

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

ILLUSTRATION / DEMONSTRATION

PREPARATION:

Buy or make a growth chart (the more fun and colorful, the better) to bring to church. Make copies of the instructions from the "Live It!" article "A Spiritual Fitness Test" on page 1265, to be passed out to children after the sermon.

DURING THE CHILDREN'S SERMON:

Have a couple of children stand in front of the growth chart to see how tall they are. Point out that they weren't always that tall, and they won't always be that tall. They've grown and are continuing to grow! Say to the kids, "It's easy to see that all of you have grown physically. But how about spiritually? Are you growing that way too?"

SCRIPTURE READING

Open the *NIV Adventure Bible*, telling the children, "This is from the book of Luke, chapter 2, verses 40 and 52."

The child [Jesus] grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.... Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Say to the children, "Can you see the different ways in which Jesus grew? This passage says he grew in 'stature,' which means he grew bigger, just like you have. It also says he grew stronger and smarter. And it says he grew 'in favor with God'—which shows that he was growing spiritually."

FEATURE READING / MESSAGE

Turn to page 1145 in the *NIV Adventure Bible*, telling the children, "Now listen to this 'Live It!' article from the *Adventure Bible*, called 'Two Ways to Grow.'"

God's plan for all living things is for them to grow. Ask your mom or dad how many inches long you were when you were born. Ask permission to mark that many inches on a wall. Then stand by the wall and mark how tall you are now. See how your body has grown!

People grow spiritually too. Talk with your parents. Ask whether they can see ways you have grown spiritually in the past two years.

After reading the article, tell the children, "Now, you all know what it means to grow physically. That's when your body gets bigger and bigger, right? Growing spiritually is different. It means a lot of things. Part of what it means is to learn more and more about what God says in the Bible, and to understand God's words better and better, and to live by them more and more. When a child grows physically, he or she gets closer and closer on the outside to being a full-grown adult. When a child grows spiritually, he or she gets closer and closer on the inside to being the kind of person God wants them to be!"

APPLICATION

Turn to page 1265 in the *NIV Adventure Bible*, telling the children, "Here is a 'Live It!' article from the *Adventure Bible*, called 'A Spiritual Fitness Test.' This article compares spiritual growth to the way athletes train their bodies to get in shape so they can compete in sports. Just listen for now. I'll give each of you a copy of this article so you can try these things later at home."

Take this physical fitness test: 1. Do five push-ups. 2. Do ten sit-ups. 3. Touch your toes ten times. 4. Do three pull-ups. 5. Run around the outside (or inside) of your house three times without stopping. Do this every day, and you will probably stay physically fit.

Here's a spiritual fitness plan: 1. Read your Bible and think about what God says. 2. Spend time in prayer every day. 3. Pray for others who need special help. 4. Do at least one loving thing for someone each day. 5. Try to please God in everything you do.

In [the Bible,] Paul writes about athletes who train hard. The athletes don't just want to be fit. They want to win! Use the five spiritual fitness steps to train yourself spiritually.

Tell the children, "Here's another idea. As you record your physical growth at home on the wall, you can keep track of your spiritual growth too. Choose an area of spiritual growth to focus on, and write it at the top of your growth chart. Write a Scripture reference beside it, to remind you of God's words about that topic. For instance, you could write, 'Selflessness—Philippians 2:4' at the top of your growth chart. Memorize that verse and ask God to help you grow in that area. Then, as you do, you can make marks higher and higher on your chart!"