

Maturing in character & faith by using an inductive growth method

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Summary

Nowadays many born-again believers have a deep desire to grow in their faith, but don't know how to accomplish this goal. After introducing some basics of faith this paper describes an inductive growth method (iGM), which can be used alone, in pairs (as a mentoring model) or in a network of believers in order to gain a better knowledge of oneself, other people, or God. Inductive means moving from specific things (such as personal experiences) to general items (such as the attributes and behavior of men and God). The iGM's core goal is to formulate deep questions and to work out their answers in honesty and openness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These questions are designed to address a person's character, personality, intellectual, emotional and behavioral patterns, habits, lifestyle, natural and spiritual gifts as well as calling and ministry. For this, spiritual perception and being still in God's presence are crucial. The functioning of the inductive growth method is illustrated by an example dealing with a person's unemployment.

Key words

Maturity, character, faith, inductive growth method, attribute, behavior, pattern, reasoning

1. Introduction

Put yourself into the shoes of the man born blind (John 9:1-7). After being healed by Jesus he was able to observe his surroundings for the first time ever. What a breakthrough! Surely his mind was on a thousand things he wanted to see and try out with his newly gained eyesight.

Born-again believers are in a similar situation today. After repenting and experiencing rebirth they are given spiritual eyesight through the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-15). They are able to know God's truth and behave accordingly. But in practice the picture looks rather different. Many of us are stuck in the fog on a plateau below the summit from where we should have been able to see God's glory. How can we climb to the summit and really see God?

The iGM is a possible way of achieving this goal. It is similar to the inductive Bible study method (Arthur 2000, InterVarsity 2004, Klemke 2004), but instead of using a Bible passage it starts with personal experiences in one's daily life. Inductive means going from specific things (such as personal experiences) to general items (such as the attributes and behavior of men and God). By doing so, the iGM applies a holistic balance of the analytical/intellectual and the contemplative/experimental so that the whole person including body, soul and spirit is involved as one in the iGM.

The iGM's main work is spiritual perception and reflection with the help of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this is to ask deep questions and work out the answers in honesty and openness under guidance of the Holy Spirit, addressing a person's character, personality, intellectual, emotional and behavioral patterns, habits, lifestyle, natural and spiritual gifts as well as calling and ministry. For this, three gifts of the Holy Spirit - words of wisdom, words of knowledge and the discerning of spirits (1.Cor. 12:8-10) - play a crucial role (John 16:13).

Together with this, the triad of spiritual perception, thinking and doing should be in balance. This will require times of stillness with God. The iGM seems to be more suitable for people for whom spiritual perception, reflection and analytical reasoning are not too difficult.

The significant contribution of the self-diagnosis method (iGM) presented here is the idea of thinking honestly and openly about one's self and then **following through** and taking practical steps based on the obvious conclusions one has reached (Ps. 139:23-24; Heb. 4:12-13). The difficulty is often that somehow we just don't follow through in practical ways on obvious things. We don't even bother to think through things in an honest way. We get caught up in our emotions, which sometimes can simply be an excuse not to get honest with ourselves - an excuse to put off building on the rock as Jesus told us to do. For this reason the author strongly emphasizes the need to work with someone else as a mentor or a trusted friend. That is, don't just draw conclusions about yourself and start acting on correcting them. Draw conclusions about yourself, write them down and ask a trusted friend or two to draw their own conclusions about you, write them down and give them to you. You look at your conclusions about yourself and their conclusions about you and then draw your final conclusions about the practical steps you should take. After a designated period of time you could redo the same evaluation process with the same people to see if everybody has reached the same conclusions about your progress.

2. Some basics of faith

2.1. Faith – what is it?

This existential question is frequently asked and leads often to unsatisfying answers. Just as the Good News of the crucified Christ is a secret (1.Cor. 2:1-7; Eph. 3:3-6), so biblical faith in its essence is also a secret (1.Tim. 3:9), which only believers can comprehend. Faith is the key to God (Eph. 3:12) and a free gift from Him to men (Rom. 12:3), who seek God with their whole heart and soul (Jer. 29:13). Faith is the foundation and condition for forgiveness of sin, eternal life and all other blessings given to God's children (John 3:16; 3:36).

2.2. Faith – how can it be summarized in short and precise terms?

The following pattern is very suitable in the author's opinion:

Faith = Trust and Obedience,

where obedience can be divided into listening and applying, resulting in the **faith pattern** below as the ABC of biblical faith:

Faith = Listening (A) => Trusting (B) => Applying (C).

Like a red thread the faith pattern goes through the whole Bible and is learned by daily training as was practiced by our Lord Jesus (Heb. 5:8-9). This pattern also contributes to greater personal knowledge and deeper conviction regarding God's revelations (Heb. 11:1). The history of the people of Israel illustrates clearly the faith pattern. After having an encounter with God, listening to His word and knowing His will, the people of Israel were obliged to behave according to the revealed purposes of God based on trusting His love, care and power (Deut. 4:1-2). The listening to God and the perception of His presence requires sufficient times of stillness with the Father, as was practiced by Jesus himself. This pattern of

listening, trusting and applying builds an undivided unit of faith, where the emphasis lies on applying the knowledge of faith as proof of its truth (Jam. 2:14-26). This is expressed by the saying “I hear and forget again. I see and remember. I apply and understand.” This means that true knowledge of faith can only be gained by application of this knowledge.

2.3. Faith – What hinders it?

Basically, disturbances in faith growth can be subdivided into the following categories according to the faith pattern introduced before:

- A) Problems in listening
- B) Problems in trusting
- C) Problems in applying

Disturbances can originate from more than just one category. Possible causes for them may be shortcomings or deficiencies in:

- Inner healing according to the **cleansing pattern** in 1.John 1:9:
Acceptance => Confession => Forgiveness => Purification => Repentance
- Sanctification and walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh (Rom. 8:1-17; see explanation below)
- Trust in God and conviction of God’s unfailing love (Rom. 8:28)
- Commitment to Jesus and setting of priorities (Gal. 2:20):
What is important to me? What is less important to me?
Who or what takes decisions in my life?
- Fellowship and quality time with God and Bible study times (Mat. 6:6; Mk. 1:35-39; Heb. 4:12): How and for what do I use my time (time management)?
- Motivation, attitude and determination to grow in faith with God’s help (Eph. 4:15; Phil. 3:7-14; 1.Pet. 4:1-2) and to live in victory over sin (Mat. 5:29-30; 5:48; Heb. 12:1-11),
- Care for one’s inner being (soul & spirit) (2.Cor. 4:16):
How do I deal with my own inner being?
- Care for the own body and material goods (1.Cor. 6:15-20; Mat. 6:33):
How do I deal with my own body and material goods?
- Further development of character (Rom. 12:1-3),
- Further development of natural and spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:4-8)
- Ministry to neighbors and in the church (Rom. 12:9-12),
- Care for relations with other people (Rom. 12:13-21; Mat. 5:23-25; 7:1-5; 7:12):
Do I care for other human beings around me?

Their sequence is no hint for their importance in a specific case.

Regarding quality time and care for one’s inner being, the triad of spiritual perception, thinking and doing should be in a balance, which requires times of stillness in God’s presence. Yet, the present lifestyle of many people with its restlessness causes this triad to get out of balance so that many of us only live in the words of thinking and doing. They neglect the perception that keeps the inner being alive and leads to a deeper relationship with God. True spiritual perception goes through the body and senses into one’s heart. The human heart feels through the body because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1.Cor. 3:16). Jesus kept the triad of perception, thinking and doing in a harmonic balance. Thus, He was able to perceive people and spirits with great clarity and discernment so that He could read the heart and mind of people. Jesus nurtured his perception by spending quality time with the Father in stillness,

contemplation and prayer. Resting in the presence of God has a strong refreshing power. It leads us to a spiritual alertness that gives a clearer and deeper perception of God and man. Fasting and keeping the Sabbath also play a crucial role in this because they sharpen the senses and help to increase one's perception (Jalics 2003).

Sanctification and walking in the Spirit are important topics for growing in faith. There are many books about them like Bonhoeffer (1995), Bridges (2003) or Sauer (1994). The biblical truth of them can be summarized as follows. A believer should grow from Rom. 6 ("Christ for me": repentance and rebirth) through Rom. 8 ("Christ in me": sanctification and walking in the Spirit) to Rom. 12-15 ("Christ through me": ministry), also described in Heb. 5:11-14. Yet, many growth disturbances become evident because neither Christ nor the Holy Spirit through the new spiritual nature govern a person (character, personality, intellectual, emotional and behavioral patterns, habits, lifestyle, natural and spiritual gifts as well as calling and ministry), but rather the old fleshly self governs (Rom. 7:14-25). As with faith, repentance and rebirth, sanctification also is a secret and a free gift from Him to men, who at the same time should strive, pray and fight for sanctification with their whole heart, determination and will power (Rom. 6:1-11; 2.Cor. 5:17; 1.Th. 4:3; Heb. 12:1-11). Like faith sanctification is a symbiosis of God's will and man's will.

Helpful questions:

- Who or what reigns in your life?
- Who or what has the power in your life?
- Who or what controls your life?
- Where am I in the growth progress of sanctification?

The measuring rods for growth in faith and sanctification are: 1) freedom in Christ, according to God's will, which enables one to serve neighbors and to minister in church; and 2) the fruits of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:13-26; comp. Mt. 7:15-23). If we hear God's voice calling us to repent, we should listen => trust => apply, what He personally reveals to us (Mk. 9:23-24; John 10:13-17; Heb. 3:7-19; 4:7-12; 4:14-16; 1.Joh. 1:9).

3. An inductive growth method (iGM)

3.1. What is the iGM und how does it work?

The overall goal of the method described here is to "grow in faith and sanctification so that the whole person with character, personality, intellectual, emotional and behavioral patterns, habits, lifestyle, natural and spiritual gifts as well as calling and ministry develops more and more into the image of Jesus Christ."

The iGM is divided into four steps that build on each other and dependent on a cause-effect-model, which is successfully used in many other areas of life. The four steps are:

1. Data logging: **What** have I experienced?
2. Analysis: **How** have I perceived these experiences?
How am I feeling about them? How am I thinking about them?
3. Research of causes: **Why** have I perceived these experiences in such a way?
4. Conclusions: What results and consequences can be drawn from parts 1 to 3?

Each step involves an open and honest posting and answering of questions that should be as specific as possible in order to set tangible goals in one's life. They are needed to grow in

faith and sanctification together with a firm structure for accountability (formal through a mentor, or informal through Christian peers).

About 1.

Describe personal experiences in your daily life at home, in meetings, during Bible studies or at any other place in a written (!) format because a textual formulation of them deepens the understanding and helps us to process them. For the data logging write down what you have experienced, felt and thought as accurately as possible.

Helpful questions:

- What did I exactly experience, feel and think in this situation?
- What was easy for me? What was difficult for me?
- What gave me joy? What disappointed me?
- What motivated me? What got me down?
- What did I experience in my inner self (starting point)?
- What did I experience with other people or objects (horizontal axis)?
- What did I experience with God (vertical axis)?

About 2.

The analysis of all logged experiences about an event, which can stretch over a longer time period, has the goal to better understand the person with her/his attributes and behavior. The main focus is on a person's character, personality, intellectual, emotional and behavioral patterns, habits, lifestyle, natural and spiritual gifts as well as calling and ministry.

Helpful questions:

- How did I exactly behave in this situation?
- How did I exactly feel and think?
- How did my character become noticeable in this situation? What role did it play?
- How did my personality become apparent in this situation?
- How did my natural and spiritual gifts become apparent in this situation?
- How did my calling and ministry become apparent in this situation?

About 3.

The research of causes uses the logged data and analysis to identify a person's attributes and behavior. It searches for reasons why a person behaves, feels and thinks in the way as described in the log file. This goal is often placed too high and is not reachable (Jer. 17:9-10). Besides, the research about causes depends very much on the three gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are words of wisdom, knowledge and distinguishing between spirits (1.Cor. 12:8-10). During research the main focus is again on a person's character, personality, intellectual, emotional and behavioral patterns, habits, lifestyle, natural and spiritual gifts as well as calling and ministry.

Helpful questions:

- Why did I behave like this in that situation?
- Why did I feel and think like this?
- What are the causes for my behavior, feelings and thoughts?
- Where did I see success or fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)? Why?
- What are my strong points? What are my weaknesses? Why?
- What are my natural and spiritual gifts? What are not my natural and spiritual gifts? Why?
- What is my calling? What is not my calling? Why?
- What is my ministry? What is not my ministry? Why?

About 4.

The conclusions summarize the results of the first three steps and draw from them the required consequences. This step is often decisive as to whether a person is able and/or willing to seriously apply the drawn consequences, or at least try to move towards the given direction in order to grow in his or her faith.

Helpful questions:

- What can I specifically pray for?
- What shortcomings or deficiencies do I see in my life? What can I do to overcome them?
- What is too much for me? Where do I need help?
- What other help could I use offered through e.g. other believers, friends, literature, seminars, counseling, etc.?
- How can I further develop and mature in the different areas of my life (character, personality, intellectual, emotional and behavioral patterns, habits, lifestyle, natural and spiritual gifts as well as calling and ministry), for example, by leadership training or mentoring?

3.2. What are the limits of the iGM?

The iGM should help that God has access to all secret places in our lives. All unrecognized sin should be revealed. We should examine ourselves as to whether we are in the faith (2.Cor. 13:5). But there are limits other humans shouldn't cross over expressed by the following statement: "In counselling work only in the torch light of the Holy Spirit. **Never go further!**" How wise this is experience many of us in counselling because the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, not us.

Many people are emotionally in a critical state and very often tempted when they start sharing their situations with others. To apply a method like the iGM could be quite dangerous for them because they are confronted with past and new challenges at the same time. A person could become separate and push the own guilt aside. It has happened that new believers committed suicide because they felt overwhelmed by what was expected from them. A simpler method based on repentance, trust and obedience according to the ABC faith pattern could be more suitable in such difficult situations. This is biblical and practical for all people involved.

Perhaps an analysis method like the iGM has its place more in medicine than in a discipleship program because it's quite dangerous to deal with human souls and feelings. This is the reason why professional counselling is needed, and lay counsellors can cause a lot of damage.

Many people are also not used to be confronted with their own problems. They would break without a solution on the horizon, without the cross and God's grace. It's also important to point first to Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Besides, one's teaching about God should be biblical because without trust in the God of the Bible, nobody can grow in faith.

Several parts of the iGM are similar to the spirituality of monasteries and their religious exercises. The discipline to do them is remarkable but they can also lead to spiritual routine and inner dryness, if the grace and power of the Holy Spirit is not sufficiently emphasized. Paul had persecuted the church, but he said: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1.Cor. 15:10). The fruit of the Holy Spirit is also joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10). Many things in life become much easier when we have learnt to be joyful in Jesus. In

the Lord's supper we take our eyes away from ourselves and look to Jesus who won the victory over sin on the cross (Heb. 12:2).

God talks to us in many different ways but He mainly communicates with us through His Word. The Bible advises us to meditate on God's Word day and night (Ps. 119:148) and to pray continuously (Eph. 6:18). In prayer and talking with God our inner being is shifted into the presence of God, clarifying our thoughts and giving us more insights. Besides, we have God's promise in James 1:5: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him".

4. An example for the iGM: unemployment

The example in this chapter illustrates how the iGM works. Inductive is here the personal experience of unemployment (the specific item) that reveals the quality of a person's character, personality and behavior as well as the maturity of his or her faith and personal relationship with God (the general items). The results show a very limited faith in God and personal deficiencies. The consequences are a further step in the growth process by experiencing the cleansing pattern in 1.John 1:9. The example is written in the I-form for better understanding.

1. Data logging: **What** have I experienced?

After finishing my last project my boss told me that my present contract wouldn't be extended due to lack of finances.

2. Analysis: **How** have I perceived these experiences?

How am I feeling about them? How am I thinking about them?

The fact of my being unemployed has resulted in different feelings:

- I'm disappointed because I feel rejected and not fairly treated by my old work colleagues.
- I'm angry because I feel abandoned and cheated by my old company.
- I'm frustrated because my self-confidence is very low.
- I'm desperate because I'm afraid I will not be able to find a new job.

The fact of my being unemployed has resulted in different thoughts:

- I'm thinking of flight to escape from my being unemployed.
- I'm thinking of fighting and taking revenge to solve this problem once and for all.
- I'm thinking of compensative behavior like drugs or gambling to satisfy my needs and feel happy at least for some time.

3. Research about the causes: **Why** have I perceived these experiences in such a way?

I perceive the fact of my being unemployed and without income, as an attack on my basic needs for life, security, being accepted, love, fellowship, meaningful occupation, etc. I feel and think that I am a damaged and useless human being. By my being unemployed I'm losing my power and control over my life. My self-confidence and joy of life are on the decline. This situation also reveals that my faith in God is very small or even non-existent.

4. Conclusions: What results and consequences can be drawn from steps 1 to 3?

I haven't yet learned that my value as a person doesn't come through my doing or my work, but it comes from the fact that I am a wonderful creation of God (Ps. 139:14) and that I have a personal relationship with God (John 17:9-26). All my needs are being satisfied by my being

in Jesus and my identity as a child of God resting in His power and love (Phil. 4:6-7). My doing comes from my being in Jesus, not the other way round!

In reality, my negative feelings and thinking are caused by my disbelief, egoism, self-control and longing for power. Because I'd like to deal with the situation of joblessness in my own strength I can't trust in God. I exclude Him from this situation or even make Him responsible for it. Thus, I can't trust that He's Lord over my life and can bring the best out of this situation for me. I believe just the opposite of Rom. 8:28 and live in the flesh as described in Rom. 7:14-25.

I should draw the following consequences according to the cleansing pattern in 1.John 1:9:

- Accept the present situation of my unemployment including all negative aspects for me,
- Confess to God all my disbelief, selfishness and desire to live in my strength as well as all my negative feelings and thinking,
- Receive thankfully the forgiveness of sin and purification from God by the blood of Christ,
- Experience again the victory over sin as well as growth in faith and holiness because the Holy Spirit, who dwells in me, gives me the authority and power to repent and follow Jesus (Mt. 11:28-30).

5. Final remarks

Believers from different cultures and backgrounds are using the inductive growth method (iGM) introduced here. According to the gained experiences the iGM bears more fruit when used as a mentoring model or in a network of believers. Besides, the iGM can be used in an evangelistic Bible study with a believer to gain deeper knowledge of oneself and God using the faith pattern listening => trusting => applying. Any comments, questions or thoughts can be sent to the author at jamentoring@yahoo.de.

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