

Oriented Towards Increase

Overview: People of healthy, integrated character are people of growth. They increase good things as a result of who they are. They do this in themselves, with others, with their companies, their careers, their relationships, and all the other areas of their lives where they apply themselves. This tendency to make things grow has to do with the ways that they are glued together that just cause things to increase. Also, they do not have the aspects to their character that get in the way of growth. They hunger for it, invest in it, and achieve it. This is natural, and part of being alive. If someone is not growing, something is wrong, and they are probably dying or going backwards in that area. So, the ways that the drive to grow are stifled are not a part of the integrated character. They take good risks, and submit to processes and people who help them grow on an ongoing basis.

1. Growth is a natural thing that God has created.

God has constructed us, and everything that is alive, to grow. If we are planted in a healthy garden, and have healthy character soil, we will grow. It is natural. We will hunger for it. A baby comes into the world curious, risk taking, desiring more. That is the normal course for every human being.

The kind of person with this character leaves a “wake” in life of whatever he is involved in grows and gets better over time. Fruitfulness and growth are natural in every area just as they are with a child.

Psa. 115:14 May the LORD make you increase, both you and your children.

Psa. 115:15 May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Psa. 92:12 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;

Prov. 13:11 Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow.

Luke 12:27 ¶ “Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

2. The normal path is that people use parts of themselves, invest them, and as a result, they grow. When that is not happening, something is wrong.

In the parable of the talents, this is shown in the two people who invested what they were given and increased it multifold. As they used it, it grew. This is normal. When we practice something, it gets better. When we use something, it grows. This is true of muscle, brain tissue, talents, money, skills, or whatever we put to use.

Matt. 25:16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.

Insert Illustration: This is a good place to insert an illustration about the way that compounded interest happens. Get a table of compounded interest and show what happens to money that is invested over time, vs. money that is not. Also, tell a story about someone who practiced or invested themselves in a new area and grew.

But, if a person, a relationship or a company is not growing, but staying the same, something is wrong. Everything that is alive grows, and if not, it is dying.

3. Although the drive to grow is natural, it is not commonly seen because it can be stifled by brokenness, sin, fear, wounding and other factors.

In people of integrated character, the drive to grow manifests itself in the ways we have just talked about. But, the more common scenario is to see people not growing because they world has “beat it out of them.” Their drive to grow has gotten stifled, or buried, or wounded, and because of fear, despair, or even laziness, they no longer invest themselves.

This is seen in the parable of the talents as the one man did not invest or use his talents because of fear:

Matt. 25:24 ¶ “Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

Matt. 25:25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

Matt. 25:26 ¶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

Matt. 25:27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

Prov. 10:4 Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.

It is similar to Joshua and Caleb. As they stepped out when others were afraid, there was increase. They did not see the obstacles, but the possibilities and went for it. Yet there were others who did not.

There is a **good** drive for more, and for increase, which has to do with growth, and there is an **unnatural** drive for more which has to do with lust, greed, and envy. It will never be satisfied and is not a natural expression of life and growth. It is to fill up an empty soul who is not growing in real life, the “life of

God.” We have to look at our motives to find out if we are growing or just lost in empty ambition or greed:

Eph. 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Eph. 4:19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

James 4:2 You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

God wants us to grow and achieve and have things. He desires to give us good things, but wants them to be going to a good part of us.

Psa. 145:16 You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

But, some desires we have are not from “living” parts of us, but lustful, ambitious, parts that are not of God. Growth has to come from good character, or it is not really growth at all.

Insert illustration: This is a good place for an illustration of someone who has either given up on growth, or has chased things that do not give life and as a result failed to grow in some significant area. A good example of that is someone who gets addicted. Their growth stops at the age or level at which they started using drugs. Or someone who pursues materialism and they stop growing spiritually or relationally.

4. Taking risks is always a part of growth, but risk taking is not the same as gambling.

Risk taking is part of what makes us grow. Risk is defined in the Integrity book as “putting something in danger of a bad outcome.” That happens when a toddler begins to walk, as she is trying something that could have a bad outcome, a fall. It happens when someone invests in a business, as they could lose their money. It happens in relationships when people invest their hearts, as they could be rejected or not loved in the end. And in reality, those are the only ways that growth can happen. It takes investment and risk.

Ecc. 11:1 ¶ Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.

Ecc. 11:4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

2Cor. 9:6 ¶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. (This passage is talking about giving, but the principle applies to other kinds of growth and giving of ourselves as well.)

Peter had to step out of the boat to find that he could walk on the water and that God could sustain him.

Matt. 14:29 ¶ “Come,” he said. ¶ Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

This kind of risk taking is a natural outcome of growth and abilities. A toddler is ready to walk, but a baby does not attempt it, nor would we allow him to. When someone starts a new business, it should be a natural outgrowth of abilities that she has developed, not a foolish venture. That is why investment and risk are not the same as gambling. It makes sense to take risk because it is based on knowledge, wisdom, ability, experience, and the like. Peter had experience with Jesus. But for someone to take the family’s savings and put it into some business that they know nothing about is not taking a risk. It is a gamble and is foolish. Increase does not occur then, but destruction does.

If someone’s character is impulsive, they will gamble and not take appropriate risks. As a result, they do not increase whatever they have, but lose it. Impulsive people do this in business all the time, as well as relationships. People take a gamble on someone they hardly know and marry them, or invest with them, or do a deal that they know little about.

Insert Illustration: Someone who took a big risky step to get out of the boat and grow and it changed their life.

5. There are ingredients that are necessary to growth, and you see people of integrated character using them.

For something to grow, it has to have three things:

- A. It must be an open system. If it is closed off to things from the outside, then it will not grow. Just as a plant has to take in new things, so does a person or a company.
- B. It must have some source of energy that is putting new things into it. It has to take in fuel.
- C. It must have a template for that growth. It has to have truth, code, structure or some sort of design that is guiding the growth.

Integrated characters open themselves up to outside input, like mentors, experiences, coaches, love, support, new information, etc. They are not closed systems who are guarded, defensive, or “know it all.” They are open to learning. In the bible’s view, they are humble.

Psa. 25:9 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

Next, they take in the energy of love and support from people. They take in encouragement, prodding, coaching, and things that add fuel to them. They are not too proud to say that they need other people.

Third, they take in truth to guide them as a template. They learn about whatever it is that they are trying to grow in by finding a structure that will guide that growth. They take classes, get coaching, get advanced degrees, read books, or study God’s word.

Prov. 24:3 By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established;

Prov. 24:4 through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.

Prov. 24:5 A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength;

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These three ingredients of openness, fuel, and a template are the biblical ingredients of Humility, Grace, and Truth. That is how God grows us, through our being humble and accepting His grace and truth:

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

6. Submission to Structures of Growth

You see people who grow have structured ways of growing. They do not do it randomly. They have regular disciplined practices that they invest themselves in. Spiritually, it may be daily quiet time and prayer. For personal growth, it may be a regular support group. For physical growth, it is regular workout time. But the ones who really grow have structured ways of doing it. They have groups, or a therapist or counselor, a mentoring relationship, take classes, or something. They do not depend on random growth.

One of the ways that you can tell how invested the person is in growth is by taking a look at finite measures of time, money and resources that they have

spent. You can go to their calendar or their checkbook and determine how much growth means to them. Is there a regular path of growth on the calendar? Is there money being spent? Those are indicators. As Jesus said:

Luke 12:34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

As Proverbs says:

Prov. 4:7 Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

Prov. 23:23 Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding.

Here are some examples of the kinds of structured growth experiences people of integrated character submit to. But to submit to these requires humility and discipline:

- Personal coaching
- Personal therapy
- A support group of other executives, parents, or people in personal or spiritual growth
- Training experiences
- Continuing education past what is required
- Retreats
- Accountability relationships
- Summits of other leaders
- Leadership training experiences that are not required
- Reading and study
- Courses
- Groups for spiritual development
- Marriage and couple's retreats
- Relationship seminars

- 12 Step Communities
- Personal trainers
- Spiritual directors
- Advanced degrees and education that is not required

7. People of mature character submit to mentors further down the road.

They are not too proud to have a mentor. They can submit to other people's accountability and wisdom, and see them as valuable to their own growth.

Prov. 10:17 He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.

Prov. 15:32 He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.

Prov. 15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Prov. 24:5 A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength;

Prov. 24:6 for waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers.

8. People of integrated character are able to balance enjoying the present with not wanting to stay there.

They possess contentment and drive at the same time. They enjoy the gratitude of what God has given them and what they have achieved at any given juncture. They celebrate it. But, they do not want to rest on their laurels and not accomplish more. The one does not do away with the other.

Some people have such drive and ambition that they are driven and can never enjoy the present, or an accomplishment. Others accomplish something or get somewhere, and then just sit there. They never accomplish anything more. They become stagnant, or retired. Healthy people do neither.

Prov. 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

If someone is always putting off chasing dreams and goals, they will have hope deferred. But, when a goal is accomplished, the mature person is also able to

be fulfilled by it and it becomes a “tree of life” inside of them, always giving off fruit of enjoyment. It is not “spoiled” by envy of something “more” or some other kind of devaluation of their accomplishment. They embrace it and enjoy it. So, we need both the ability to want more and then the ability to have it become a satisfying tree of life when we attain it. Then, we need to want a new goal as well to keep from getting a sick heart. It is a circular balance in life.

9. Mature people push themselves to do things they never have done before.

To grow, we have to get out of our comfort zone. This is similar to taking risks, but risks can be taken in areas that we are familiar with. This part has to do with trying new things, things we have no skill or experience in doing. That is how we grow and attain new skills.

To do that requires humility, the lack of a fear of failure, and no need for others to see you as having it all together. But when a person can do this, they grow forever. Research has shown that even in elderly people, if they are using their brains that they are developing new brain cells, for example. It is good practice for us to always be learning to do new things.

Insert Illustration: Show where someone tried something never tried before and it caused huge growth or success. Maybe use a ministry example to cast vision for your people to try teaching a class, or leading a ministry, or discipling kids, or sharing their faith. Or it could be in another area of life as well.

10. Integrated characters understand the need for rest and are able to use it.

If a person is driven, then they cannot rest. But God has designed rest for our bodies, minds and spirits to re-create. We are replenishing and regenerating when we rest. Research has shown that regeneration is important to the brain as well as the body. Continued stress and demand is not good.

This comes from the image of God who Himself is a person of rest. He rested after creation, and then established a day for us to rest as well. Genesis says:

Gen. 2:2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

Gen. 2:3 And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

It is a character problem when someone does not think that they need rest because they are so driven, and their need to accomplish does not make room for it. That can be a sign of omnipotence, driven-ness, fear, or a lot of things. It is part of the created order for everything to rest after a time of work. Even fields lie fallow.

Insert Illustration: You could choose between one where someone really pulled back and re-invented, and then came forth with something great, or one where someone did not and burned out.

11. Growing people are also invested in helping others to grow as well.

Integrated characters do not just take in growth for themselves only. They “give it away,” and invest in others. Mature people are usually sharing their wisdom and experience with others who are not as far along the path as they are. If they are not, and just looking out for themselves and wanting more for their own future, then that is a sign of some sort of inability to grasp where they have come from, and give back to others. It is still showing self-centeredness, which makes one question their growth.

12. The integrated character is growing in many areas of life, and not just one.

Some people might really grow in one or two areas of life because they are driven to do that, but are neglecting other areas. If someone for example is spending all of their growth effort in their career, and they are not growing in their relational world, they may lose their marriage or their relationship with their children. They have become lopsided. Likewise, if someone is just growing relationally and not developing talents, then they are not balanced either.

Sometimes because of greed, a person is driven just to work and ignores relationships. That is one way that this is a character issue. Or, they could be afraid of love, and as a result, lean on their strong areas of work to compensate. Either way, an imbalanced life is not an integrated character in the image of God. God is able to love and to work, to play and to celebrate. He does it all and asks us to be growing in multiple areas as well. That is the path to maturity.

As Peter shows us:

2Pet. 1:5 ¶ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

2Pet. 1:6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;

2Pet. 1:7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

2Pet. 1:8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2Pet. 1:9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

In this passage, we see a call to growth in a number of areas, and that is what leads to a well-rounded person who will not be “ineffective and unproductive.” But, being restored and mature in the image of God, they will be

able to be fruitful in all areas of life. God wants us to prosper from achieving growth in all areas:

3John 2 ¶ Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

Deut. 6:24 The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.

Look at, for example, the fullness of character abilities that the Prov. 31 woman has:

Prov. 31:10 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.

Prov. 31:11 Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.

Prov. 31:12 She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

Prov. 31:13 She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands.

Prov. 31:14 She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar.

Prov. 31:15 She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls.

Prov. 31:16 She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.

Prov. 31:17 She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.

Prov. 31:18 She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.

Prov. 31:19 In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

Prov. 31:20 She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.

Prov. 31:21 When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

Prov. 31:22 She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple.

Prov. 31:23 Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.

Prov. 31:24 She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes.

Prov. 31:25 She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.

Prov. 31:26 She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

Prov. 31:27 She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Prov. 31:28 Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

Prov. 31:29 "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."

Prov. 31:30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

Prov. 31:31 Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Conclusion: Growth is natural, as part of the created order. But it is not automatic. The person's heart, the soil, has to be right. And the right ingredients have to be present. If all of that is there, with a willing spirit, then healthy people grow. If they are not, then there might be a character issue that is in the way. If we are going to make life work, then we have to be focusing on our character growth in the ways that God has designed it to happen. We have to be open systems, take in the right ingredients, and take the steps and risks that make it all happen. If we do, an exciting life will be the outcome as we continue to grow for as long as we live, never getting stale.