit rather than in the flesh. If we walk in the Spirit we'll grow spiritually. But if we trust in the flesh we'll stay spiritual babes.

Growth in maturity is moving from being self-centred to God-centred.

Jesus talked about this change: 'Come to me, all you that labour and are heavy laden (with dead works), and I'll give you rest. Take my yoke (my Spirit, my anointing) upon you, and learn of me (the word) for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you'll find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' (Matt11:28-30) A young ox would be yoked to a large ox and they'd plough the fields together. It would seem easy because he wasn't doing it alone but was joined to one with great power, working with him. As we allow the yoke of the Spirit to come and rest upon us we can do great works as we trust in His power to work with us. When we believe, we enter into rest for we are resting on the Lord and are held up by His power (Heb3and4) When living in the Spirit, doing God's will is easy in the sense that He empowers us to do it. If we receive the yoke of the Spirit upon us, we will live and do God's work in His power. To repent is to stop trusting self and live by faith in God. Then the New Creation Man will dominate. (Rom8:2-6; Gal2:20; 5:16-25; 6:14-16; Phil3:2on) God's grace (life) is freely available for us to live by, but while we trust in ourselves we set it aside and it can't operate in us and we do not grow in grace.(Gal2:21)

A big step out of babyhood is learning how to WALK.

Each time a baby falls he gets up and tries again. Each time he learns more technique for getting up and for staying on his feet. As he perseveres he gets stronger. Likewise a Christian is learning to WALK in faith, in the Spirit. At first he finds it hard to stay on his feet, for a baby is easily knocked down (by his own sins, by things that happen, by what others say and do) **The Bible gives specific faith-techniques for getting back on our feet and keeping on walking in faith under different pressures.** These are an important part of the milk that new believers must be taught. Mastering them is basic to sustained growth in God. Christians who haven't put these into practice, get knocked down easily and are then down and out for too long. Thus there is no sustained walk or growth. While grounded there is no growth. But every moment we're standing on the promises, living in God's grace we're growing.

Many things happen to cause us to fall and stop walking by faith.

**What really matters isn't what happens to us but how we respond.**

We let them knock us out or we get back up stronger.

We need to know GOD'S REBOUND techniques, so we can immediately get back on our feet, back into faith moving on with God.

(1) REBOUNDING FROM SIN

Sin breaks our fellowship with God but not our relationship. It grounds us and stops our growth. Satan then adds his condemnation to paralyse us on the floor. If we respond in the flesh by covering it up, justifying it or trying to earn forgiveness by extra efforts, struggling against it in our own strength then we will stay grounded. Stop looking to yourself but rather claim 1John 1:9 : 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

David learnt this when he sinned. Psalm32:1-5 tells how he went into decline when he covered it up, but when he brought it to the light and confessed it fully he came back into God's blessing. Psalm51 is his prayer of confession which finishes with asking to be refilled with the Holy-Spirit to do God's will. When you sin run to God not away from Him. He knows all about it anyway and is ready to forgive. REBOUND from sin at once, get straight back into the grace of God. Every moment on the floor is wasted. **REBOUND by CONFESSING your sin to God and asking Him in faith to FILL you with His Spirit.**

(2) REBOUNDING from SUCCESS-

Success, pleasures and good things can also cause us to fall asleep spiritually and get our eyes off God, living in our own strength,

trusting in ourselves. They deceive us into thinking we don't need God. **REBOUND by giving God THANKS** for every blessing, acknowledging Him as our source and **GIVING Him the FIRSTFRUITS** of what He has blessed us with. (1Thess5:18)

**(3) REBOUNding FROM SETBACKS and TRIALS.**

A new Christian needs to know that it isn't all roses. Afflictions and bad things will happen for we live in a fallen world. They must be told how to respond. Peter walked by faith on the water, while he looked to Jesus trusting his word. But the wind and waves (tests and trials) came and grabbed his attention. When he focused on them he began to sink. If we let problems dominate our thinking we sink, for we've let them take our eyes off the Lord. Trials come from evil, to push us down, pressurise and discourage us and try to make us give up walking by faith. So, we must respond actively in order to keep our eyes and faith on God. They either overcome us or we overcome them by faith. **REBOUND by actively REJOICING IN GOD, CLAIMING Romans8:28: 'God works all things work together for good to them who love God, the called according to His purpose' We PRAISE God and THANK Him out loud that His power is working in the situation and that He's turning it for our good. In this way we stay on our feet** or if we're down that's how we get back into faith.

**God works the trial for our good if we respond in faith. REJOICING in God causes us to look to God and move in faith when under pressure.**

One result is that we grow faster if we love and trust God in a trial. That's why we can rejoice by faith when under trial. (See James1:2,3; Romans5:3; 2Cor4:16-18) In overcoming setbacks we get stronger. As we develop muscles by pushing against resistance, so our faith is challenged to operate more fully when there is resistance and thus it is developed more. When all is perfect we don't feel the need to use our faith much. Difficult times present the greatest demand on our faith and the greatest opportunity to use it. Trusting God in hard times causes greater spiritual growth than anything. Trials expose our weakness and the futility of trusting self, thus causing us to trust more fully in God, allowing His strength (grace) to work more fully in and through us. Paul rejoiced in situations that revealed his need for God (2Cor12:9-) for he knew '**God's strength is made perfect in weakness**'. As he REJOICED by faith he found '**the power of Christ rested upon him.**' In our awareness of weakness we reach out and put our trust in God, joining ourselves by faith to His strength. When we've done this we can say-'**I am strong not in myself but in the grace of God**' Let the weak say 'I am strong in the strength of my God'

**(4) REBOUNding FROM HURTS and OFFENCES** (the sins of others) A great danger to our growth is not rebounding when others sin against us. If we nurse the hurt bitterness gets rooted in us causing us to fall short of God's grace (Hebrews12:15) In seeking to punish them we only punish ourselves. **REBOUND by FORGIVING QUICKLY and FULLY.** Leave all judgement and vengeance to God. Forgive and PRAY for them that they will find God's forgiveness and blessing (as Jesus did on the cross) This will remove all evil seeds of bitterness from your heart. This will keep you from falling when others mistreat you and let you down. You'll continue to grow in grace like Joseph did, despite the unfair and cruel behaviour toward him. Ephesians 4:32: 'Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you (completely and freely).'

It helps to remember how much God has forgiven you and that to hold others in unforgiveness brings torment. (Matt18:21-35) It blocks the grace of God and your growth like no other sin. (Mark11:25, Matt6:14,15) The mark of spiritual maturity is forgiving your enemies, praying for them and acting toward them in love as God does. (Matt5:43-48) Mature ones have learnt to do this by putting the Word into practice, not because they felt like it. Thus by doing the word, their inner man has gained dominance and they have become mature.

**A major part of growing up is learning how to REBOUND in faith.**

**REBOUND techniques are MILK-** basic Christianity. We must master these first principles of the word first, before we can take the meat. Knowing and applying them is essential for us to grow up into spiritual adults. If we don't learn to REBOUND we'll stay babies.

If we don't confess our sins (1John1:9) we stay a baby. If we don't rejoice in tribulation (Rom8:28) we never build any muscle and stay a baby. If we're slow to forgive, harbour resentments and nurse bitterness, we are a baby and in order to grow up-we must learn to forgive quickly from the heart.

**GROWING UP SPIRITUALLY (3)**

God wants us to grow up into strong mature Christians, but this doesn't happen by accident. **Spiritual growth is the PERFECTING OF GOD'S LOVE IN US**, so that it controls our character, words and actions. In the New Birth God became the Father of our spirit, we were **BORN OF GOD**. Our spirit is a new creation possessing the life and nature of God. Growth comes by letting that life be expressed and it depends on how much we let love control us. God's nature is LOVE. He is LOVE so what He gives birth to (our spirit) must be made of LOVE. (1John4:8) As children of God His love-nature is already inside us, our spirit is made of love. '**The LOVE of God is shed abroad (poured out) into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.**' (Romans 5:5) Jesus prayed that '**the LOVE You have loved me with may be IN THEM**' (John 17:26) God's love is in us. Father and son have the same nature. We are a LOVE child of a LOVE God. Walking in love starts by receiving God's love and knowing it is in us.

**We have the capacity to love with God's LOVE.** We don't have to get it, we have it. Now by faith we must ACT on it, EXPRESS it, so that it is developed (PERFECTED) in us. A baby is born with great unseen potential. The process of growth happens as he begins to exercise his abilities (speaking, walking etc) and then his potential comes forth. His inner abilities are developed, and perfected by practice until they show on the outside. So, as we walk in the LOVE of God within us, it develops and shows and we get skilful at moving in it. In this way we grow out of babyhood. Living from our flesh (soul-life) our ability to love is limited. Our natural love runs out with people we don't like or have upset us. This is then an opportunity to draw by faith upon the Divine love in us, and live by this unconditional, unlimited love. As we do this God's love in us is perfected (matured and developed).

**In 1Corinthians3:1-3** the mark of BABY is described as being CARNAL (FLESH-RULED= self-centred). But A MATURE one is ruled by his spirit (love ruled.) We have continual choices to act in love or operate in selfishness, to put own interests first or others, to deny self or not. A mature one has chosen to act in LOVE again and again so that it dominates his lifestyle (Hebrews5:13,14) He is described as SPIRITUAL for he is dominated by his spirit not his flesh. The more we chose LOVE the more our spirit takes control and LOVE is perfected (developed) in us. Carnality shows in envy, strife, and division where everyone fights for their own interests. We either give others what they deserve (justice) or we give love (mercy) If we dish out according to what others deserve they will do the same to us. Christians who act from the flesh, are living just like a mere unsaved men because they're not drawing on God's LOVE. Anyone can be nice to their friends but Divine LOVE goes further showing goodness to all, including the undeserving whether we like them or not. Spiritual maturity is to be controlled by this kind of unconditional, undeserved LOVE.

**'Be ye therefore PERFECT (MATURE), even as your FATHER is PERFECT.'** (Matthew 5:48) God wants us to be perfect! This means to 'be mature.' As SONS we have the Father's nature and are to grow up to be like Him. The ideal of maturity we aim for is exemplified by our Father in heaven. He shows us what true maturity is and expects us to become like Him. In Matthew 5:44-47 Jesus shows us that the mark of maturity is unconditional love to all: **'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them who despitefully use and persecute you, that you may be the SONS OF YOUR FATHER in heaven: for He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? and if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore PERFECT (MATURE in love), even as your FATHER in heaven is PERFECT.'**(v48) So this PERFECTION is MATURITY in LOVE. It means showing unconditional love to all, even our 'enemy' who has hurt us, whom we don't like, treating him as a friend (this starts with forgiving him) This is how God is. He loves us even when we mess up. He responds to men's hatred and rejection with love and mercy. He has a big heart and He wants us to be same, to be His SONS (grown up children who are just like our Father) To take the initiative and show love whether deserved or not. This means being Actors not Reactors, not controlled by other's behaviour but walk in love regardless.

Is this 'putting on' an act? **'Be followers (imitators) of God, as dear children; and walk in LOVE, as Christ LOVED us, and gave himself for us.'** (Ephesians5:1,2) It's acting in love as a child imitates his father. It's not hypocritical because His nature (LOVE) is in us. Hypocrisy is an outward face with no inner reality. Even if can't feel love, we know it's there and by faith we can draw on it. This love does not come naturally but supernaturally. The instinct of our flesh is the opposite but we're not just natural but also supernatural beings. We're not just flesh but also have a reborn spirit. Our natural love runs out but if I know God's Love is in me, by faith I can lay hold of it and live from that love and find it flowing through me. It means denying our flesh reaction and acting out from our spirit. It is strange at first but it's the better way.

**How are we perfected in LOVE?** Believing in God's Love in us, we choose to walk in love. By repeated practice love takes more and more control of our character, and we grow into maturity (sonship) LOVE is in us but must be perfected (this is the development of our character). Everytime we act on and speak in that love, it is perfected and comes forth stronger. **'Whoever keeps His word** (this word or command is to walk in love-see v7,8,John13:34; 1John 4:21) **in him truly is the LOVE of God PERFECTED** (matured,developed): **by this we know** (and prove) **that we are in him** (truly born again.) **He who says he abides in him** (claims to be a christian) **ought to walk as he walked** (in LOVE)' ((1John 2:5,6).

As we act in LOVE, LOVE is perfected in us, taking dominance in our personality: **'If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his LOVE is PERFECTED in us.'**(1John 4:12) **'We have known and believed the LOVE that God has to us** (walking in love starts by receiving His love -seev19) **God IS LOVE; and he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.'** (v16) We walk in God's will, if we walk in love. **'When our LOVE is made PERFECT, we can have boldness** (confidence,strength in spiritual life) **... because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but PERFECTED LOVE casts out fear: because fear has torment. He who fears is not made PERFECT (mature) in love.'** (v17,18)

**This MATURING process is the development of Christ-like character from the inside.** This is also described in the Bible as the FRUIT of the spirit. Fruit is PRODUCED from the flow of an inner life. As a branch brings forth fruit by letting the SAP flow through it, so as we let LOVE flow through us, from the inside of us is produced visible FRUIT that people can see and eat from. This is a PROCESS. The fruit is contrasted with **'the works of the flesh'**(v20,21) These WORKS are plural (implying a divided, dissipated life) but the FRUIT is singular.

There is only ONE FRUIT (not 9): **'The FRUIT of the (human reborn) SPIRIT is LOVE, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control'**(v22,23) The whole fruit is LOVE - the 9 words describing the qualities of reborn spirit, are but aspects of LOVE. LOVE is joy, peace etc. The whole requirement of God is summed up as the COMMAND to LOVE.(v14) If the fruit of our spirit is LOVE then the nature of our spirit must be Love. If we let the spirit dominate then the fruit of LOVE will be produced and demonstrated in our life.

**1CORINTHIANS13** describes God's Love in all it's 9 qualities. It is a Loveometer to use and test on ourselves. If we are honest with ourselves we won't be able to judge others because of our own selfishness. **'LOVE is the more excellent WAY** (ROAD to walk on)' (1Cor12:31). **'If I have not LOVE, I am as a sounding brass, or clanging cymbal.'**(v1) When we are moving in Love, to God we're making beautiful music, harmonising with others. But when in the flesh, just going after our own things we may look O.K to others but God just hears a noisy gong, drawing attention to ourselves. True Love isn't out to get praise and attention. The God-kind of love isn't interested in what I can get but what I can give.

'Though I have all gifts and have not LOVE, I AM NOTHING.'(v2) God's measure of our maturity is the measure of our love. The measure of a man is the quantity of love developed in his character. Some may put on a great show but in reality there's nothing there. They're still a baby. 'If I have not LOVE, (whatever I do) it PROFITS ME NOTHING.' (v3) Our love-walk governs our eternal reward. The degree of God's love you possess is what you take into eternity. Your depth of character is your capacity for God's glory and hence determines your reward. Every time you act in love you gain treasure in heaven. Much is at stake!

**AMPLIFIED**

**VERSION:**

'LOVE suffers and endures long' (LOVE is LONGSUFFERING)

Many endure but don't keep a sweet disposition in the trial but

'LOVE is kind' (LOVE is KINDNESS)

'LOVE is never envious nor boils over with jealousy' Love is happy to see others succeed and be blessed. Thus (LOVE is PEACE) It is content with God and his blessing. It doesn't compare with others. This either leads to envy if inferior or to pride and boasting if superior:

'LOVE is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. It is not conceited-arrogant and inflated with pride'(v4) (LOVE is MEEKNESS)

'It isn't rude (unmannerly) and doesn't act unbecomingly'(v5) (LOVE is SELF CONTROL) It doesn't act in an embarrassing way.

'God's love in us doesn't insist on its own rights or it's own way, for it seeks not her own, it is not self seeking'(v5)

God's LOVE is self-giving and willing to yield. MEEKNESS is not weakness or compromising on essentials but is willing to fit in with others.

'LOVE is not touchy or fretful or resentful, it takes no account of the evil done to it-it pays no attention to a suffered wrong.' (v5) It's not easily provoked or irritated, thinks no evil. Thank God He doesn't keep account (record) of our sin but forgives us! (v5)

'LOVE doesn't rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth (God and Word), it rejoices when right and truth prevail.'(v6) (LOVE is JOY) It doesn't rejoice when others fail for it wants them to be blessed. Joy is a manifestation of Love. If we walk in love joy will be produced in our life.

'LOVE bears all things (whatever happens), believes all things (is ever ready to believe the best of every person. Misunderstandings easily happen. Love puts best construction on people's words and actions) 'hopes all things, endures all things (without weakening)' (v7) (LOVE is FAITHFULNESS)

Under pressure the faithful keep going, you know they'll be there. Faithfulness is the relentless strength of love. No matter what happens they will be there for you. You can depend on them. God's love is strong and solid and is still reliable even under great pressure. The Hebrew word for God's covenant love is 'HESEED' (translated loving-kindness) meaning LOYALTY and FAITHFULNESS.

'LOVE never fails' (v8) If you walk in love you won't fail. Whatever hardships at end of life to God you'll be a success if responded in love consistently. The character we take into eternity depends on how much love we have developed in this life.(v13)

God's LOVE is impossible for our flesh but when we're at the end of our own strength and ability to love someone, it's good, for then we've got to move into the spirit of faith and lay hold of God's unconditional LOVE and put it into practice causing it to then grow stronger in us. We have a choice when someone does us bad, to either move in selfishness and talk about them (tastes good to the flesh) or move in love (and pray for them) Remember if they are out of God's love, we should feel sorry for them and pray for them for they have a serious problem. Let's not do what comes naturally but what comes supernaturally!

'Beloved, keep yourselves in the LOVE of God.'(Jude 20,21) LOVE is like a road or river. Keep within it's boundaries. HOW ?

- (1) Receive it
- (2) Know it is in you.
- (3) Walk in it.

When tempted to go outside it say 'no- my blessing is within the LOVE of God even if means denying self.'

**POEM:**

**WHAT**

**IS**

**LOVE?**

It's silence when your words would hurt,  
 It's patience when your neighbours curt,  
 It's deafness when the scandal flows,  
 It's thoughtfulness for another's woes,  
 It's promptness when stern duty calls,  
 It's courage when misfortune falls.

**GROWING**

**UP**

**SPIRITUALLY**

**(4)**

- God's 2 desires and priorities for every person is
- (1) that they would be BORN AGAIN and
- (2) that they would GROW SPIRITUALLY from babyhood to adulthood.

'God wills all men (1) to be saved and (2) to come (a process) to the (experiential) knowledge of the truth (the Word)-(by hearing

and doing it' (1Timothy2:4)  
Both are achieved through the Word of God (preaching and teaching) (See 1Peter1:23-2:2)

**Hebrews 6:1,2** describes the elementary principles- the MILK of the Word, that we must absorb to grow out of babyhood (1Pet2:2) These foundational revelations of truth are what a mature christian house (life) must be built upon.

Third in this list of 7 doctrines is '**the foundation of DOCTRINE (TEACHING)**' This is a key revelation for growth. It's that the teaching of the Word is our number 1 source of spiritual life and growth - the one thing absolutely necessary for our growth is the Word of God. Knowing this makes us hungry for more of the Word because we desire it for our sustenance and growth. '**As newborn babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby**' (1Peter2:2) We can only grow by receiving the milk of the word like a baby. God anoints ministers of the Word for the purpose of perfecting (maturing) the saints, for all to be edified (built up) and growing together in '**the knowledge of the Son of God.**' (Eph 4:11-14)

The number one thing a new christian needs is good Bible Teaching along with regular Bible reading.

Why is the Word so important? We'll see why through 3 PICTURES or ANALOGIES of our growth.

- (1) The growth of our physical body.
- (2) The growth of a building.
- (3) The growth of a plant.

**(1) Food is necessary for growth. The WORD is our spiritual FOOD.** '**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.**' (Matthew 4:4) As bread is food for our body so the Word is food for our spirit and spiritual life. It's essential for our sustenance and growth. Our body is made out of the same material substance as our food. We receive food into our stomach and it's substance and energy is absorbed into our body. Our New-man (spirit) was brought forth by the Word of God (1Peter 1:23-25) and is made of the Word. The Word contains God's Life, Spirit, Energy and Nature (Hebrews 4:12; 2Timothy3:16). As we receive the Word (our food) into our heart,we absorb it's spiritual substance and energy (faith, love etc) and our spiritual life grows stronger. ( Hebrews 11:1, Romans 10:17) The Word is the same substance as our spirit and thus can feed it with God's life. Like our body, our spiritual life needs to be fed and nourished in order to prosper.

The Word contains FOOD for all stages of growth.

We start with MILK because it's easiest to digest. 1Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:12,13 speak of believers who must drink the MILK of the Word to grow up.

Then we go onto HONEY, the sweet grace of God which releases sweetness into our life. (Ps19:10; 119:103), and BREAD (Matt 4:4, Ps104:15) Jesus gave himself to us as the BREAD OF LIFE inviting us to eat of his life.(Jn6:48) They did not understand how so he explained that it was by eating his words 'my words are spirit and life (food for our souls)'(Jn6:63)

Finally the Word is MEAT for the mature (Ps111:5, 1Cor3:2, Hebr 5:12,14) **But the Word must be properly absorbed. It's not what's put before us that benefits us but the FOOD WE DIGEST.** We must chew and digest our food (the Word) to release the goodness in it. Psalm23 and Isaiah55:1-3 says the Lord has set a table before us with all His provisions upon it. These spiritual blessings are wrapped up in the promises of God. We have to take them and eat them for them to be activated in us. **This digestion is called MEDITATION.** It means to chew the cud like cows with 2 stomachs who regurgitate food already eaten to chew it more. Meditation is bringing a scripture up to chew on it. (Tapes are helpful for meditating on and absorbing a sermon) It's to mutter it to ourselves. Look on it from every angle and personalise it. The more meaty it is, the more we must chew it. What have you been chewing over today ? Meditation of the Word renews our youth (Ps103:5), brings sweetness (Ps19:10,14) and is the key to growing strong,successful and fruitful.(Josh1:7,8) As we need a daily intake of food so our spirit needs daily meditation of the Word.

**(2) We are God's Building. The WORD is the substance (the BRICKS) the building of our spiritual life must be made from.** We must use the word to build foundations (Hebrews6:1,2) and we continue to be built up (edified) by the Word as we hear and do it. (Matthew7:24-27) If we build our spiritual life with inferior materials our apparent growth will be shown to be false and will be destroyed. But if we build with the Word it will stand the test and prove to be genuine. (1Corinth3:9-16)

**(3) The WORD is the WATER a plant needs to grow.** In Psalm1 the growth of a believer is compared to a TREE. How we turn out depends on what we focus our attention on. If we listen to rubbish (v1) we'll end up as rubbish to be blown away by the wind (v4) If we plant ourselves by the Word we'll grow into a strong, stable, fruitful tree planted by the Waters. He who meditates in the Word day and night (as a lifestyle) will put down roots, and grow up strong and straight and flourish as a fruitful, productive tree. Again, **the key to growth is the intake of the WORD. The WORD is the WATER containing the nutrients for growth.** The tree planted by the water is the believer who puts himself under the Word. Meditation is like the tree's action of sucking in the water and it's goodness. The tree takes in the water day and night and allows it to flow through it and fill it causing the tree to flourish at all times.

**The growth of our spirit (spiritual life) through our personality is like the growth of a plant or tree.** Both grow from a SEED and both develop as a steady process if it's fed right. The New Man was created when the seed of the gospel was planted in our heart. The New Man grows out of that seed and thus is made of God's Word. Now God wants our New Man to grow like a plant or tree until it fills (controls) our personality (bringing forth much fruit). God's purpose is for us to be a fruitful tree of righteousness that glorifies the Lord. (Isaiah61:3) **The number one thing necessary for this growth is the WATERING OF THE WORD** (Ephesians5:26) Plants that receive no water shrivel and die. They can't grow. **The primary need for every christian is to be sustained, nourished and to grow is the WATERING of the WORD.** We're like a young plant in the heat of the sun (the afflictions, pressures and trials of life) that continually needs watering. But we don't need the toxic rain of false doctrine! '**Receive**

with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.'(James1:21) The word is implanted at our new Birth, but we must receive more of it (hearing and doing it) for the spirit-life to grow out of it, filling and transforming our souls.

**In 1Corinthians3:6,7** the believers are PLANTS. 'I planted (the preached word that saved them) **Apollos WATERED** (by teaching the Word) **but God gave the increase**(the growth)' God is the Source of all growth but He only does it through the teaching (watering) of the Word. Like plants we need a daily intake of water.

**Isaiah 55:8-12** describes the WORD as RAIN from heaven sent to WATER the plants (us) causing us to grow and be fruitful. The Word accomplishes it's purpose in us if we receive it and causes us to go forth with joy.

**The PARABLE OF THE SOWER** is the clearest exposition of this picture (Luke8:5-18, also Mark4:24, Matt13:1). **It is the revelation of how the Kingdom of God (the Life of God) grows in us as a PLANT. The parable shows the progression and growth of the Kingdom in us. It shows it in 4 stages which mirror the phases of a plant's growth. The key to the parable is the WORD which is the SEED containing the life, nature and power of the Kingdom (v11)** It all starts from a seed and the growth is the growth of the seed (the word in us)

	THE	STAGES	OF	GROWTH	OF	A	PLANT
(1)		The		seed	is		planted.
(2)		It		puts	down		roots.
(3)		It	overcomes	competition	from		weeds.
(4)	<b>It brings forth fruit.</b>						

The parable reveals the factors and forces that come to impede growth at each stage.

It also reveals the key to overcome these and maintain growth: 'If anyone has EARS to HEAR (the Word) let him HEAR.'(v8) The key to growth is hearing the Word. This hearing is receiving the WORD which is like a plant receiving WATER. If the plant and the earth (heart) continues to receive the WATERING of the WORD then growth will continue. Since the key is the Word, satan's strategy is to take the Word from us or to keep us away from it.

To stop us reaching stage (1) satan blinds the minds of unbelievers (hardens the ground) so they don't understand the word, then comes to take it away from their thoughts by distraction. (SOIL1) But if they keep hearing the Word, the Water will soften their hearts, and the seed will be planted (they understand and believe the gospel) and they are Born Again.

Now they are vulnerable to the heat of the sun (bad things = afflictions) because their soil is shallow and they have little root. But if they keep hearing the word, their roots will grow and their soil will be deepened and they'll be able to overcome the tests and enter STAGE 2. If not they wither under the sun after a promising start.(SOIL 2)

Now other plants come which compete for the soil (heart) These are cares, responsibilities, pleasures (including the good things of life) Even though the plant is rooted these things are capable of stopping it grow to maturity. This happens when these things so grab our attention they choke the Word in our life. (SOIL 3) Cut off from our source of growth we stop growing. But if we keep putting the Word first, receiving God's Water which has nutrients that feed, and disinfectants that kill the weeds we will continue to grow and enter STAGE 3. This issue is illustrated with Martha and Mary in Luke10:38-42 where Jesus tells Martha overwhelmed by the things of life that only ONE THING (the Word) is needful. This was what Mary chose. Putting it first will then give you mastery over the details of life.

Then, if we continue patiently to receive the watering of the Word we will grow and bear much fruit. (STAGE 4)

So the Kingdom enters us by the SEED (the Word) and grows in us from that seed as it is WATERED (by the Word) Satan's strategies to stop our growth are all focused on cutting us off from our supply (the Word) The key is to keep under the watering of the Word for then our heart is changed into good soil and the life of God grows in us and becomes visible and fruitful. We will grow and succeed if we continue under the Word. The New Life in you was created by the Word. As you hear the Word that life is nourished, strengthened and grows.

Thus Jesus concluded the teaching of this parable, saying: 'Whoever has (ears that hear the Word) shall more (life, blessing, growth) be given in abundance, but whoever has not (ears for the Word) what he has shall be taken from him (by satan)' (Matthew13:12) 'The measure (of attention to, and hearing the Word) you use, it (growth) will be measured to you and to you who HEAR (the word) shall more be given.'(Mark4:24)

**'Take heed therefore how you hear (the Word) for whosoever has (ears that hear and receive the Word) to him shall be given (blessing and growth-for the life and blessing of God is in the Word!) and whosoever has not (ears that hear) from him shall be taken even what he seems to have.'** (Luke8:18) He backslides (negative growth) and loses his gains.

	GROWING	UP	SPIRITUALLY	(5)-	OUR	BAPTISM	INTO	CHRIST
In	1Corinthians3	our	christian	life	and	growth	is	compared to
(1)	a	BABY	needing	the	MILK	of	the	WORD to grow (1Cor3:1-4)
(2)	a	PLANT	needing	the	WATERING	of	the	WORD to grow (v5-9a)
(3)	<b>a BUILDING or HOUSE built using the WORD for BRICKS(v9-15)</b>							

In building a house it's essential to lay the right FOUNDATION- which Paul said he laid, **'which is JESUS CHRIST'** (v11) So the FOUNDATION a christian must build upon is the BASIC TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST-who he is, who we are in him, who he is to us and in us. Hebrews5:12-6:2 agrees. They needed 'the first principles of the oracles of God' This MILK for BABES is called: **'the elementary FOUNDATIONAL DOCTRINES OF CHRIST'**- foundational revelations of truth that we must build the house of our life and character upon, for it to stand the test. He describes the **'7 elementary teachings of CHRIST'** that make up the foundation. (6:1,2) These are what a mature strong christian house (life) must be built upon.

	The	(4)th	on	the	list	is	'the	FOUNDATION	of	BAPTISMS'
Of	the	3	foundational	Baptisms,	today	we	look	at	the	first 2:
(1)	<b>When receive Christ, the Holy-Spirit BAPTISES us INTO CHRIST</b> and we become part of the Body of Christ, so it's also									

described as being baptised into the body of Christ: **'By one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.'** (1Cor12:13)

(2) **BAPTISM INTO WATER** is commanded on all believers to testify outwardly and publically of their BAPTISM INTO CHRIST (which happened in the spirit) So we must be saved before being baptised, which is the first step of faith, a declaration of our new identity and life in Christ, a physical demonstration of what's already happened in our spirit.

**BAPTISM** means to DIP or IMMERSE like a garment dipped into die. It's to be IDENTIFIED, made ONE with, and thus to share the same life and quality. The result is permanent change. The New Birth was accomplished by the Spirit BAPTISING us into Christ, thus uniting us with him (identified with his past, present and future.) We were put into Him and His eternal life came into our spirit. The truth is WE ARE IN HIM and HE IS IN US (John17:23,26) We're born of God with His New Life and Nature within.

Thus the doctrine of Baptisms is firstly the key revelation of WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST by the New Birth. **To grow spiritually we must know who we are in Christ and walk in that truth.** Spiritual growth like natural growth is the outworking of who we are by our birth. We gradually discover the truth of who we are, and what we can do and then walk by these truths. Growing up involves growing in knowledge of our HISTORY, our ABILITIES, who WE ARE and living accordingly. Likewise spiritual growth involves finding the truth of who we are by the New Birth and living that out.

Imagine having amnesia and forgetting who you are. Your identity is the same but it's locked up inside. You're not free to be who you are and vulnerable to believing lies about yourself. This is what it's like for a baby christian who doesn't know who he really is in Christ. We live up to who we believe ourselves to be, so he's unable to fully express his true reborn nature. Satan comes and lies to him about who he is. But there's a Book that tells the truth about ourselves. We must study to find out who we are in order to grow into the person we should be, otherwise we're paralysed by our ignorance. We need to know this truth for then we're set free to be ourselves.

So we must find the TRUTH which is in the WORD (teaching) of Christ who said:

**'If you abide (continue) in my WORD you are my disciples indeed and you will KNOW (personally) THE TRUTH (of who you are in Christ) and the TRUTH (you know) shall make you free'** (John8:32)

**'A hearer of the word and not a doer, is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror (the word which reveals what we're like in Christ) he OBSERVES HIMSELF, goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who LOOKS (intently) into the PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY and continues in it and isn't a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, will be blessed in his doing'** (James1:23-25) He sees who he is, meditates until it changes his self-image so that he acts on it and is blessed. Acting on the word (the truth of who he is) releases the new life of the new-man and he grows into who he really is as a SON OF GOD.

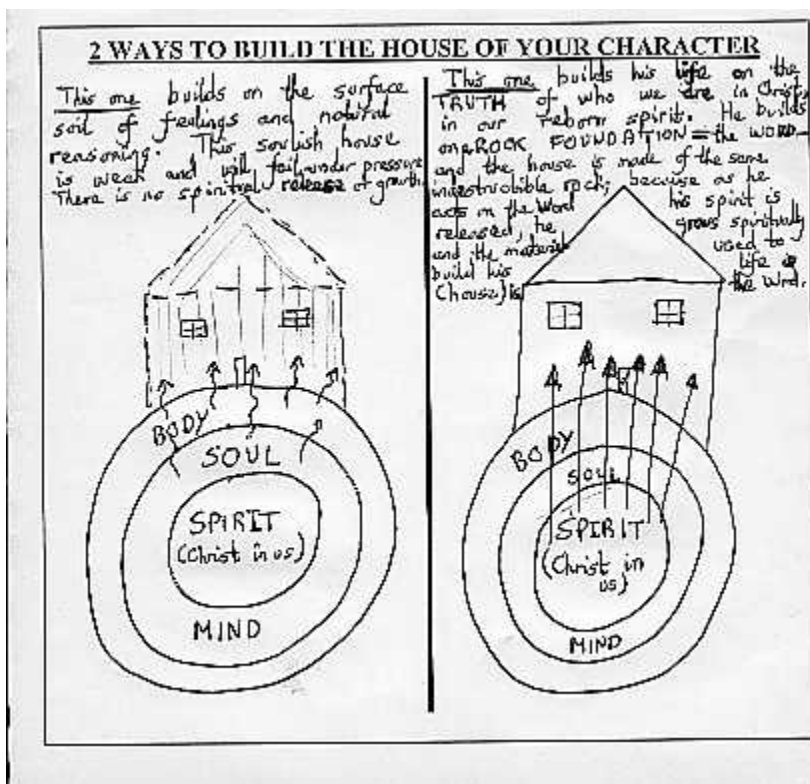
**NEW CREATION REALITIES to KNOW and build our life upon--** things that are TRUE based on our BAPTISM INTO CHRIST. **'If any man be IN CHRIST he is a New Creation'** (2Cor5:17) 'IN CHRIST' Scriptures tell of who we are and what we have because of this BAPTISM.

**(1) Romans 6:3-6: 'Don't you know that those BAPTISED INTO CHRIST JESUS were BAPTISED into his DEATH? ...BURIED WITH HIM by BAPTISM into death,...as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we should walk in newness of life. If we've been UNITED together in his death, we also shall be his resurrection. Knowing our old man (spirit) was CRUCIFIED WITH HIM...if we DIED WITH CHRIST we shall also LIVE WITH HIM. Knowing Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more, death has no dominion over him. For the death he died, he died once for all, but the life he lives, He lives to God. Likewise reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ'** We were baptised into his death, burial and resurrection. Our old-man was crucified and died with him. Out of this death arose a new man who operates in newness of life. We were raised with Christ. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead has raised our spirit. Our spirit is made of the resurrection life and power of Christ so sin and death has no dominion over it. This is who you really are: victorious over sin, satan and death. You've conquered them all IN CHRIST. Yes, he conquered but now joined to him you share the victory.

**(2) Colossians2:10-15'complete IN HIM... IN HIM you were circumcised (the old man cut off) ...BURIED WITH HIM BY BAPTISM in which (BAPTISM) you were also RAISED WITH HIM by faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead (to be saved you had to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead-God took that faith in God's resurrection power to resurrect your spirit!) and you, being dead.. has MADE ALIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM...He disarmed principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them in it (his death,burial and resurrection).'** He conquered and triumphed over satan and we were in him when he did it. So, **'we are more than conquerors THROUGH HIM who loved us.'** (Romans8:37)

**(3) In Ephesians1:19-23** Paul prays for us to have a revelation of **'the exceeding greatness of His power IN and TOWARD US who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which He worked IN CHRIST\*-(when He raised him from the dead (now we're in Christ that same power works us) and seated Him in the heavenlies far above all principality, power, might, dominion and every name that's named...)'** When we were baptised into Christ, we were baptised into and became part of his Body. The Body is one with the Head, so when the Head was raised, the Body was raised by the same operation of power. This fact he brings out in 2:1: 'AND YOU\* (this connects with the previous star\*-the words in between (1:20-23) are in brackets and describe this power) So this mighty power worked in Christ and in us raising us up with him, seating us with him far above. Thus 1:19-23 applies also to us! This is confirmed in 2:4-6 He **'MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST(saved by grace) and RAISED US UP TOGETHER and made us SIT TOGETHER in heavenly places IN CHRIST(far above all power)'**

**These truths are FOUNDATIONAL for our IDENTITY IN CHRIST.** We're not ordinary people-but new creations with resurrection life in us. Devil defeating, world overcoming children of God, successful in Christ (Eph2:10) When we believed and were put in Christ we overcame satan. All he can do is lie and try convince us we're still rejected. The TRUTH is we're **'the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN CHRIST'** (2Cor5:21) **WATER BAPTISM** is the outward SIGN, TESTIMONY or CONFESSION of what's already happened in our spirit. Going under we proclaim the old man dead and buried. Coming out declares we've risen to new life-a new creature in Christ who will walk in new-life.



**The growth process (see diagram)** Our spirit was reborn-a new Man. This is our true identity. Spiritual growth is the outworking of what God's done in our spirit by the New Birth. The extent of growth is the extent this new life dominates. The key is the mind (soul) While we think in the old ways of darkness the new life is blocked from revealing itself. Once we see who we are (mind agrees with spirit) then the real us can come through. **'Be not conformed to the world** (squeezed from the outside into a mold, controlled by what you see and deduce about yourself from the natural viewpoint and what the world says about you) **'but be transformed** ('metamorphosis' =changed from the inside, by bringing forth our true personality and beauty, like a butterfly comes forth from within a caterpillar, our inner life in Christ revealed on the outside) How is this made possible? 'by the renewing of your mind (to the truth about ourself)' (Romans12:2) **'We all with unveiled face, beholding** (ourselves in Christ) **in a mirror** (the Word) **the glory of the Lord** (seeing ourselves in Christ-love, joy, peace) **are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit.'** (2Corinth3:18)

**Build the house of your life on the ROCK FOUNDATION.** This is the REVELATION of Christ (Matt16:13-20) and of who we are in Christ and who He is in us by our BAPTISM. Jesus said there are 2 ways to build the House of our life and character: **'Whoever (comes to me and) HEARS my WORDS and DOES them, I'll liken him to a wise man who built his house on the ROCK (who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock-the rain descended, the floods (storms of life) came and the winds blew (false spirits, ideas and doctrines) and beat (vehemently against) that house, and it didn't fall (couldn't shake it) -for it was FOUNDED on the ROCK. But he who HEARS my WORDS and DOESN'T DO them** (apply and build our life on them) **is like the foolish man who built his house on the sand** (on earth without a foundation) **and the rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat on the house and it fell and great was it's fall.'** (Matt 7:24-27, Luke 6:47-49 -*in italics*)

**One built on earth (surface soil)** He lived by what his body and natural thinking told him (a self-image based on appearance, performance, feelings) but these are shifting, unreliable sands. A house built on this foundation has no strength. It's made of straw. It may look O.K but when tested under pressure it's weakness is revealed. (1Corinth3:9-15) His growth was not real and lasting. Tests show what you've been building your life with.

**The other dug deeper** (not depending on upper layers) **down to the ROCK and built his house on that FOUNDATION.** He was building his life on the teaching of Jesus. The foundation is the TRUTH of Christ (1Cor3:11) -Who he is, who we are in Christ and who he is in us. This is unchangable ROCK SOLID, dependable truth-so we can build on it. It doesn't depend on our performance, feelings, or what others think of us. **This man hears and hears the word and acts on it, and as he does he's building his life on the word and with the word. Since his house is built on the WORD and made from the eternal indestructible, WORD it's solid, unchangable, strong in storms and will last forever. This is true growth.**

**GROWING UP SPIRITUALLY (6) THE TONGUE**

Our tongue is a small member, but is very important in our spiritual life and growth. In creation God released His Spirit and power by SPEAKING WORDS, creating by releasing the breath of His mouth. We're created in the IMAGE OF GOD and through our mouth have the power to bring forth good things or to destroy our life by bringing forth evil. **'Life and death are in the power of the tongue'** Jesus said: **'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart BRINGS FORTH GOOD THINGS, and an evil man out of the evil treasure BRINGS FORTH EVIL THINGS...for every idle word men speak they'll give account of it in the day of judgement. For by your words you'll be justified and by your words you'll be condemned'**(Matt12:34-37). Every word has consequences. A bad thought dies unborn if not spoken or acted upon and

you'll not be judged for it. A good man (1) by his MEDITATION in the WORD stores up GOOD TREASURE abundantly in his heart and then (2) SPEAKS it out, thus bringing forth and creating good things in his life. A bad man meditates on evil things (fear, worry, what satan is doing) and it fills his heart and comes out of his mouth creating the evil he was afraid of. (e.g creating rejection by saying-'no one likes me or wants to be with me.')

**So the GROWTH OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE is greatly determined by our use of our tongue.** Growth is the increase of how much our reborn spirit-nature controls our life. It's by our WORDS and actions that this life is expressed, released and developed in us. Our tongue is hooked up to our heart and so has unique ability to express our spirit. Actions do also but words are primary. As we speak from our spirit, God's life and love is released and is thus developed (perfected) in us.

**'With the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation'** (Romans10:10)

There are 2 stages:

(1) When you believed you received eternal life your spirit was made righteous,you were reborn and received LIFE in the inner man.

Then (2) As you confess (act and speak out) what God has done on the inside, the result is salvation (wholeness)-the outward experiential manifestation of what God has worked within. This applies to all receiving from God (e.g healing) First receive by faith the answer (the word) into your spirit.(Mark11:24) and then by speaking it (the word) out you bring forth the manifestation (Mark11:23) Thus in **Genesis1** God brought forth into manifestation what He had in His Spirit by saying: '**LIGHT BE**' In the **BAPTISM IN HOLY SPIRIT** first receive the Spirit within and then release the power that's now in your spirit by speaking with tongues. When we know we've received something from God we can bring it forth by corresponding words and actions.

**JAMES** is a book of practical christianity written to christians (1:2) with the aim of bringing SPIRITUAL GROWTH (1:4) '**Receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to SAVE your souls.**' (1:21) All spiritual growth comes through the WORD. Our spirit was saved (reborn) by the Word planted in us and as we keep receiving the Word, that new life grows and fills us, saving our souls (bringing all of God's fullness into our lives) '**Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourself(that you're growing)'** (v22) The word has the ability to save (make whole) the life (character) but it must be acted on (this means firstly 'confessed')

**James is thinking of Jesus' parable of the 2 housebuilders in Matthew7.** One heard the word only, but didn't do it. He produced no character,strength -no real spiritual growth as the storm revealed. He looked at his house and was deceived into thinking it was something it wasn't.

The other heard and acted on the word- he based his life on the word. As he heard and did the word (spoke it) he was building his spiritual life and character with the Word of God as the material. Every time he believed and acted on the word (LOVE) another brick was established in his character. His house grew and was perfected and stood the test because it was built of the indestructible eternal word of God.

Another illustration of these 2 kinds of believers is in v23-25

**'If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man observing his natural face in a mirror (the WORD)- he observes himself (who he is in Christ, who Christ is in him, his relationship to God) goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks (intently) into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it.(John8:32-33) and isn't a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work this one will be blessed in his doing'** One doesn't store treasure up and so doesn't bring it forth. The other looks (meditates) in the Word and so builds it up in his heart. Then he brings it forth by saying and doing it and he is blessed, saved,perfected. (Joshua1:8)

Spiritual Growth comes by hearing and doing the Word.

What kind of actions bring growth ? (1) '**If anyone among you thinks he is religious (a good christian) and doesn't bridle (take strong control of) his TONGUE but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is useless (unproductive)'** (v26) The tongue is the primary way we act on the word. Not only speaking in line with the word but refusing to contradict it. Often it wants to speak evil and to be doers of word we must bridle it like we would a wild horse. If we don't we're deceived if we think we're growing or mature. (2) '**Pure and undefiled religion before God is to visit orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.'**(v27) Walking in LOVE (loving and showing mercy to the needy) is also a key action. Be careful not to pick up the world's apathy toward them. (2:1-13 gives specific example of this)

2:14-26 argues that although we're saved by faith alone, we only grow spiritually when we put our faith into action. '**Faith by itself, if it doesn't have works is dead (unfruitful, inactive)'** (v17,21) '**Faith without works is dead (useless).'**' (v20,26) When Abraham offered up Isaac (v21) his '**faith was working together with his works and by works(acting on the word) his faith was made perfect (developed, grew)'** (v22)

**James 3** now focuses on the primary action producing growth-**THE TONGUE.** '**Let few become teachers, knowing we'll receive stricter judgment'**(v1) If we give account for every word how much more will teachers be judged strictly. '**We all stumble in many things. If any one doesn't stumble in word he's a perfect(mature) man, able also to bridle the whole body.'**(v2)

Notice:

(1) A mark of maturity is tongue-control and so our growth is measured by how much we bring our tongue under the control of our spirit.

(2) The tongue is the control centre of the body. Putting the Word on our tongue is the first step to doing the Word in our actions. By bringing the tongue under control we bring our whole body (actions, life) under the control of the spirit. So bringing our tongue under the control of the Word is the key to our spiritual growth.

ILLUSTRATIONS of how our tongue controls our body, life, growth and destiny.

'We put BITS in HORSES' mouths so they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.' (v3) It's hard to believe our small tongue has the power to control our direction in life. A bit is small and weak compared to a horse but because it's at the control centre (mouth) you can control a big restless horse with a bit (tongue).

'Look at SHIPS, though so large and are driven by fierce winds, they're turned by a very small RUDDER wherever the pilot desires' (v4) Our life is like a big ship with winds (wrong ideas) that blow on us to get us off-course and shipwreck. The Pilot (our inner-man) can control it with a small rudder (tongue) Our tongue controls the direction and destiny of our life. You can keep it on course by speaking God's promises over your life (confess Psalm23)

'Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire (spark) kindles! and the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature (disrupting the orderly cycles of life) and is set on fire by hell.'(v5,6) The tongue's power is seen in it's power to destroy. It's small but has great power. Uncontrolled it will run rampant destroying your relationships, everything you've built, your body (evil and bitter words bring sickness) Evil words release hell-fire into your life and in others'.

Thus we must learn to tame it (bring it under control) It's like a wild animal. It's not easy. It takes a QUALITY DECISION. In fact it's impossible in the natural: 'Every kind of beast ...has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It's an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.' (v7,8) Willpower alone can't do it. We must trust in the supernatural power of God, by speaking the Word and speaking in tongues. Only then it can be done.

**A PUZZLE:** 'With it we bless our God and with it we curse men made in the image of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. Brethren this ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?' (v9,10,11) 'Can a fig tree (dead religion), bear olives (the oil of the Spirit), or a grapevine (grapes/wine of the Spirit) bear figs (death)? neither can a salt spring produce fresh water' (NIV) (v12) We don't see it in nature so what's going on? From same opening (mouth) we see sometimes the fresh water of the spirit released (v17,18) and at other times bitter waters.(v14-16)

**v12 has the answer** -there are 2 fountains (sources of life/water) in us that want to be expressed through one opening or fountainhead (tongue) (1) **The Fountain of our flesh** wants to be expressed through the mouth (we all feel it's build up of pressure at times.) If we yield to it we speak wisdom from below. (2) **The Fountain of our reborn spirit** has waters of love, joy, peace bubbling up. One fountain can't produce 2 waters- there must be 2 fountains. Both fountains push for control. There may be water pressure in your hosepipe but you control the nozzle ! We control which waters come out (life/death) No good (life) can come by yielding to the fountain of the flesh.

We need to recognise (taste) what kind of water is wanting to flow: 'If bitter envy and self-seeking is in your heart...this wisdom (WORD) isn't descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic' producing 'confusion and every evil thing' If it tastes bad turn off the nozzle-if you stop meditating on it, it will subside. Instead start speaking and praying: 'wisdom (WORDS) from above-pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy' producing 'the fruit of righteousness and peace' by 'peaceful sowing' of WORDS. (v13-18) Thus speaking from this fountain (in peace not strife and anxiety) results in good fruit (outward growth produced from an inward life) This is character growth in our life and in others. If it tastes good open your mouth and let living waters flow out. You feel good after praising God because you've let waters of life and joy flow out of your mouth from the good fountain in you.(Isaiah12, John7:37-39)

**The Tongue in TRIALS** (1:1-20) In trials the greatest pressure comes on us to yield to the wrong fountain! James starts with what we say when things go wrong. 'REJOICE when you fall into various trials (don't just say nothing but start yielding to God's fountain in you to resist evil) **Knowing that the testing of your faith** (the test is to see what you yield your tongue to) **produces** (develops) **patience** (if you keep confessing the Word)' Trials give us a unique opportunity to grow for they put a demand on our patience (an important character quality in our spirit) 'Let patience have it's perfect work (don't quit speaking from the spirit) **that you may be perfect (mature) and complete (in character), lacking nothing**' (1:2-4) By continuing to yield our tongue to God's word we exercise patience and it then grows in us with the result that we become mature and as we let living water flow the blessing (answer) to our trial comes through and we 'lack nothing' (c.f. v12) Giving up and yielding our tongue to the negative brings more trouble to us and we don't grow. One way we do this is by blaming God: '**Let no man say when he's tempted (tested, tried)-I'm tested by God'-for God can't be tested by evil neither does He test anyone**'(v13) Speaking from the wrong fountain stops growth.

GROWING UP SPIRITUALLY (7) MOVING INTO MINISTRY

**Hebrews 6:1,2** gives the 7 ingredients of the milk of the word, the Foundational Doctrines of Christ- what people need to apply to their lives to grow spiritually. The 4th is 'the teaching of baptisms'. We've looked at the Baptism into Christ and into Water. Today we look at the 3rd Baptism - the Baptism in the Spirit which gives power for ministry and the 5th Foundation-the laying on of hands (which describes ministry in action)

We see the growth process in how Jesus brought his disciples on.

**(1st) They became believers.** Responding to the call of salvation they are saved by grace through faith. As new-borns they are spiritual babes who need to grow. Unfortunately many stay babies (unproductive christians.)

**(2nd) He called them to be his disciples** (followers, learners, who put Jesus and his word first in their life) A disciple is one who continues in the word, knows the truth and is set free to grow into who he is as a son of God (John8:32) Jesus told them discipleship will be hard and cost everything. It will take everything you've got. You must lay down your life but the rewards are great. It's worth giving your life for Christ and his cause, rather than fritter it away. He called them to count the cost and give all.(Luke14:25-35, Matthew 10:1-42,16:24-27) He warned against half-hearted decisions which will result in failure and a falling away in the tests of life. In the Parable of the Sower only the good soil, the committed ones continue to grow and produce fruit.

Discipleship is first learning to do the word in our everyday life- living by Kingdom ways of humility and love.

**(3rd) True Discipleship leads to Ministry.** Jesus said: 'Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men.' A true disciple starts to **MOVE OUT IN MINISTRY.** This is the fulfilment of the growth process and a mark of maturity. A baby has everything done for it, but as he matures he takes on more responsibility and reaches out to others. **'The greatest in the Kingdom is the one who humbles himself and is the servant of all.'** The aim of a disciple is to be like his teacher.

So we're to be like Jesus  
(1) in character and commitment to God and his word  
and (2) in supernatural ministry. (John 14:12)

In James 1:26,27 the mark of true religion (discipleship) is

(1) The tongue -bringing ones personal life under control of the word.

(2) **Ministering God's love to the needy.** This is the doer of the word who is experiencing growth. (the saving or developing of the soul)

As we grow we must answer 3 CALLS from God.

(1st) To enter salvation- 'come to Jesus'

(2nd) to enter discipleship- 'follow Jesus and learn his word'

(3rd) to enter ministry- to give ourselves for others to be blessed (and get blessed in return) The result of discipleship is ministry.

Matthew 11:28-30 shows all 3 calls and stages.

(1) 'Come unto me..and I will give you rest (salvation)'

(2) 'Learn of me'

(3) 'Take my yoke (Spirit) upon you' so that we can labor together in the harvest fields.

Jesus (our example)

(1) was born of the Spirit

(2) grew to personal maturity and character

(3) received power and moved out in ministry.

**The Great Commission** says:

(1) 'Go preach the gospel..those who believe are saved.' (Mark 16)

(2) 'Having gone disciple all nations' HOW ?

(A) **'Baptizing them'** (the entrance into discipleship, the culmination of the call to be 100% committed to Christ) Baptism is a confession of our new identity in Christ and our new lifestyle as his disciple. Thus, we sing: 'I've decided to follow Jesus'

(B) **'Teaching them to observe all that I (Jesus) commanded you.'** (Matthew 28)

So, (1st) We give the Gospel for Salvation.

(2nd) We challenge them to be a committed Disciple resulting in their Baptism.

(3rd) Now as disciples, starting with the Gospels we teach them the teaching of Jesus.

(4th) This process culminates in them moving in ministry-giving out what they've received. In fact, the teaching of Jesus concludes with the Great Commission-a call and command to ministry

In our words and prayers we want to help people on to maturity. God's programme for them is

(1) to be saved.

(2) to be committed to God, the church and the Word

(3) to move out in ministry.

**GOD IS MOVING** and we're to move people along this track.

**God's Word is (1) To the unsaved-** 'receive His free gift of salvation.'

(2) **To the saved but drifting** -'get committed to christian living-put God 1st, get involved in church, in fellowship, in the Bible and prayer for these are all means (channels) of grace for you, so that you may grow in grace.'

(3) **To those faithful in the Bible and in church, who are established in the truth-**'move out in ministry-give what you have received. Ministry is like being a waiter, you see the need and go to the Lord to receive the answer and serve (minister) it to the person.'

(4) **To those already ministering and giving of their time and gifts** God wants you to remember you're first His son, second His servant. Don't get so caught up in the work that it becomes more important than your relationship with God. He loves you unconditionally, not because of the work you do. Rejoice and rest in the fact that He's accepted you.

**The proof of discipleship is moving into fruitful ministry** (John 15:7,8; 2Peter 1:8, Luke 8:15) The purpose of discipleship is to bear 'ministry-fruit' (John 15:16) We prove ourselves to be true disciples, abiding in the word, **by walking in love** (John 13:34,35) **and bearing much fruit.** (John 15:7,8) Paul said to some: **'By this time you ought to be teachers** (ministering, giving out the word to others) **but you need more milk** (they were still babes)' (Hebrews 5:12) Had they put the word first, by now they'd be ministering (not necessarily in the pulpit, but teaching and discipling others) The fact they hadn't moved into ministry revealed they weren't true disciples for they hadn't grown as they should. **Growth in maturity means growth into ministry.**

**KEYS FOR PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY**

**(1) FIND YOUR SECURITY and IDENTITY IN GOD, not in your ministry.** Grow in your personal character and relationship with God, in knowing who you are in Christ. Ministry can only be as strong as the foundation of character. Jesus set the example of being a servant (minister) when he washed his disciples' feet. He did this from a place of security in God: **'Jesus knowing the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God ROSE'** (John 13:3) He then put on a towel and washed their feet. **In Luke 9:57-62** Jesus gave the call and cost of discipleship. Then in

10:1,2 he described the great need for laborers (ministers) and sent 70, who passed the test of commitment, to preach the gospel (v9) In v17-20 they returned rejoicing at the power that flowed through them (seeing demons subject to them in Jesus name) Then Jesus warned them of the danger of basing one's security and identity in one's works, ministry and anointing, for this means being lifted up in pride like satan who fell from heaven. **'Rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'** (v20) We are to rejoice in that we are beloved sons of God and give Him all the glory.

**(2) Prove yourself faithful** Faithfulness is the no1 thing required by God (1Corinth4:2, Matthew25:21). If we are faithful in smaller things we'll be entrusted with more. (Luke16:10-12) God considered Paul faithful and set him into ministry.(1Timothy1:12). Lack of self-discipline (e.g in our words) will also disqualify us from ministry. (James3:1, 1Cor9:26,27)

**(3) GET YOUR MOTIVE STRAIGHT** If it's to look good or important or be popular we'll never stay the course. Our motive for ministry is LOVE and GRATITUDE to God, not to get popularity or status with men. It's to freely give what we've freely received (God's love), to bless others, and to please our Father by walking in His will, following the example of Jesus-our big-brother.

Part of maturity is to be dead to praise or censure. Of course we like praise and don't like criticism but we can't let either get to us to puff us up or stop us. **'With me it's a very small thing for me be judged of you, or of man's judgement, yea I judge not myself. For I know nothing of myself, yet I'm not hereby justified but he who judges me is the Lord.'**(1Corinth4:3,4) Paul was motivated by the fear of the Lord-his main concern was to please Him. We should receive constructive correction and not be not overly upset by destructive criticism. Paul sought only to commend himself to God and was not bound by fear of man. We will get criticised when moving out in ministry but it is the love of God that constrains us and keeps us reaching out.(2Corinth5:14) **'Love isn't touchy, fretful or resentful, takes no account of the evil done to it-pays no attention to a suffered wrong.'** (1Cor13:5 AMP) When you move in ministry you come on the front line and satan tries to discourage by raising up critics (who don't do much themselves-true disciples are to busy with the work to look round at others and criticise) Likewise don't be overly exalted by praise, success and results-stay grounded in who you are in Christ and you'll stay the course and bear fruit.

**(4) RECEIVE THE POWER** So growth involves moving into ministry. But Jesus never sent anyone without first empowering them. **'You're my witnesses.I send the promise of my Father on you, but tarry until you are clothed with power from on high.'** (Luke24:48,49) **This is the Baptism in Spirit.** Jesus didn't move into a full supernatural ministry until he was Baptised in the Spirit. Likewise his disciples (Acts1:4,5,8) **'You shall receive power when the Spirit comes on you and then you shall be my witnesses.'**(1:8)-fulfilled in Acts2:4 on Pentecost. They were filled, ministered and bore much fruit. So to grow we must receive the basic teaching of **'Baptisms'** (Hebrews6:2) so that we can receive power to minister. Come to Father and ask for the Holy-Spirit (Luke11:9-13), receive the infilling by faith.(Mk11:24) **(1st)** receive it on the inside, then **(2nd)** by speaking you release it to the outside. So, receive the Spirit and then by faith YOU speak out in tongues trusting the Spirit within to give you the words. Until you speak you're like a hose-pipe filled with water but the nozzle (tongue) is closed and so the benefit (power) is blocked.

**You have the Word, you have the power so MOVE OUT, REACH OUT, believing that as you do His power is flowing through you!** It's not enough to be BAPTIZED in the Spirit. Many sit around; they've received power but aren't using it. Power is for a purpose-to minister. (Acts1:8) This means risk! Having received, we're to MOVE OUT TO MINISTER God's Love-and that's what **'LAYING ON OF HANDS'** (Heb6:2) refers to. Jesus said to all christians (Mark16) - **'GO-preach -lay hands on the sick and they'll recover.'** This is symbolic of all ministry. **To lay hands on the sick or needy is to REACH OUT in LOVE to a hurting, dying world that needs a touch from God. As His representative when you touch them, God is touching them with His love. It's a picture of loving hands reaching out to hold and IDENTIFY.** Joining as one you bring God's love and power to them, helping them receive from God. You're just a channel. So minister compassion not judgement. When you do, God's love and recovering power is transmitted into their lives.

God's will for all christians to have 2 areas of ministry  
**(1) In the church** (not necessarily official, it could be welcoming and encouraging new ones or intercession) We're all members of the body and contribute to life of body and together we are a witness. Whatever you do in the church you strengthen her witness, if done well.

**(2) In the world.** (Mark16:15-18, 2Corinth5:18-6:2)