

What Will You Look Like 25 Years From Now?

I had always thought my longtime friends' good marriage resulted simply from a blessed compatibility. I learned differently when I heard her speak to a group about having a happy home. She recounted the adjustments both had to make. Every year they read together at least one book specifically devoted to improving marriage.

I'm not suggesting that all you have to do to enjoy a good marriage is read one book together annually, but their marriage tells me that good relationships require effort. Married couples must commit to growing, or the marriage will stagnate, wither and die.

In the fourth beatitude (Matt. 5:6), Jesus talks about hungering and thirsting for righteousness. It's His way of telling us to never stop growing.

What will you look like 25 years from now?

Other than watching your diet, exercising or having plastic surgery, there's little you can do to stop time from changing your appearance.

But you can do something about what you will look like inside. Jesus tells us to make righteousness our growth goal.

Many view righteousness, like the Pharisees did, as conformity to some external code of conduct.

I saw two very "holy" deacons accost my dad one night at the altar and, with balled-up fists pressed against his chin, demand he resign because he was hindering the church from being more "spiritual." My father's crime was that he had not endorsed the non-biblical excesses of a "revival" occurring in

nearby churches.

Now, those deacons did not use tobacco, attend questionable places of amusement or drink alcohol. They went to church for Sunday School, Sunday morning and evening worship services, plus midweek services. They tithed and paid their bills.

But they were mean!

How many young people are away from Christ today because they grew up in homes or churches with the kind of atmosphere I described?

I think of the church business meeting I presided over years ago where the older folk voted out a pastor who had been effective in reaching young people. The bewildered youth, at the end of that business meeting, clustered around the altar crying uncontrollably, unable to process what had just happened to the pastor who had led them to Christ and nurtured them. I have wondered how many of those young people subsequently wandered away from God because they experienced spirituality which lacked kindness.

Later in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for maintaining an outer righteousness devoid of justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matt. 23).

The righteousness Jesus wants in us is seen in the 15 qualities of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 or the 22 life responses of Romans 12:9-21 or the nine fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 or the seven add-ons to faith in 2 Peter 1:5-9. Those are the attributes we must continually hunger and thirst after.

Desire for Growth

The Christian life combines a marvelous balance between being "content" and "not having attained." Those filled with the Spirit must also be the ones who desire yet more of Him.

Thus, we are never to stop growing as believers. Even the apostle Paul at the very end of his life models for us a desire to grow by calling for Timothy to bring him the scrolls and parchments (2 Tim. 4:13), Why would he want to study when he is only days away from execution? He has no more sermons to preach, no more letters to write, no more churches to found, no more disciples to mentor. So, why does he want anything to read? Because he wants to keep on growing.

There will never be a moment this side of eternity when you can say, "I have arrived. I know it all. I have become totally like Christ." Jesus Himself tells us that only those who desire to keep on growing will be satisfied—"They will be filled."

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