

GRADE SEVEN

PERSONAL GROWTH, PART I: THE HUMAN PERSON



The growth and change experienced during adolescence are part of the unfolding of God's plan for our development as mature Christian persons.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop in the young adolescent a sense of self-worth and self-respect nurtured and strengthened by one's knowledge of God's love.
- To acquaint the young adolescent with an understanding of the virtues necessary for a life of goodness and faith.

I. EXPERIENCES OF GROWTH: PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, EMOTIONAL, INTELLECTUAL, SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL

Adolescence is a period of rapid growth. It begins at a different time for each person. It is part of God's plan.

- During adolescence, our bodies grow physically and develop sexually. [362, 364, 369]
- Because our bodies are changing so quickly, we have new feelings about ourselves. [1764]
- In adolescence our minds are developing. It is a time of broadening the scope of our learning. We face different and more complex challenges in our thinking. [158-159]
- It is a time of change in our relationships with parents, friends and others, as we strive to become more independent and build lasting friendships. [2206, 2217, 2347]
- Our relationship with God changes and often deepens. We no longer take our faith and relationship with the Church for granted. [27, 33, 94, 99]

Like the rest of creation, we grow and change through predictable patterns of development. But unlike the rest of creation, we have been given free will by God, and can choose to cooperate with God in our own development or to impede growth and refuse to develop into mature human beings. [1704-05, 1707-09, 1732]

God's grace and guidance lead us to maturity according to our potential and God's plan for us. [1810, 2000, 2012]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Introduce the prayer by telling the young people of this new time of growth in their lives, of God's presence during this time of change and how God is speaking to them through sacred scripture and through others.
- Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-4.
- Invite the young people to reflect on the many ways God has been present in their lives. Ask them to write a petition for God's blessing on them at this particular time.

II. GROWTH IN THE VIRTUES

The virtues are habitual and firm dispositions to do the good. They allow us to give the best of ourselves. [1803-04, 1833]

An important aspect of spiritual growth is growth in the virtues. Virtues must be learned by deliberate, repeated actions, in which we are helped by God's grace. [1810, 1839]

There are many human virtues. Four pivotal ones (the cardinal virtues) spoken of in Scripture are: [1805, 1834]

- **Prudence:** The ability to see which course of action is good and to follow it. [1806, 1835]

- **Justice:** The firm will to give to God and neighbor what is due them. [1807, 1836]
- **Fortitude:** The determination to keep doing good in spite of difficulties that may impede us. [1808, 1837]
- **Temperance:** The ability to exercise moderation in seeking pleasure and in the use of created goods. [1809, 1838]

The root of all human virtues can be found in the virtues that reflect directly to God (theological virtues). They are: [1812-13, 1840-41]

- **Faith:** The virtue by which we believe in God and all that God has revealed. [1814-16, 1842]
- **Hope:** The virtue by which we trust in Christ's promises and desire God's kingdom and anticipate eternal life as our happiness. [1817-21, 1843]
- **Charity:** The virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. [1822-29, 1844]

Growth in the virtues is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹ The *fruits* of the Holy Spirit² show forth God's work in us. [736, 1830-32]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Ask the young people to think of a story when God has blessed them.
- Read Luke 2:41-52.
- After they have listened, lead them in the following reflection and questions: We, like Jesus, need to grow in wisdom, age, and favor/grace; in Luke's Gospel, this is made clear.
 - How have you grown in wisdom and come closer to God?*
 - Which of the virtues would help you to grow closer to God at this time in your life?*
 - Ask God to help you.*
- Invite the young people to talk to God about the ways in which they need to continue to grow in wisdom and grace.
- After a few minutes of silence, read the following closing prayer: Jesus, you know what it is like to be growing up. Help us never to forget that you love and understand us even when we find it difficult to love and understand ourselves. Enable us each day to grow in wisdom and in your grace. Amen.

¹ See Grade 7, Sacraments, III. Confirmation, F. Living the Sacrament of Confirmation.

² Ibid.

III. CHALLENGES TO GROWTH DURING ADOLESCENCE

A. Accepting Ourselves

It is a challenge to accept ourselves when we are in a process of growth. One of the most important realizations is that our value, beauty and worth as a person comes from being made in God's image and likeness, and God loves us as we are. Accepting ourselves in the present helps us to grow into the people God calls us to be. [604, 1710, 2012, 2167]

B. Self-Direction

While much of our growth is the result of biological processes that we cannot direct, there are many aspects of our growth that we can influence. [1731]

- Our bodily well-being is fostered by eating healthful foods, getting sufficient sleep, exercising regularly, and by refusing to smoke or to abuse alcohol and drugs. [1809, 2289, 2290-91]
- Our spiritual and personal well-being is fostered by praying, by participating in the sacramental life of the Church and by using our time to develop our talents and share them with others. We do this by accepting others, being kind to them, and talking and listening to them. Avoiding excessive use of television, electronic devices and time spent on social media frees us for more creative activities (i.e., enjoyment of the natural world, developing one's mind) and learning to be of service. [294, 1838, 1879, 2725]

C. Responsibility

Our decisions have consequences not only for ourselves, but for others, especially our family and friends. [1905, 1913-14]

Learning to accept responsibility for the consequences of our actions is part of growing up. [1734, 1743, 1781]

Keeping commitments, even when they cause us inconvenience or when we would rather be doing something else, is a way to grow in responsibility. [1836, 2410]

D. Our Need for Others

Other people can help us in our emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual growth. [2038, 2223-26, 2232]

The example and experience of parents, relatives, teachers, older brothers and sisters, and other adults we know and admire can help us to understand what we are feeling or thinking. We are always free to seek out their advice. We are not alone. [1879, 1936-37]

E. Our Need for God

Our relationship with God changes and develops throughout our lives. God is always calling us to a fuller life, always sustaining and supporting us. [2560, 2567, 2591]

As we mature, we need to grow in our experience and knowledge of God in Jesus and to find new ways of relating to God, both in prayer and in our life situations. [2650, 2745]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Read the following scripture passage from Ephesians (3:17-21) to the group, asking the young people to reflect on each line and its meaning in their lives:

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Conclude the silent reflection with this prayer:

Loving God, help us to understand that you want each of us to grow to our full potential, rooted in your unconditional love. May Jesus be the Way for us, and may the Spirit be the power enabling us to cooperate with you and listen to your call to growth. Amen.