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For immediate release

Growing pains (Immediate change does not equal long-term growth)

By Hannah Pilcher

November 18, 2022

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at comm-mark@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206.

What did we learn? Where do we go from here? These two questions have been at the forefront of my mind after attending a professional development conference that was equally challenging and inspiring. In a room full of higher education professionals, the speaker posed these questions in relation to the last two years as we have dealt with the reality of how COVID-19 affected our work life and the lives of our students.

We were challenged not to give in to the urge to skip these questions because they felt too daunting to answer. She asked the audience to reflect on these two questions and to consider how our answers would impact, first, any *immediate change*, and second, *long-term growth*.

Growth involves intentionality, reflection, strategy and foresight. To grow, you must first acknowledge that change is necessary and seek to understand how to implement that change. Alternatively, growth is sometimes the result of an unforeseen circumstance or season. It can be an experience that is both difficult and rewarding, eye-opening, motivating and very personal.

C.S. Lewis wrote in an essay, "Mere change is not growth. Growth is the synthesis of change and continuity, and where there is no continuity there is no growth."

Growth does not happen overnight; it takes time and regularity. It encompasses the influence of outside voices, the willingness to be honest with ourselves and the acceptance of constructive feedback.

Over the last nine years, I've had the honor of welcoming hundreds of incoming students to Ouachita; as a resident director of one of the freshman residence halls, I have a front row seat to much that transpires during a student's first year on campus. This up-close and personal viewpoint allows me to see the excitement, development and challenges that students face every day.

Freshman students experience a lot of change: living on their own, managing class and work responsibilities, understanding roommate and friendship dynamics and learning how to take accountability for their decisions. *Change* is inevitable for a freshman student who begins in August as a high school senior and ends the year in May as a college student. The process is not always smooth, and if they put in extra effort, they just may *grow* in the process, as well. It is highly rewarding to witness this development and to have a role throughout the year that aids in their growth.

Growth is one of Ouachita's five core values: We desire for our students to experience growth intellectually, spiritually, physically and socially. Ouachita seeks to be a safe place where students can learn to build deep friendships, ask critical questions, consider different perspectives and grow together. We want to see this type of maturity while students are on campus, but we aspire for students to seek growth past their time at Ouachita and throughout their lives.

The changes they make here can lead to meaningful and holistic growth. Every year, I remind my students that the lessons and skills they learn while on campus are meant to carry them into the future and into their next seasons. The goal of being a lifelong learner recognizes that growth is necessary for our entire lives and that it does not stop after graduation.

"GROWTH REQUIRES
MORE OF ME THAN
CHANGE."

Hannah Pilcher

As I've personally reflected on the two questions from the conference, I've come back again and again to Lewis' quote and to the reminder that growth requires more of me than change. When I consider all of the adjustments that have been made in the last two years, I am inclined to assume that growth has occurred as well. But I must ask myself: Have I been intentional or thoughtful in how these changes have affected my own life?

Throughout my life, seasons of growth have consistently been marked by finding myself in a humbled posture before the Lord and walking away with a deeper understanding that I am not as self-reliant as I aim to be. As COVID-19 has impacted my own life and work, I have found that the last two years required me also to depend greatly on the help and support of my colleagues, students, family and friends. I have needed the care and compassion of others and the strength and refuge of the Father to wade through the difficulties that these years have brought. For these I am grateful, but I also hope not to waste the chance to truly grow in the Lord through purposeful reflection and response.

Peter encouraged the early church similarly: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." (2 Peter 3:18).

As I have worked to recognize the growth in my life, my hope is that we all would utilize the growth we've experienced as a catalyst to push us forward in whatever challenges, opportunities and changes lie ahead. I pray we can be active and intentional in our way through the world. May we be "doers of the Word and not hearers only" (James 1:22). We need to keep asking ourselves: What are we learning, and where do we go from here?



By Hannah Pilcher, assistant director of residence life and resident director for Frances Crawford Hall. She has served at Ouachita since 2013, the same year she earned her B.A. degree in Spanish from Ouachita. She also has earned an M.A. degree in student affairs from John Brown University.