

Growth Formula

Growth rate & depth = amount of time (soul) + amount of diligence (strength) + amount of heart (passion) + amount of thought (mind) + amount of adjusting to Bible content + amount of spiritual focus

Overwhelmed is a feeling one can get when stepping into a new experience. When we first learn to ride a bike the experience can feel overwhelming. As we sit down and place our foot on a peddle and feel how wobbly the bike is we can quickly lose faith in our ability to ride it. Then when we take our second foot off the ground to try to peddle the bike we realize we have lost stability and quickly put our foot back down. Then we might think to ourselves, “how the heck can I do this?”

We soon see our friends riding their bikes telling us to keep trying. There is something about seeing other people being successful that can inspire us to try. So we try again with encouragement from others who say, “keep trying, you can do it.” And as we keep trying we eventually get to peddle a little better and stay on a little longer. Our little successes can teach us we are improving and making progress. Our progress can provide the encouragement to continue. Our faith can grow as we continue improving.

Whether it's music, public speaking, surgery, sports, art, science, dance, math, or english, we know we need to take classes and learn how to do these things. We need to sit with an instructor and listen. We must do the assignments as they are assigned. The more we regularly attend and complete the assignments the more we can learn and feel confident with the learning.

(Sometimes, students don't apply themselves and for different reasons: they may have lack of faith, hope, desire/interest, or understanding. These are problems that can come up. We can discuss them with each other.)

The ingredients in the growth formula work together in different measures. We are going to break down each ingredient separately knowing that they are never really working without the others. All the ingredients work together all the time to affect our growth.

Soul means life which involves time

How much time/soul we apply to seek and practice God's goodness will impact how much we grow. The options can vary from one second a week to all day every day. We can choose how much time we spend. "I don't have time" is a response that indicates that there are other investments that may be more important than our growing with God.

If John goes to church, serves as a greeter on Sundays, and runs a Bible study group on Wednesdays, then John could spend roughly 3 hours or so each week toward his growth.

How do we gauge what is an appropriate amount of time to invest in our growth with God? Well, this is going to vary by what we want or desire. If our goal is to maximize our personal potential to be with God then we ought to push ourselves toward our potential. Instead of the question: How much time should we invest? We can ask ourselves: How much time can we invest? Is growing with God more important than our other activities? If God is going to be our greatest goal and teacher, then our schedule of activity can indicate that.

Michael Phelps, a decorated Olympian was in the pool swimming "3 to 5 hours a day seven days a week."

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/14/olympic-hero-michael-phelps-says-this-is-the-secret-to-his-success.html>

Jesus and the Apostles were every day seeking, praying, communing, discussing, teaching, and living to grow and be with God. We can do likewise. We can take God everywhere we go within our minds and hearts and to any activity if we choose to do it. God is available everywhere all the time. God is convenient and always accessible, if we are humble and ready.

It has been suggested and taught by many different people to practice daily prayer and meditation. There are books and Apps created with 30-day challenges. Our time with God can grow if we choose to do it.

Diligence

Effort or strength applied with time affects our growth. If Michael Phelps got in the pool and just sat at the stairs for 3 hours a day he would have little growth. He would prune up for no reason. Yet he could still boast being in the pool for three hours a day seven days a week.

Defining diligence:

Diligence “steady, earnest, and energetic effort: persevering application”
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diligence>

We can check for our “steady, earnest, and energetic effort: persevering application”

Continuum scale of diligence

1 -----5-----10

Our weakest effort

Our mid-range effort
potential

Our maximum effort
or giving our all

This scale fluctuates based on our individual abilities. We will all vary depending upon our training, passion, faith, experience, spirit, and willingness. It may be tempting to assess others with this scale, but assessing others can often distract us from looking at ourselves. Looking more at how we can improve our application to the formula can help us stay the course.

Heart

The heart is difficult to describe. I think it’s best to give some examples and simply understand the spiritual essence that lies underneath.

Rising to the challenge

I used to play volleyball with friends each week. I would usually begin playing to have fun and not really try too hard. Eventually someone from the opposing team would do or say something that would rile me up. My pride would sometimes get challenged. At that point a switch from inside me would turn on and I would change from easy playing to “game time.” What was once a relaxed and easy-going fun game would suddenly turn into an intense competition.

Passion - Inspiration

Movies and stories exemplify this idea. There are many stories of champions who are at a point of giving up hope when something inspires them to continue on or step up to the challenge. Yet how do we maintain inspiration? Inspiration leaves us. Ultimately, at times, we will need to invest the time and effort without the inspiration. If we stay with the time, effort, and thought, the inspiration can come back. Passion, although a fundamental ingredient, is not the leading component. Our faith may need to be stronger and longer than our passion.

Feelings

Feelings are largely a result based upon how we perceive things. If we view things that are fear inducing and perceive them as scary, we may become afraid or angry. Anger much of the time develops from a perceived threat. There are Godly good feelings and there are feelings that can go against God. Fear, envy, lust, and hatred toward self or others are feelings that may not be aligned with God. God is about love, mercy, forgiveness, truth, justice, and compassion, which lead toward peace. We ought to examine ourselves to see if our heart or feelings are in the correct agreement with God.

Feelings are definitely part of the growth experience, but like passion, feelings are not the leading component. We ought to ensure we are not waiting to ‘feel like praying,’ ‘feel like meditating,’ ‘feel like reading the Bible,’ or ‘feel like talking about God.’ Waiting to feel like doing things can be a stumbling block toward growth. Feelings can help lead us, but we are not to wait or rely upon them without discernment. We ought to rely upon God and God’s direction, which sometimes may go against our feelings.

I have been getting up each morning to research, reflect, pray, meditate, read, and write about God for over a decade now. I may have missed a few days in that time. I'm dedicated because I know it makes a difference. When my mind tells me it doesn't feel like it, I do it anyway because it is the right thing to do. Feeding my spirit and soul is necessary, not just an option. For me, if I neglect seeking God to care for my heart, mind, and spirit, I will make self-seeking decisions that are destructive. It's like having a child that relies upon my actions to stay healthy. If I stop taking care of the child because I don't feel like it, the child suffers and so will I. My mind, heart, and soul needs God's grace and my choices affect their condition.

Mind

We experience thousands of thoughts each day. If we love God with all our mind then we can easily spend a lot of time thinking about God. Most of us will rarely apply thorough investigations to see if our assumptions are correct. We can often expect they are correct, but a lot of times they are not. Because we all draw conclusions and live off our assumptions we can make many errors everyday. To seek truth we will need to evaluate at least some of the ways we think to ensure we are accurate and make corrections.

We can evaluate our mental attitude toward growing with God and practicing God's character. If God is a crucial part of our lives then we make time to see that we are understanding God's directions correctly. We can apply some research, study, exploration, testing, and investigation into Spiritual truth. We can seek out factual evidence in reviewing our actions.

Bible content

All our beliefs and perceptions do not match God's intentions for us. If they did, then, we would be like Christ. That said, we each have much correction to make within our perceptions, beliefs, and faith. If we are unwilling to make correction, then we ought to evaluate why. Right now our minds are governed by some beliefs that are at odds with God's ways. We can identify them and make corrections if we are willing and ready.

Resistance isn't wrong, it's normal. We all have a rebellious way within us that resists change. Ask any trainer and they can testify with experience

how few people really give themselves over entirely to the process to be changed. It's normal to not feel like changing and to make mistakes. It's normal and not necessarily evil. We all fall short of perfection and we always will. Yet we ought to grow at a rate where we can improve our spiritual productivity. The goal is not perfection, but improved production in spiritual character.

Let's stick with the best material, the Bible. To best align ourselves with the Word of God is to make the Word of God our instruction. That means we read the Bible more than any other book. Our minds can be like a container that learns and holds information. The information within that container often directs our lives. If we fill that container with conflicting dogma it can affect our lives negatively.

It may be best to define Biblical ideas and principles by reading the Bible. Is our opinion and understanding about God or the Bible based upon what we have read in it, or is it based upon someone else's information? If we go to some other author or speaker for their input without looking at the primary source we can easily develop an understanding that is incorrect. Being more correct with God has everything to do with our goal. The Bible really hammers out this point.

We will need to learn critical thinking skills and self-evaluation to see if our thoughts are right. We will need a sense of humility and a willingness to be corrected. 2 Corinthians 10:5 "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Spiritual focus

Matthew 6:33-34 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble."

God's righteousness is our goal. As we humble ourselves to be changed by God's character through our participation with it, we can grow spiritually. To be changed by God's character requires us to seek God's character, ways, principles, statutes, and ideas. God's grace can save us, if we receive, accept, and adopt it into our hearts, minds, choices, and

actions. If we deny it we may be denying our salvation. So it's worth some serious investigation.

Grace and spiritual things are intangible and invisible. We will need to apply senses that can feel love, peace, mercy, patience, truth, compassion, justice, and forgiveness. Our minds will need to be guided to think about such things.

Philippians 4:8-9 NKJV Meditate on These Things

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

I believe this is to be done regularly, not just once in a while. The spiritual reality around us lives and breaths within the underlying dynamics of love. Love is the central ingredient, but it is love the way God defines love. 1 Corinthians 13 gives a pretty good definition of love.

We ought to be looking intently at what is not visible. Meditation can be a great way to sharpen such senses. We can bring our meditational demeanor into the world and our relationships. We can seek with empathy to understand how other people feel and their perceptions. We can learn to be with other people emotionally and mentally. God has everything to do with feelings and spiritual sensations which incorporate our whole being.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

(Jesus explains this command to be the first and most important. Are we going to prioritize this command as Jesus instructed? Our answer will be stated through our actions)

“Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get

up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

(We can seek to apply our heart, mind, soul, strength, choices, and actions as the Bible suggests. It involves combining all the ingredients together. Let’s read the Bible, do what it says, experience new spiritual realities within and around us, and share what we learn.)

Spiritual Growth Assessment

As we assess ourselves we can involve all areas of life combined: work, school, family, friends, alone, pets, house, chores, finances, health etc. How would others score us; spouse, boss, teacher, or friends? With all this in mind we can use our best guess to choose a number for each character. Honest self evaluations can help us understand our spiritual condition and show us where we can grow. Our minds ought to think about growth.

Peace

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Patience

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Mercy

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Forgiveness

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Generosity

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Truth

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Justice

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Compassion

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Developmental Attitude & Action

Humble

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Serving Others

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Teachable, Listening to Learn

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Prayer for Help to do God's Will

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Introspection and Self Examination

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Time Investment

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Meditation, Reflection

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Bible Study to Renew Our Beliefs

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

Intimacy, Empathy, Sincerity with Others

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10