

Growing Spiritually (1953)

Foreword by Timothy C. Tennent

The genius of E. Stanley Jones was his understanding that our growth as Christians involves both “crisis” as well as “process.” The “crisis” moments are those times when we come to the altar to receive prayer and guidance in our lives. These are important and vital moments all through the Christian tradition. As early as the 2nd chapter of Acts we read about that first ingathering of believers who listened to Peter’s sermon and were “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37) and wanted to know what to do. But, we also know of the importance of steady, daily growth over a long time which helps to equip us to be effective and holy Christians in the world. The Scripture always honors both. We rejoice in the divine encounter Paul had on the Road to Damascus, but we all appreciate the long nurturing of Timothy by his grandmother, Lois and by his mother, Eunice. This book by E. Stanley Jones is designed to be read over an entire year. Each day there are scriptural verses, a meditation, a prayer and a thought for the day. Christians have used guides like this for their daily devotional life since the rise of Pietism in the 17th century. However, most of these devotional guides go quickly out of print because they are so bound to the particular issues and challenges of a single generation. However, this spiritual devotional guide is timeless and profitable for any Christian in any place or time. There are few that meet this criteria. Oswald Chamber’s *My Utmost for His Highest* is one example. Another would be *Table in the Wilderness* by Watchman Nee. These classics have never been out of print because the church has found them both edifying and profitable. *Growing Spiritually* by E. Stanley Jones deserves to take its place among these timeless devotional guides. The reason is that Jones sets out not simply to inspire you, but to directly address the timeless issues which Christians face which hinders their growth in discipleship. May this new publication of E. Stanley Jones be read and appreciated by a whole new generation of Christians. For, as Jones states in the opening line of this devotional, “you are made to grow.” May this volume help you to do just that.

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PREFACE by Anne Mathews-Younes, Ed.D.

The devotional *Growing Spiritually*, is a study on the fruits of the spirit. “We are made to grow into the measure of the stature of Christ. In Christ the past is buried, the present blessed and the future beckoning.” We grow by “all the stimulus of Christ.” (Phil.2:1) In *Growing Spiritually*, Jones focuses on the significance of the devotional experience in our lives. Without this daily and consistent focus we risk continued (and even dangerous) immaturity. Jones emphasizes that the need for spiritual growth is critical, not just in itself but because of the unprecedented demands placed on the human spirit by our complex world and its myriad problems. He writes, The center of almost every acute problem, personal, social, economic, political, and international is moral and spiritual immaturity. The problems and possibilities in almost every situation have outgrown the persons. Our world problems and challenges require mature persons, however in many instances the persons who handle those challenges are immature. Our problems are costly as powers are put into the hands of people morally and spiritually too immature to handle them for the collective good.

We need a place to begin to address this urgent need for maturity. Jones tells us that it begins with us, with each individual. The good news is that God wills our maturity and we are made for spiritual maturity. However, we need to cooperate with God and be open to receiving his beckoning. Jones found that his own spiritual growth was directly related to his consistent devotional practice. Jones spells out how we are made for growth and why we need to create an environment that makes growth possible, and even stimulates this growth. God has set the urge within us for growth and we can choose to make use of the mental and spiritual environment in which we live to further our inherent growth. Jones helps us to understand the hindrances to growth that may deter us, things like fear, anxiety, worry, resentment, and self-preoccupation. The reader is shown concrete steps to release him or her from such hindrances of maturity

and lay open the path to joy and peace. Jones offers many powerful examples of human growth. The most striking example of is of a lay woman, Mary Webster. (Mary's story begins on page 224) He writes, The very center of the Christian faith is the Incarnation, in which the Divine Word becomes flesh—the Idea becomes Fact. All other faiths are the word become word, the idea projected as an idea. In Jesus the Idea walked. It spoke in human life and manifested Itself in human relationships. It transformed religion from idealism to realism. Where this faith is sincerely tried, it becomes incarnate as fact. It works in human relationships. And wherever it is tried, it produces something so exquisitely beautiful that we stand “lost in wonder, love, and praise.” From many outstanding examples of Christian growth I am picking one, for several reasons. One is that the person is an ordinary person, with ordinary education, with ordinary’ abilities. The second is that she was placed in a very commonplace situation—on a farm. The third is that at first sight she seems not to be endowed with particular physical gifts. — And fourth, she wasn’t always what she is now. Her sister-in-law said: “Before her conversion her attitudes were all wrong.” And because she was average, I pick her out to let the average person see what can happen when average life is fully surrendered to God and responsive to His will. And I pick her out because in doing so I can easily look past her and beyond her and above her to the source of her life and power— Christ. Mary is not a lone star, aloof and unique: she is an example of ordinary human nature responding extraordinarily to God’s grace. God has no favorites and what God did for Mary Webster he will do for any of us provided we come to him with simplicity and singleheartedness, to grow spiritually. God’s grace is available to you as you choose to Grow Spiritually! This book could not have been reprinted without the assistance of our entire E. Stanley Jones Foundation staff, including Rev. Shivraj Mahendra, whose publishing skill and theological perspective contributed greatly to the project, and Nicholas Younes whose writing and editing expertise always ensure the updated text is clear as he tenaciously pursued the needed annotations. I also want to thank Dr. Timothy Tennent, President of Asbury Theological Seminary for his Foreword and endorsement for this new edition of this E. Stanley Jones classic. I am surrounded by gifted people and am truly blessed because of them. I trust that in turn you will be blessed by this book.

ANNE MATHEWS-YOUNES, ED.D., D. MIN. President

The E. Stanley Jones Foundation

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INTRODUCTION by E. Stanley Jones

In the writing of all my books, I have tried first to sense a need, and then I have the book move in to meet that need, however inadequately. The need has been the call. This has been especially true of this one. One would have thought that, in view of the need, there would have been a spate of books on the subject of “Growing Spiritually.” But when I asked my publishers about books on that subject, they replied, to my astonishment, that they could not think of any. Nor could I. Plenty of books are on various phases of the subject of growth and development, especially in psychology, but few, if any, covering the subject from a definitively Christian standpoint. This book tries to step into that need and meet it. And it tries to meet it at the place where spiritual growth is made or marred, namely, at the place of the devotional. It is at the place of the devotional that we go up or down spiritually. It is the crux. For in the devotional we expose ourselves to God’s resources, we assimilate them and grow by them. But it must be an all-round growth of the total person— intellectual, emotional, and volitional. If the devotional becomes merely the emotional, then decay sets in the other parts, and that means a decay of the whole. We must grow totally or grow lopsidedly, which is not growth, except in the sense that a “growth” comes out on the body—an excrescence. It is a species of spiritual cancer—cells growing by feeding on the rest.

The necessity for spiritual growth is not merely our personal problem— it is that, but it is more: it is our world problem. At the center of almost every acute problem— personal, social, economic, political, and international—is moral and spiritual immaturity. The problems and the possibilities in almost every situation have outgrown the persons. We are immature persons dealing with mature problems. Dr. Rebecca Beard says: “The consuming illness of our times is our immaturity—our refusal to grow up.” We have on our hands powers and possibilities for mature people, but the people who handle those powers are immature. Here is a man who is supposedly the head of a home, in a situation demanding maturity, but he is emotionally immature. He creates havoc. The same thing happens in larger situations and organizations— the school, the church,

business, the state, and international relationships. Each time the area of possible havoc grows larger. Deficiency in our moral and spiritual growth means devastation around us. Our immaturity is costly—increasingly so. For larger and larger power and responsibility is put more and more into the hands of people morally and spiritually too immature to handle them for the collective good. As has often been said, our intellectual lives have outgrown our moral and spiritual lives. We have received grown-up powers handled by half-grown persons. And that is serious. For the powers we now have are such that an irresponsible mistake by a few immature people can set the world on fire—literally. Spiritual maturity is no longer a luxury for a few; it is a necessity for us all. John Foster Dulles tells us how he was driven into being a Christian from seeing international conferences dealing with great issues break down because the people who took part in them lacked a spirit which would have made the conferences a success—the Christian spirit. Today we see all life around us being tangled and snarled because of a lack of an intangible something, and that something is Christian maturity. Through it anything can happen anywhere. It is the key—the master key to every situation. Then to produce that Christian maturity must be the major business and endeavor of our race. It is that or chaos. So this book attempts to point the way to that maturity of character without which we will remain an infantile civilization. If it furthers that maturity only by inches, well—it will be something, and it will be something in the right direction.

Where do we begin? Where everything begins—with ourselves. “If religion doesn’t begin with the individual, it does not begin. If it ends with the individual, it ends.” The beginning must be within. We cannot point to the lack of spiritual maturity in others and leave it at that, for that may turn out to be what in psychology is called projection—a projecting on others the faults and lacks we find in ourselves and thus mentally escaping the responsibility. But we must not leave the reader feeling the club of necessity to be spiritually mature hanging over his head. We cannot be scared or clubbed into maturity. It must be a beckoning instead of a bludgeoning. We must feel the call. Fortunately that call comes from above and from within. God wills our maturity. He has arranged the world and us with one thing in view, namely, our maturity. And fortunately we are made for maturity—for growth, for development, for perfection. Everything within us works toward that end, everything except one thing—sin, or evil.

This is the unnatural intrusion throwing monkey wrenches into the machinery of human living. Except for this, all else—I repeat, all else—is made for spiritual maturity. We are destined to be mature, to be perfect. “Everything,” says Tagore, “lifts up strong hands after perfection.” It does. We can live against that destiny and cancel it. But it is our destiny, written into blood and tissue and nerve and cell and organ—written in us. All we have to do is to clear away hindrances and meet the conditions of growth, and we grow—grow out of an inner necessity. “The earth bears fruit of itself—the earth—and we are a part of that earth and are made in our inner structure to bear fruit of ourselves. God and nature and we can thus cooperate in our growth. And when we do, then nothing in heaven or on earth can stop us from growing. But it all depends on our cooperation with God. Without this, the nerve of our growth is cut. With it, then, anything can happen—the sky and beyond is the limit. “I am the tadpole of an archangel,” cried an exultant soul, but we are more: we are made to be made in His likeness. “We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.” But it won’t just happen. We have to will to grow and to create the conditions for growth. Not that growth is strain—it is not. It is receptivity, as we shall see. But we have to will to receive. The most open time of receptivity is the devotional time. Here the pores of our being are open to God and life, and we are receptive to our fingertips. Hence I have linked growth with devotional exercises, following the plan of my other books, a page a day. But while this book is divided into a page a day, it follows a theme throughout. The page a day is not an isolated dab of unconnected ideas and suggestions. I have tried to make it all a consistent whole, going from the beginning stages on through to maturity. It tries to expound the possibility of the total growth of the total personality. This book can be read a page a day; or, since it is divided into a week’s complete thought, it can be used as a study book for group discussions; or, since one theme runs through the whole, it can be read straight through as an ordinary book. Growth in life is life’s greatest adventure. The business of life is to live and to live abundantly. But most people know everything about life except how to live it. As one who has tried this business of living in every climate and in almost all conditions around the world and has found that it works, I would share my secret with you. It is not mine. I found it at the feet of Another—a gift. One night in India after a very hard week in which it seemed that everything adverse had piled upon

me, I found myself awakening before daylight and saying to myself: “I can feel myself grow.” I could. But it was all “in spite of.” And it was not my own. I had learned a secret. I share that secret with you in this book. For it is “an open secret”—simple and learnable by anybody, by anybody who wants to grow and wants it enough to pay the price.

E. STANLEY JONES