

Assessing Growth

Mums are preoccupied about a baby's growth. Some weigh their baby before and after feeding to ensure the baby is getting enough milk. Babies are regularly measured. Eyesight, hearing, concentration, motor responses, word acquisition are all seen as symptoms of growth.

Preschool kindergarten is an environment designed to aid a child in their social development. At school examinations, essays, assignments are tools used to assess our learning progress. These so called 'norms' are at best a guide but when a person fails to meet a 'norm' it can generate great concern and perhaps fear for all interested parties.

Assessing physical, psychological and social development is a complex task. Jean Piaget suggests there are four different stages in the cognitive development of a child: Sensory Motor Stage, 0-2 yrs; Pre-operational Stage, 2-7 yrs; Concrete Operational stage 7-11 or 12 yrs; and adolescents go through the Formal Operations Stage. Research today shows Piaget's stages are nowhere as distinct as he asserts.

How can we assess an individual's spiritual formation? There are tools available to gauge our spiritual growth like Frazee's Christian Life Profile and Monvee.com. James Fowler proposes a six staged development of religious faith that is closely related to the work of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg regarding aspects of psychological development.

The question that needs to be asked is whether or not spiritual growth tools measure the right things? A church may use attendance and giving as symptoms of a congregation's spiritual health. The incarnation of Jesus is about transformation via salvation. The verses in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Ephesians 4:22-24 combine three key ideas: **transformation**, **transfiguration**, **metamorphosis**. This describes the inner change, a change of desires, ambitions and character, that is the ongoing process in a christian: **transfigure** (verb) to transform the appearance of somebody revealing great beauty, spirituality, or magnificence; **transform** (verb) to change people completely, especially improving their usefulness; **metamorphosis** (noun) a complete or marked change in character.

God predestined us "to be conformed to the image of his Son." The work of the Holy Spirit is to change us "who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness [character] from one degree of glory to another" 2 Corinthians 3:18. Paul claimed "I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" Galatians 4:19. For the Corinthians his concern was "the life of Jesus may be seen in our bodies" 2 Corinthians 4:10.

As a 'self-assessment' measure I am using the fruit of the Spirit asking myself, "which aspects are dominant and which may be completely missing in my behaviour? "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" Galatians 5:22-23.

Am I more loving, kind, gentle today than last week? How about you?