

# SPIRITUAL MATURITY

**Growing in Christ**



**And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that  
bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither;  
and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.**

**~Psalm 1.3~**

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Olathe, KS, USA

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ISBN: [pending]

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"...freely ye have received, freely give."  
[Mathew 10.8]

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# SPIRITUAL MATURITY

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. [Eph 4.14-15]

**Lesson Theme:** Make the sacrifice to develop the habits that are essential to consistently grow toward spiritual maturity in Christ.

- Growing spiritually is a daily and life-long goal of a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## INTRODUCTION

**Our greatest joy, delight, and sense of purpose comes from God. Read Psalm 73 and observe what the psalmist said.**

1. (v1-15) The iniquity and injustice that surrounds us in this world will eventually affect us.
2. (v16-17) The way to understand our lives in this world is to draw near to God.
3. (v18-28, especially v25-28) When we draw near to God, we will find our greatest joy, delight, and sense of purpose. This is what we want to study in this lesson: how do we draw near to God?

**What is our purpose in life? Why are we here?**

- Our purpose, as individuals and as a church, is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
  - ✓ Firstly, we have been created to glorify God in all that we are and all that we do.

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. [Rom 11.36]
  - ✓ Secondly, when we enjoy God in this sin-cursed world, we please Him because our joy today is the result of our faith in what He has promised us in His Word.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. [Heb 11.6]
- How exactly do we do this? How do we fulfill our purpose of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever? We do this by completing the mission He has given us to do.

**What is our mission in this world? What are we supposed to do?**

- Our life's mission, as individuals and as a church, is to be and make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we must do in order to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
- Jesus said that in order to glorify God on earth, one must finish the work God has given him to do. That “work” given to us to finish while we are on this earth is our mission.

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. [John 17.4]

  1. Our mission begins with being disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - Salvation: Being a disciple means being saved (turning from following sin and self and turning to Jesus Christ to follow Him as Lord and Savior).

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. [1Tim 2.3-4]

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. [2Pet 3.9]

- Sanctification: Being a disciple also means growing in Christ-likeness (and this is what this lesson is about).

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. [Rom 8.29]

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. [Luke 6.40]

## 2. Our mission includes making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- When God saved us, He created us anew in Christ for good works. He has some specific works that He desires that we finish.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. [Eph 2.10]

- These good works He has given us to do are primarily the works that result in the growth and edification of the Body of Christ (the Church).

- ✓ Evangelism: God has called each and every Christian to the work of evangelizing the lost.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. [2Cor 5.18-20]

- ✓ Edification: God has called each and every Christian to the work of edifying the saved (and this lesson will provide you with some of the basic and essential skills and tools to do that).

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. [Eph 4.11-16]

### **Key Principle: Our mission of making disciples depends on us being disciples first.**

- The principle is this: Every tree will reproduce “after his kind.”

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. [Gen 1.11-12]

- That same principle applies to discipleship, because we cannot reproduce in others that which is not true of us. We will reproduce in others “after our kind.”
- Therefore, if we hope to *make disciples*, then we need to first *be disciples*; and if we hope to make spiritually mature and responsible disciples, then we need to first be spiritually mature and responsible disciples.
- Think of reproduction in the physical realm and two illustrations that are fairly common today.
  1. Many have heard the phrase “kids having kids” when speaking of teen pregnancy. Anyone that is of age can make a baby, but how good of a parent is an immature teenager? Who really ends up raising the child? It's usually the child's grandparents!
    - ✓ We should all desire to evangelize and sow the seed of the gospel among the lost.
    - ✓ But, we need to make sure we can also help new converts to grow to spiritual maturity, and that means we need to be growing toward maturity ourselves because every tree will reproduce “after his kind.”
    - ✓ The Great Commission to make disciples is not just about evangelism (“making babies”). It's about evangelizing the lost *and* edifying the saved.
  2. A healthy family is the result of two mature adults (a man and a woman) having children and raising those children to be responsible adults. In other words, it takes mature, responsible adults to raise children to maturity (so they can, in turn, reproduce after their kind). And that is true also of our efforts to reproduce ourselves spiritually through the process of discipleship.

**The purpose of this lesson is to discuss the process of spiritual growth and then present three habits that are essential to grow and mature in Christ-likeness. We will be studying:**

1. The Foundation of Spiritual Growth
2. The Process of Spiritual Growth
3. The Illustrations of Spiritual Growth
4. The Cost of Spiritual Growth
5. The Five Means of Spiritual Growth
6. The Four Goals of Spiritual Growth
7. The Three Essential Habits of Spiritual Growth

## THE FOUNDATION OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

### *A Commitment to a Biblical Local Church is Foundational to Spiritual Growth*

1. Part of the foundation for spiritual growth in the Christian's life is his local church. Just like a tree cannot grow to healthy maturity if it does not set down roots in good soil (Ps 1.3), so a Christian cannot grow in spiritual maturity if he does not set down roots in a sound, biblical local church.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. [Ps 1.3]

2. During the Church Age (our dispensation), God has established the local church as the institution through which He will accomplish His plan and His purpose.
  - A. The local church is the pillar and ground of the truth—it is the essential and necessary structure for following Christ today.

i. Truth is needed for spiritual growth.

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. [Eph 4.15]

a. This is because God's revealed truth (his specific revelation) is given to us in Scripture.

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. [John 17.17]

b. Therefore Scripture (truth) is the principal instrument God uses to perfect us—to make us like the perfect Man, the Lord Jesus Christ (to conform us to His image; Eph 4.11-15; Rom 8.29).

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. [2Tim 3.15-17]

ii. God's ordained structure for communicating truth today (during the Church Age) is the local church.

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. [1Tim 3.15]

B. In order to grow and mature spiritually according God's plan and design, a Christian needs to commit to a local church and submit to the leadership of that church as they shepherd their flock according to God's Word.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. [Eph 4.11-12]

### ***Local Church Pastors are Foundational to Your Spiritual Growth***

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. [Heb 13.7]

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. [Heb 13.17]

1. According to God's own design, He ministers to the members of a congregation through their pastor.

A. The pastor is the one who has been given the responsibility to feed the flock of God (to teach and instruct his congregation in the Scripture) and to fend off the wolves (to warn his congregation of false teachers and their false teaching).

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. [Acts 20.28-32]

i. The pastor has been placed in the Body of Christ by God in order to teach sound doctrine and to exhort the saints to obey that doctrine.

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of



the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. [1Tim 4.13-16]

- ii. The pastor has been placed in the Body of Christ by God in order to warn the members of his congregation of false teaching.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. [1Tim 4.1-6]

- B. Without being “rooted” in (committed to) a sound, biblical local church, the Christian quickly becomes spiritually malnourished and therefore easy prey for the enemy.

## 2. The local church and its pastors also provide the necessary structure for church discipline.

- A. Just like many children have grown up to be self-centered and unruly because of a lack of discipline in their families (parents who refuse to discipline their children), so many Christians have never matured spiritually because of the lack of discipline in their churches (pastors who refuse to hold their members accountable to Scripture).

- And this principle works both ways: A pastor needs a strong commitment to his local church because he, too, needs to be held accountable to obeying the Bible. That accountability of the pastor will be accomplished by the members of his congregation.

- B. Spiritual growth requires a strong commitment to the local church because part of the growth process will include exhortation to obey the Word and (eventually) correction for having not obeyed the Word.
- C. Without a genuine commitment to the local church, a believer who receives exhortation or correction will simply leave his church and find another where he is more comfortable.
- D. Many today have forsaken the local church altogether and actually think they can grow in Christ by listening to sermons on the radio or over the Internet. That may help them increase their knowledge, but it will rarely result in true spiritual maturity because there is no personal relationship with a pastor and no personal accountability to a congregation—there is no “church discipline.” And we need that in order to grow.

### ***Local Church Members are Foundational to Your Spiritual Growth***

1. Not only does God minister to us through the pastor of our local church, He also does so through the members of our church.
2. The members of a local church are members of a body; they are uniquely joined together.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. [1Cor 12.27]

3. In the local church, the Spirit of God manifests Himself through the members (each and every one of them) “to profit withal” (for the profit of all who are in that church).

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. [1Cor 12.7]

4. The profit we receive from the other members of our local church is our spiritual growth. The Spirit manifests Himself through the members of the local church, as we gather together as one body, “unto edifying.”

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. [1Cor 14.26]

5. There will be no spiritual growth toward maturity (no true and complete edification) in the life of a Christian who does not commitment to a sound, biblical local church. We need other believers to grow spiritually!

### ***The Local Church is Foundational to Our Suffering***

1. Later in this lesson we will see that, by God's design, suffering (enduring suffering) is one of the means that God uses to conform us to the image of Christ—to make us grow spiritually toward Christ-likeness.
2. The church is our spiritual family and we will suffer together just like brothers and sisters in most any physical family.
  - A. God will use the problems that arise between the members of a church to teach those members how to deal with people with love, grace, and mercy.
  - B. In other words, we have to learn to “get along” and that requires a Christ-like character. That cannot be learned without the suffering one must endure in learning to live and minister with other Christians in a local church.
3. The church is also our refuge from the suffering we endure in the world.
  - A. The Christian ought to be able to come to his church and know that he is “safe.”
  - B. In the local church, a Christian can rest and recuperate so he can then go back out into the world and continue fulfilling the mission God gave him.

### ***In Summary: Spiritual Growth Requires a Commitment to a Local Church***

1. Growth toward spiritual maturity happens when we are committed to being “builded together” (a concept we will come back to later when we talk about fellowship in this lesson).

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. [Eph 2.19-22]

2. Edification (spiritual growth toward Christ-likeness) occurs when the members of a local church gather together and minister one to another in the love of Christ.

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. [Eph 4.16]

3. Without a commitment to the local church (a willingness to sacrifice and put forth effort to learn and grow with the other members), the believer will never mature in Christ as God desires.
4. But, just as a sapling that has set down roots in good soil is ready to grow toward full maturity, so the Christian who has committed to a biblical local church is ready for the process of spiritual growth.

## THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

### *Spiritual Growth has a Beginning*

1. Spiritual growth begins the very same moment the sinner is saved. In the moment of his salvation, he is born again and, like a new born baby, he begins to grow and develop.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: [1Pet 2.2]

2. *Spiritual growth*, in this sense, is synonymous with *discipleship* (it refers to basically the same thing).

- A. Remember that a disciple is a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. [Acts 11.26]

- i. A disciple is a follower in the sense of an apprentice; he follows his Master to be like Him and live like Him.
    - ii. That is why a mature disciple is called a *Christian* (meaning “little Christ”): he has become like his Master in many aspects of his character and conduct.
  - B. Spiritual growth, therefore, begins when the sinner becomes a disciple, and that happens at the moment of salvation.
    - i. The sinner has turned from following sin and self (repentance) and has turned to Jesus Christ to follow Him as Lord and Savior (faith).
    - ii. Once the sinner has converted to Christ and is born again, he begins to grow in Christ-likeness because he is now a follower (an apprentice) of Christ—he desires to learn of Him in order to be and live like Him.
3. Spiritual growth, therefore, begins when the sinner becomes a disciple: At salvation.

### *Spiritual Growth has an End (a Goal)*

1. From the time a sinner is born again (from the moment of his conversion, his salvation), God's goal for him is to form Christ in him—to make him like Christ, a Christian.

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you. [Gal 4.19]

2. This is the predetermined destination for every saved sinner during the Church Age: to conform us to the image of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. [Rom 8.29]

- A. This is the process of restoring in man that which was lost in the beginning, when Adam sinned.

- i. When God made man, He made them (Adam and Eve) in His own *image*.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. [Gen 1.26-27]

- ii. However, when sin entered by Adam's disobedience, the Bible says that man is no longer born in the perfect image of God, but rather he is born after the image of Adam (which is the image of God that has been twisted by sin).

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth: [Gen 5.1-3]

- B. God has predestinated every saved believer to be conformed to the image of His Son, and that means He will restore the perfect image of God in every Christian (He will restore what Adam lost).

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. [Col 1.13-15]

- C. This process of becoming like Christ (like God in the flesh: “godly”) is called *discipleship*, and it refers to the process of growing spiritually toward maturity (and spiritual maturity is Christ-likeness).

- i. A *disciple*, according to the Bible, is one who follows his Master in order to be like Him and to live live Him.

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. [Luke 6.40]

- ii. Notice in Luke 6.40 that the disciple becomes “as” his Master (he becomes “Christ-like” and “godly”) when he is perfect.

- a. This is what Adam lost and this is what God will restore in each saved believer.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. [Mat 5.48]

- b. Being *perfect* means to be like the Perfect Man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. [Eph 4.11-13]

- c. The disciple (the saved believer) follows Christ as an “apprentice” in order to be perfected—to be made like Christ, to grow in Christ-likeness, to be conformed to His image.

- D. All of this means one thing for us as Christians today: We need to grow up!

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. [Eph 4.14-15]

- i. (v14) We need to stop being children, tossed to and fro (weak and unstable—immature).
- ii. (v15) We need to mature (grow up!) spiritually in order to be like Christ, the Master of the disciples

### 3. Review: Spiritual Growth

- A. Spiritual growth has a beginning: At conversion and salvation we are born again and become like newborn babes in Christ.
- B. Spiritual growth has an end (a goal): God wants us to grow up in Christ in all things (He wants us to be like Christ in character and conduct; He wants to conform us to Christ's image).
  - i. This end (goal) will ultimately be reached when Christ comes back for us in the rapture and gives us our resurrected, glorified bodies.
 

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. [Php 1.6]
  - ii. That means that from the beginning (from the moment we are saved) until the end (the rapture or our death, whichever comes first), we are in a process of spiritual growth.

### *Spiritual Growth Today is a Process*

- 1. Spiritual growth is the process of becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, the image of God and the Perfect Man.
  - A. Therefore growing toward spiritual maturity is growing toward the goal of being Christ-like.
  - B. That means that spiritual growth is growing in sanctification: becoming less and less like the sinners we were, and more and more like Christ who saved us (and Whom we follow as His disciples).
 

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. [Eph 4.22-24]
- 2. Even the Apostle Paul, later in his life, said that he had not arrived at perfection (complete Christ-like spiritual maturity, which is God's goal for all of us; Rom 8.29; Eph 4.11-15). He knew his spiritual growth was a process and that he still had growing to do!

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. [Php 3.7-14]

- 3. The Apostle Peter said much the same thing when he exhorted his readers to be diligent in the process of growing in Christ.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen. [2Pet 3.18]

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [2Pet 1.5-8]

4. Until the rapture and resurrection, when God finishes the work He began in us at salvation, we will be growing in Christ. It's a process, just like a baby grows and matures into an adult, or a tree that develops from a sapling to a fully grown tree that bears much fruit.

5. Review: Spiritual Growth Today is a Process

A. You were saved and left on this earth to work in God's harvest of souls—in making disciples.

Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. [Luke 10.2]

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. [Eph 2.10]

B. In order to do that work, you must be perfected.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. [Eph 4.11-12]

C. And that means you need to commit to learning and applying the Scripture (learning of the Lord Jesus Christ and living as He would have you live).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. [2Tim 3.16-17]

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. [Col 1.28]

D. That is the life-long process of discipleship: growing toward spiritual maturity in Christ.

E. This process of growth is illustrated in the Bible by several different metaphors (pictures), two of which we will look at in the following section.

## THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

### *The Growth and Development of a Person*

1. Babe: The newborn baby needs protection, love, and basic nutrition.

A. When a child is born, he needs to be placed in a family where he can receive the proper nourishment, protection, and loving care that will allow him to grow and develop like God designed.

B. When a sinner is born again, he needs to be placed in a sound, biblical local church where he can receive the same things. One of the first things a new believer (or an immature believer) needs to do is commit to a local church where he will be fed the Word of God, protected from false teachings and sin, and cared for by a pastor and the congregation.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. [1Pet 2.2]

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? [1Cor 3.1-3]

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that

useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. [Heb 5.11-14]

C. Every believer who wants to grow spiritually needs to commit to being a member of a sound, biblical local church.

2. Child: The child needs to “go to school” to increase in knowledge and he also needs strong, consistent guidance to help him apply what he knows in order to live right.

I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake... I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. [1Jn 2.12-13]

A. Once a child is out of the baby stage, he has needs beyond basic nutrition, protection, and loving care. He needs to start learning in order to be a productive member of his family and of society. We call that “going to school,” and we expect that of every child. During this stage the child needs some very rigid structures to educate him on how to live correctly and on what happens when you don't (we call that *discipline*). This is usually the “elementary school” stage.

B. The young Christian that has grown out of the need for only the “milk” of the Word is now ready for more “meat.” He needs to learn the Bible—he needs to increase in his knowledge of Scripture. But, he also needs some very rigid structures to keep him accountable to applying what he knows, and that will include “discipline” (church discipline) when he chooses not to.

C. This is simply the process of maturity: Learning and application—growing in knowledge and in obedience to that knowledge. Every believer who wants to grow spiritually needs to commit to this process of maturity (the life-long process of learning the Bible and doing what it says).

i. Notice also how this stage will not work (it will not produce the desired results of growth toward spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness) if the disciple is not first committed to membership in a local church.

ii. Without a sacrificial commitment to the local church, when the young Christian is disciplined (when he is held accountable to obeying the Bible or corrected for disobeying it), he will simply “run away” and find another church where he won't have to give up his comfort. And his growth will stagnate.

iii. We need the local church (the pastor, the members of the congregation, and the structure they provide) in order to be held accountable to do what the Bibles says.

3. Youth: The youth needs to grow in strength, experience, and responsibility as an individual.

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. [1Tim 4.12]

A. As the child grows and matures, he needs to begin to take on more responsibilities in his family. He needs to participate in the work being done, and he needs to begin to develop his responsibility by participating without so much of the rigid supervision a child needs. This is usually the “teenager” stage (and sometimes into the early 20's).

B. As the Christian grows and matures he will naturally desire to do more in his church family. He will desire to serve in some way and minister with the other members. It's at this stage where a Christian needs to develop his individual responsibility and participate in the ministry of his local church; and he needs to learn to do so on his own (without the rigid supervision of the “child” stage). He needs to learn to take on responsibilities and finish well what he starts.

C. This is where the Christian must sacrifice in order to participate in the ministry. It will cost him because he has to commit to doing the work (whatever service or ministry that may be) and then he has to show maturity and responsibility by putting forth the effort required to do that work well.

4. Adult: The adult needs to show maturity in leadership ability, consistent self-discipline, and responsible reproduction.

A. And adult man or the woman is no longer under the immediate supervision of his parents. Rather, he (or she) has entered the process of becoming a parent himself (or herself). He needs to show leadership ability in taking care of himself and his own needs. There must be consistent self-discipline (getting up on time to go to work, cleaning the house, etc.). And he must show himself responsible in raising his own family. He may look to his own parents for guidance and advice, but now he is on his own and must make decisions for himself.

B. This is the ultimate goal of the Christian in this life: to be a mature, responsible, fruitful adult “parent.”

i. The saved believer should grow up in Christ to the point that he does not require another, more mature Christian constantly “holding him accountable.” He should be filled with the Spirit and therefore have the discipline to do what he knows he needs to do as a Christian.

ii. He should be a responsible “parent” in the sense of reproducing in others the life he has in Christ—we call that evangelism.

I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. [1Cor 4.14-15]

iii. And he should be a responsible “parent” in the sense of raising his spiritual children through edification.

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. [1Thes 2.7-12]

C. This is where the Christian is actually committed to the mission God gave him: the mission of being a disciple (continue to grow daily in Christ) and of making disciples (through evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved).

5. This same process of spiritual maturity can also be seen in the process of the growth and development of a tree.

### *The Growth and Development of a Tree*

#### 1. Roots: Membership

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. [Ps 1.3]

It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. [Ezek 17.8]

A. When seeds are sown, God will give them life and a new tree (a sapling) is “born.” The first thing the new tree needs to grow is a root system. It must be planted in good soil where it can receive the proper nutrients for its healthy growth and development. It must also be planted where it has a certain level of protection from the elements that might cause it harm.





- B. Every Christian needs to be rooted and grounded in a sound, biblical local church. This is especially true of the new and/or immature Christian. He needs to “plant himself” and “set down roots” in a church where he can receive proper nourishment for healthy growth and development through the preaching and teaching of God's Word, and where he can have a certain level of protection from the elements in this world that might cause him harm (for example, false teachers and their false teachings).
- C. Every believer who wants to grow spiritually needs to commit to being a member of a sound, biblical local church.

## 2. Trunk: Maturity

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: [Eph 4.13-15]



- A. A tree needs a strong trunk—a trunk that is both tall and broad—in order to withstand the winds that blow and the storms that thrash it about. Without a strong trunk, a tree will topple in the first strong storm it has to endure.
- B. According to Ephesians 4.13-15, that strong trunk is like spiritual maturity in the life of a Christian. Once a Christian is “rooted and planted” in a good local church, he needs to grow up—he needs to become established in a life-long process of maturing in Christ. Like a tree, a Christian needs a trunk that is both tall and broad: he needs both depth and breadth of knowledge in the Scripture. And he needs to learn how to apply that knowledge.
  - i. This firm foundation of a strong “trunk” is especially important when the winds of bad doctrine blow and the storms of life thrash the believer about. Without a strong trunk (without being established in a process of spiritual growth through learning the Bible and doing what it says), the Christian will not endure and he will find himself victim to false teachings or a defeated and fruitless life.
  - ii. The strong “trunk” will also become more and more important as the Christian grows in his participation in ministry and in the mission God has given him. The “trunk” is needed to support the full, far-reaching branches of ministry and the fruit that contains the seed to be sown in order to fulfill the mission of reproducing life in others.
- C. To grow spiritually and become strong and established in the faith, the believer has to commit to the process of maturity: the life-long process of learning the Bible and doing what it says.
 

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. [2Tim 3.16-17]
- D. Remember: this stage will not work (it will not produce the desired results of growth—the fruit of maturity and Christ-likeness) if the disciple is not first committed to the membership in a local church.
  - i. Without a sacrificial commitment to the local church (without being “rooted” and “planted” in a biblical church), the young Christian, when faced with a trial (winds of doctrine or storms of life), will not endure. He will likely move on to another church and never grow because he has never learned he must set down roots in order to grow to maturity.
  - ii. We need the local church (the pastor, the members of the congregation, and the structure they provide) to properly learn the Bible and be held accountable to do what it says.

### 3. Leaves: Ministry

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. [Ps 1.3]

- A. There are many ways a tree participates in its immediate environment, but one of the most common and most important is that of taking in carbon dioxide and giving off oxygen. That participation takes place, mainly, though the leaves.
- B. Just like a tree participates in its environment through its leaves, so a Christian participates in his immediate environment (his local church) through ministry.



- i. God has designed the local church and the Body of Christ so that the participation of each and every member is essential and important in the mission He has given us. Each member is to participate in ministry.

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. [Eph 4.16]

- ii. God has uniquely designed and equipped each member to do the works of the ministry that He has for them to do. Some members will be good at teaching, others at serving “behind the scenes,” and still others will be good at organizing, administering, etc. There are many different things that need to be taken care of in a local church in order for that church to function efficiently and effectively as God designed. And that requires that each and every member find his or her “ministry” and participate by doing that ministry according to God's divine design.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. [Eph 2.10]

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. [1Cor 12.18]

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. [Rom 12.5-8]

- C. Every believer who is growing in Christ will naturally want to participate in the ministry.

- i. It's only natural that a tree will produce leaves and participate in its environment.
- ii. And it's to be expected that a Christian who is growing in Christ toward spiritual maturity will desire to participate in and through his local church through ministry.

### 4. Fruit: Mission

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. [Ps 1.3]

- A. A healthy, mature tree will bear much good fruit. And the seed that results in the tree reproducing “after his kind” will be found in that fruit (just think of an apple tree: seeds to produce another apple tree are found in the fruit, the apple).



- i. The way a tree reproduces is to bear much good fruit because the seed is in the fruit. When the fruit is ripe, it will naturally fall from the tree into the soil around where the tree is planted. The seed in the fruit will take root and produce a new sapling tree which can grow under the protection of the mature tree.
- ii. In this way a tree glorifies God by doing what it was designed by God to do: grow, bear fruit, and reproduce after its kind.
- iii. In much the same way, a healthy, mature Christian will bear much good fruit, and he will sow the seed of the gospel in the soil of the hearts of people around him through the fruit borne in his life.
- iv. This fruit can take many forms, but the seed of the gospel will be found in all of them.
  - a. For example, the fruit of the Spirit begins with love, and love will result in the sowing of the seed of God's Word because when the Christian loves God he will obey Him (he will obey the command to evangelize the lost and edify the saved), and when he loves his neighbor, he will strive to meet his needs (and what greater needs are there outside of evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved). The seed is found in the fruit, and the way to sow much seed is to bear much fruit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [Gal 5.22-23]

- b. There will also be fruit in the “walk” (the lifestyle) of a Christian: he will strive to live like the Lord lived while He was on earth.

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. [1Jn 2.6]

- [1] That means there will be a turning from sin: the fruit of repentance.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. [Mat 3.7-8]

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. [2Tim 2.19]

- [2] That means there will be a turning to right living: the fruit of righteousness.

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. [Php 1.9-11]

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. [1Jn 1.6]

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. [1Jn 2.2-5]

- [3] And both of these together mean that there will be a willing, joyful submission and obedience to God and His Word.

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. [Col 1.10]

If ye love me, keep my commandments. [John 14.15]

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. [John 14.21]

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. [John 14.23-24]

- c. There will also be fruit in Christ-like conversation. The seed of the gospel and God's Word will be sown through the words that come out of a Christian's mouth.

- [1] A mature Christian will bear the fruit of lips that give thanks to God and praise Him, even in difficulties and trials.

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. [Heb 13.15]

- [2] A mature Christian will bear the fruit of evangelism: sowing the seed of the gospel by preaching (witnessing) to the lost.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. [2Cor 5.17-21]

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God... For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. [1Cor 1.18, 21]

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. [Acts 4.31]

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. [Acts 8.4]

- [3] A mature Christian will also bear the fruit of edification: sowing the seed of God's Word (truth; John 17.17) in the hearts and lives of the saved.

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. [Eph 4.15]

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. [1Cor 14.26]

- d. Therefore, as God blesses the mature Christian, there will be fruit in new converts (but remember that new life is given by God, not by the Christian; the Christian is to grow in Christ while God will give the increase to the seed that is sown through the fruit that is borne in his life).

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain... [John 15.16]

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. [1Cor 3.6]

- B. Every mature believer will bear fruit, and through that fruit he will sow the seed of God's Word by evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved. In other words, a spiritually mature believer is one who is glorifying God and enjoying Him forever because he is fulfilling his life's mission of being a disciple and making disciples.

## 5. Summary & Review: The Illustrations of Spiritual Growth

### A. The Growth and Development of a Person

- i. Babe: The newborn baby needs protection, love, and basic nutrition (a picture of **membership** in a local church).
- ii. Child: The child needs to “go to school” to increase in knowledge and he also needs strong, consistent guidance to apply what he knows and live right (a picture a being established in the life-long practices that result in spiritual **maturity**).
- iii. Youth: The youth needs to grow in strength, experience, and responsibility as an individual (a picture of the Christian's need to participate in **ministry** in and/or through his church).
- iv. Adult: The adult needs to show maturity in leadership ability, consistent self-discipline, and responsible reproduction (a picture of spiritually mature Christian fulfilling the **mission** God has given us).

### B. The Growth and Development of a Tree

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. [Ps 1.3]

- i. Roots: **Membership**. Every believer who wants to grow spiritually needs to commit to being a member of a sound, biblical local church.
- ii. Trunk: **Maturity**. In order to grow spiritually and become strong and established in the faith, the believer has to commit to the process of maturity: the life-long process of learning the Bible and doing what it says.
- iii. Leaves: **Ministry**. Every believer who is growing in Christ will naturally want to participate in the ministry.
- iv. Fruit: **Mission**. Every mature believer will bear fruit, and through that fruit he will sow the seed of God's Word by evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved. In other words, a spiritually mature believer is one who is glorifying God and enjoying Him forever because he is fulfilling his life's mission of being a disciple and making disciples.
- v. In order to fulfill our purpose on earth (to glorify God), we must be disciples (grow through this process ourselves) and make disciples (evangelize the lost and edify the saved to help them through this same process of growth and maturity).

*This cycle of growth is graphically illustrated on the following page.*



C. See the charts at the end of this lesson for a another visual summary and review of these two key illustrations.

### THE COST OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

#### *Spiritual Growth is not Automatic*

1. Obviously, it is God's goal for us to grow and mature spiritually in Christ and Christ-likeness. Therefore, just as obvious, is the fact that God is the one who gives the increase (we cannot make ourselves grow; God does that).

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. [1Cor 3.6]

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. [Ps 127.1]

2. However, that does not mean that we are to just sit around and do nothing.

- A. God expects us to work with Him in this growth process—He expects each and every born-again believer to “work out” his salvation.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. [Php 2.12]

- B. We have to take what God gave us and labor with Him (according to His will as revealed in His Word) to see it worked out in every area of our lives. That is called “sanctification” and it refers to our spiritual maturity, our growth in Christ-likeness.
3. Spiritual growth toward maturity in Christ requires effort, diligence, and exercise. That means that if we want to grow spiritually, we are going to have to sacrifice.

### ***Spiritual Growth Requires Effort***

1. Until we are fully conformed to the image of Christ, we should be like Paul, striving to press toward the mark—the goal, the finish line—of being like Christ.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. [Php 3.7-14]

2. This means that we need to be actively, intentionally, systematically, and diligently working toward the goal of growing in Christ—growing toward spiritual maturity.
3. And since we will only reach that goal when Christ raptures the Church and gives us our resurrected and glorified bodies, this needs to be a consistent, daily, and life-long effort.

### ***Spiritual Growth Requires Diligence***

1. The Apostle Peter said that believers should give all diligence to grow up in Christ—to mature spiritually and become more and more like the Master.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [2Pet 1.4-8]

2. (v8) This is the only way to bear fruit in the Lord Jesus Christ (we must grow spiritually)!
3. Bearing fruit (the fruit of Christ-likeness and the fruit that results from being Christ-like) is what will glorify God. Bearing fruit is how we fulfill our mission and accomplish our purpose on earth.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. [John 15.8]

### ***Spiritual Growth Requires Exercise***

1. This means that we need to exercise ourselves unto godliness.

But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all

things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.  
[1Tim 4.7-8]

2. Godliness is “God-like-ness.” It is being like God. And since Christ is the image of God in the flesh, then our godliness is synonymous with Christ-likeness.
3. Godliness (spiritual maturity, Christ-likeness) does not “just happen.” Paul says that we must put effort into it; he calls it “exercise.”
  - A. Being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ requires salvation (that's where it all begins).
  - B. But being a disciple of Christ also entails growing in sanctification—becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ each and every day as we follow Him.
    - i. And this spiritual growth will not happen without some “exercise” on our part.
    - ii. Just like a physical exercise program will cost you something, so a spiritual exercise program will cost you something. It will require sacrifice! That means it will require commitment to the process and daily effort to continue working hard to reach the goal.
4. Think about what it means to establish an exercise program.
  - A. You have to set goals. You have to establish accountability structures. More often than not you have to make yourself exercise because, even though you might not want to, you know you need to. And it will require that you sacrifice some things so you have time to exercise.
  - B. Paul says we should be exercising ourselves unto godliness, and he uses physical exercise to illustrate what that means.
    - i. You need goals and accountability structures that will make you do the things you need to do in order to grow spiritually (toward godliness, Christ-likeness).
    - ii. You may have to sacrifice some things that you want to do so that you can have the time to do those things you need to do in order to grow up in Christ.
    - iii. And you need to realize that most of the time, you won't want to “exercise” (it's hard work and the flesh is weak!).
    - iv. Therefore, even though it's God who gives the increase (He is the one who makes us grow spiritually), we need to understand that our spiritual growth requires some labor on our part, also. We need to labor abundantly if we want to see God's grace working in our lives to conform us to the image of Christ.

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. [1Cor 3.6]

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. [1Cor 15.10]

### ***In a Word... Spiritual Growth Requires Sacrifice!***

1. Consider what the Lord Jesus Christ said specifically about the cost of discipleship—the cost of following Him, the Master, in order to grow and become more like Him in both character and conduct.
  - Read the following passage from Luke 14, and think on what Christ said about the cost of following Him.

25 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.



27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. [Luke 14.25-33]

2. (v27, 33) Notice, first, the very clear and hard teaching conveyed by the word “cannot.” Jesus stated emphatically that if one were not willing to sacrifice (to pay the price), he could not be His disciple. Discipleship (growing toward spiritual maturity in order to be like Christ, the Master) will cost you something.

3. (v28) This entire passage is speaking about “counting the cost” because (v25) the majority of the multitude that follows Christ in a superficial manner, will refuse to pay the price.

A. Most will follow Jesus when it is convenient for them (when they like it, when it is enjoyable, or when they get something out of it for themselves). But when it costs them something (when it becomes difficult and uncomfortable), most will leave.

Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? ... From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. [John 6.60-68]

B. Following Christ—being His disciple, growing in Christ-likeness—will cost you something. It won't be the most comfortable thing you have done in life. It requires sacrifice.

4. (v26) Following Christ and growing spiritually as His disciple requires sacrifice in your affections. Christ requires that you love Him so much that, in comparison, your love for your family members seems like hate.

- And remember: Your love for God is expressed in following His Word—in learning and obeying the Scripture.

If ye love me, keep my commandments. [John 14.15]

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. [John 14.21]

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. [John 14.23-24]

5. (v27) Following Christ and growing spiritually as His disciple requires sacrificing your desires and your comfort.

A. In Jesus' day, a man carrying a cross was going to be crucified on it. There was no other reason a man would “carry his cross.” Crucifixion was a very long and painful death.

- B. To die to self and live for Christ all day, every day, is a sacrifice. It requires commitment and dedicated effort.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.  
[1Cor 15.21]

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:  
and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God,  
who loved me, and gave himself for me. [Gal 2.20]

- C. And though there is great, profound joy and lasting hope in the Christian life, the day-to-day struggles and difficulties are long and painful. It is a sacrifice to live for Christ, and that sacrifice is something required of us daily, until we die or Christ comes back for us.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your  
bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable  
service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the  
renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable,  
and perfect, will of God. [Rom 12.1-2]

- D. Christ's disciple is given a cross for his time on earth, and then he is promised a crown in heaven if he will carry that cross and live for the Lord. But, don't get them mixed up! You must carry the cross on earth to gain the crown in heaven. Those that want the crown now (an easy, comfortable life), will only have a cross to bear in heaven (the suffering and sadness they will have to endure at the Judgment Seat of Christ).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may  
receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it  
be good or bad. [2Cor 5.10]

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's  
building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise  
masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let  
every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no  
man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this  
foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work  
shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed  
by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's  
work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any  
man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved;  
yet so as by fire. [1Cor 3.9-15]

6. (v28-30) Your foundation is Christ and that foundation was laid in the moment God saved you. Building on that foundation, however, is your job.

- A. (1Cor 3.9-15) You will have to sacrifice (you will have to make the commitment and then put forth the diligent effort) to work at building on the foundation of your salvation.

- B. You will have to work out your salvation if you want to grow. It's work; it will cost you something. It is not something that just happens automatically.

7. (v31-33) Ultimately, you must sacrifice everything you are and everything you have to be Christ's disciple (to grow in spiritual maturity in order to be and live like Christ; Luke 6.40).

- A. Why is that? Because He did that for you and if you say you are a "Christian," then you are telling the world you are committed to putting forth the effort to be like Him.

- B. Frankly, if we thought about our lives in light of God, eternity, and the Bible, we would quickly realize that we really don't own anything on this earth.

- i. When we die, we leave behind everything we think we own. We are simply stewards for a time over that which God has entrusted to us.

- ii. If we would set our eyes on the Lord and our affection on eternity, the sacrifice required for spiritual growth would be the only reasonable choice we could make.

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. [John 6.66-68]

- 8. The point being made here is this: Discipleship (spiritual growth, following Christ to become more and more like Him) has a price tag.

- A. To follow Christ and be His disciple—to grow toward spiritual maturity—requires sacrifice. It requires a willing sacrifice for Christ, just like Christ willingly sacrificed for us.

- B. It requires that you commit to God's will and plan, like Christ did when He came to this earth.

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. [John 4.34]

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. [John 5.30]

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. [John 6.38]

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. [Php 2.8]

- C. It requires that you put forth the diligent and daily effort required to do what you must do in order to be Christ's disciple and grow in Him toward spiritual maturity.

And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. [John 8.29]

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. [John 15.10]

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. [John 17.4]

- 9. Review and Summary: Spiritual growth is a process that will cost you something.

- A. Our spiritual growth begins the moment we are born again and it will continue until the rapture and resurrection of the Church.

- B. That means that until we die or Christ comes back for us, we should be growing in spiritual maturity—we should be growing toward greater and greater Christ-likeness.

- C. And the Bible is very clear that spiritual growth is not automatic. It requires effort, diligence, and exercise. In a word, it requires sacrifice (commitment and effort).

- D. But how does this spiritual growth process actually happen? How does God actually facilitate the spiritual growth process? How does He make it happen? How does He make us grow up in Christ? What are the biblical means of spiritual growth?

## THE FIVE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

### *The Means of Spiritual Growth: Introduction*

1. There are five means of spiritual growth mentioned in the New Testament. These are five components in the process of growing in Christ-likeness.
  - A. Identification with Christ: We need to identify ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - B. Knowledge of the Bible: We need to learn the Scripture.
  - C. Obedience to the Bible. We need to obey what the Scripture says.
  - D. Suffering: We need to endure suffering.
  - E. An Exchanged Life: We need to live an exchanged life (to no longer for ourselves and our desires, but now for Christ and His desires).
2. These five means are the principal five elements that God uses in our lives to conform us to the image of Christ.
3. An understanding of these five means of spiritual growth will help us understand the sacrifice required of us to grow as Christ's disciples.
  - If, for example, we understand that God uses suffering to help us grow in Christ, we will be far more ready and willing to endure that suffering with joy than if we are ignorant of God's design in suffering.

### *Means #1: Identification with Christ – Identify with Christ!*

1. In order for spiritual transformation (Rom 12.2) to take place, we must choose to present ourselves to God as His (a sacrifice of ourselves and our lives to Him, each day).

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. [Rom 12.1-2]

- A. This passage takes on even more meaning if we look at it in its overall context in Romans.
- B. Romans 9-11 are three “parenthetical” chapters that deal with Israel.
  - i. Romans chapter 9 deals with Israel's past, chapter 10 with their present (during the Church Age), and chapter 11 with them future.
  - ii. Since these chapters are are parenthetical, we could read from Romans 8 straight over to Romans 12 (skipping Romans 9-11) without losing the context of the Paul's discourse.
  - iii. Try it. Just stop reading this lesson, open your Bible to Romans 8, read that chapter, skip over Romans 9-11, and then read Romans 12.
- C. In practical terms for our study, this shows us that the transformation Paul mentions in Romans 12.2 is the same transformation we see in Romans 8.29.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. [Rom 8.29]

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. [Rom 12.2]

- i. (Rom 8.29) God's ultimate goal for all of us is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ.
- ii. (Rom 12.2) We ought not be conformed to this world, but rather transformed... into what? We are transformed from the image of Adam (the old man) into the image of Christ (the new man).

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. [Eph 4.22-24]

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. [Col 3.8-10]

- iii. The transformation of Romans 12.2 is the same conforming to the image of Christ we see in Romans 8.29. It's the spiritual growth process of edification—growing in holiness, growing in Christ-likeness.

D. And the importance of this is found in Romans 12.1: In order to be transformed into the image of Christ (in order grow in this process of edification), we need to identify with Christ.

- i. We need to present ourselves (mind and body) to God and not to the world.
- ii. We need to align ourselves (mind and body, thoughts, and behavior) to God, not the world.
- iii. This is part of repentance (when we were saved, we turned from sin) but it is also a daily decision we must make to turn from sin and self, identify with Christ, and follow Him.

2. We need to “reckon” ourselves dead to sin but alive to Christ.

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. [Rom 6.11-13]

A. This means we need to decide to think of ourselves as no longer “categorized” as part of the world of sin (with all its trappings and distractions). We are no longer doctors, lawyers, car mechanics, teachers, athletes, students, etc.

B. We need to decide to reckon ourselves as be “categorized” as Christians—we identify with Christ. We are Christians! That is our identity!

3. This idea of identifying with Christ is the whole argument for Paul's exhortation to be holy and live right in order to glorify God.

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

13 Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.

14 And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.

15 Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.

16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.

17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. [1Cor 6.9-20]

- A. (1Cor 6.9-12) Don't "categorize" yourself any longer with the world—don't identify yourself anymore with sin and sinners.
  - B. (1Cor 6.15) Instead, think of yourself as a member of the Body of Christ—identify with Christ.
  - C. (1Cor 6.20) That identification as one who pertains to Christ is essential for living right—it is essential for glorifying God with our bodies (our behavior, conduct, what we do).
4. Paul made a conscious decision to identify himself with Christ. He reckoned himself dead to his old way of life and intentionally thought of himself as pertaining to Christ.

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. [Gal 2.19-20]

- A. We need to consciously and intentionally stop thinking of ourselves as being part of this world so that we avoid being conformed to the behavioral pattern of this world.
  - B. Rather, we need to consciously and regularly identify ourselves with Christ (as Christians, followers of Christ) so that we have ***a mental orientation toward God*** and not toward this world.
    - i. This way we will be focused on conforming our behavioral pattern (how we live, what we live for, etc.) to God's design in Christ (Rom 12.1-2).
 

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. [Col 3.1-3]
    - ii. Side Note: This is why it is important to start your day in the Bible and prayer. Die daily to sin, self, and worldly goals in order to choose to live each day for the Savior. Work on renewing your mind through Scripture and prayer first thing in the morning.
5. If we want to grow in Christ (if we want to be edified and conformed to the image of the Savior), we have to identify with Christ. We are Christians—followers of Christ. Reckon that so in your mind. God uses our identification with Christ as the first means by which He makes us grow in Christ-likeness.

### ***Means #2: Knowledge of the Bible – Learn the Bible!***

1. The process of growing in Christ-likeness is the process of growing in "perfection."

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. [Luke 6.40]

- A. The edification process is called the “perfecting of the saints” because the saints are being conformed to the image of Christ, the Perfect Man.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. [Eph 4.11-13]

- B. How does God perfect the saints? The principal tool for this work is the Scripture.

2. Without learning the Bible (personally and through the teaching and preaching of God's Word), a saved sinner will never grow—he will never be perfected. Therefore, until we are perfect, we ought to be learning more of the Bible.

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. [Col 1.27-28]

3. In order to be “perfect” (2Tim 3.17), we need to learn “doctrine” (and observe that “doctrine” is first in the list!).

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. [2Tim 3.15-17]

- A. If we want to live in a way that pleases and glorifies God, we need to know what pleases and glorifies God. Where do find that knowledge? Where do we learn about what pleases and glorifies God? In the Scripture!

- B. (2Tim 3.15) Also, if we want to lead others to salvation and sanctification in Christ (if we want to make disciples), we need to know the Bible in order to teach it to them (the gospel for their salvation and the rest of Scripture for their sanctification).

4. We should never despise or speak negatively about learning more of the Bible. We should never stop growing in knowledge. We should always strive to learn as much Scripture as we can.

### ***Means #3: Obedience to the Bible – Obey they Bible!***

1. Learning doctrine (growing in Bible knowledge) is only the first step in the perfecting process (it is essential, yes, but it is not alone).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. [2Tim 3.16-17]

- A. Doctrine, teaching, and knowledge are worthless unless we intentionally choose to obey what we are learning. Look at the progression in 2Timothy 3.16-17:

- i. Doctrine: What's right.
- ii. Reproof: What's wrong (in your life).
- iii. Correction: How to make right that which is wrong.
- iv. Instruction: How to keep it right (how to walk in the narrow path of righteousness).

- B. In 2Timothy 3.16-17 we have God's instructions for us on how to be perfected: Learn the Bible (learn a lot!) and then obey what you are learning. Let the Bible reprove you, correct you, and instruct you in righteousness.

- C. The most sound counsel for anyone is this: ***Read the Bible and do what it says!***

2. We need to both “hear” (learn) and “do” (obey) the Word of the Lord, whom we follow.

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. [Luke 6.46-49]

3. Knowledge alone puffs up, but knowledge coupled with charity (obedience to the knowledge) results in edification.

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. [1Cor 8.1]

A. Charity is love in action: 1Corinthians 13.

B. And love is primarily expressed in our submission and obedience to the Lord (His Word).

If ye love me, keep my commandments. [John 14.15]

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. [John 14.21]

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. [John 14.23-24]

C. Therefore, charity is a direct result of obeying the Scripture (loving God, loving our neighbor).

4. In other words, spiritual maturity comes “by reason of use” (by the application of the Scripture we are perfected, not by learning alone). Learn as much Bible as you can, but obey what you're learning. Put it to use! Work out your salvation by learning and doing what the Bible says!

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. [Heb 5.11-14]

#### ***Means #4: Suffering – Endure Suffering!***

1. Though we may not like it, God has established suffering as a means of making us grow in Christ.

A. The affliction we experience in this world works for us greater and greater glory.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. [2Cor 4.16-17]

B. That greater and greater glory is the work of the Spirit conforming us to the image Christ “from glory to glory” (a little bit more each time we go through difficulties).

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. [2Cor 3.17-18]

C. Without the “light affliction” of the suffering we endure in this world, we would not grow in Christ. The process of edification (spiritual maturation) requires affliction and difficulties.



2. If we want to be Christ-like, we need to be ready to experience the fellowship of His sufferings.

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. [Php 3.10]

- A. If Christ learned obedience... and if Christ was made perfect through sufferings... why do we think it a strange thing if we experience the same?

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. [Heb 5.8-9]

- B. If we follow Christ, we will follow His steps in suffering in this life in this world.

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. [1Pet 2.21]

3. That's why Paul taught consistently that in order to enter the Kingdom of God, we must endure affliction, tribulation, suffering, and difficulties.

- A. We “must” enter into the Kingdom of God through much tribulation because that's how God designed it. Enduring suffering is one of the means God established for our growth.

And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. [Acts 14.21-22]

- B. If you believe in Christ (if you are saved), you will suffer for His sake (His glory).

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me. [Php 1.29-30]

- C. If you are a Christian, just expect it: You will suffer; you will experience affliction.

That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. [1Thes 3.3-4]

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. [2Tim 3.1-12]

4. If Christ was made perfect through sufferings, don't expect anything less as a Christian.

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. [Heb 2.10]

### ***Means #5: An Exchanged Life – Live an Exchanged Live***

1. The above four means will have no genuine effect in our lives if there is no ***consistency***.

- A. The exchanged life is the disciple dying to self in order to live for his Master.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. [Gal 2.20]

- B. This conscious, intentional exchange of life (like Christ said: “*Not my will, but Thine be done*”; Luke 22.42) must be a daily experience or else spiritual growth will stagnate.

I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. [1Cor 15.31]

2. The spiritual growth process is a process of exchanging our way of living for Christ's.

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. [1Jn 2.6]

- A. We identify with Him—we categorize ourselves as Christians, not as members of this world.
- B. Then we learn our Master's Word in order to obey it and follow His instructions.
- C. He will test our resolve and solidify new ways of thinking and living through the suffering and affliction we experience in this world because we obey His Word.
- D. But if, after all that, we turn back to our old ways of living, we'll have to go through the whole process again. There must be an exchange of life—a consistent living out of the new life in Christ.

3. This is what discipleship is all about: Putting off the old life and exchanging it for the new life in Christ (a life lived according to our Master's desires—according to His Word).

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. [Eph 4.22-24]

- A. If there is no consistency in our “exchanged life,” we have not yet been perfected—we have not yet been made “fit” for the Kingdom of God.

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. [Luke 9.62]

- B. And that means we need more identification with Christ, more knowledge of Scripture, more obedience, and more affliction so that we can be made fit.
- C. This consistent walk (consistency during your entire life living this exchanged life) is one of the marks of a true conversion. You “keep in memory” the things you have been taught.

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. [1Cor 15.1-2]

- D. Those who turn back to the world when afflictions come (those who do not live the exchanged life with consistency) are likely in need of a true conversion, like Demas.

For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. [2Tim 4.10; compare this verse with the following two verses to understand why it is very likely Demas was not saved—he was likely a false convert]

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. [Jam 4.4]

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. [Rom 5.10]

- i. We all stumble and fall. We all go through seasons in our walk with Christ, some being “mountain top” experiences, others being “valleys,” and still others being in between.
- ii. But, when we evaluate our lives in light of these five means of growth, we ought to be able to see some sort of consistency in spiritual growth, because that is God's plan for all of us.
- iii. And, just to remind ourselves, this is one of the main reasons why we commit to a sound, biblical local church: So we can grow together and consistently in the exchanged life a Christian is called to live.

### ***Review and Summary: The Five Means of Spiritual Growth***

1. There are five means of edification—five components in the process of spiritual growth in Christ-likeness:
  - A. Means #1: Identification with Christ – Identify with Christ!
  - B. Means #2: Knowledge of the Bible – Learn the Bible!
  - C. Means #3: Obedience to the Bible – Obey the Bible!
  - D. Means #4: Suffering – Endure Suffering!
  - E. Means #5: An Exchanged Life – Live an Exchanged Life!
2. How are you doing in this process? Use these five means as a “measuring stick” to see how well you are doing in each area. Take each one of the five means and ask yourself...
  - A. Have I identified with Christ and do I (consciously and intentionally) identify with Christ daily?
  - B. Am I learning the Bible... intentionally, consistently, and systematically?
  - C. Am I obeying the Bible... intentionally applying what I know?
  - D. Am I enduring suffering (trials, difficulties) or have I quit because the going got tough or uncomfortable for me?
  - E. Am I living an exchanged life (consistently living according to the principles of Scripture) or am I inconsistent in my walk with the Lord?
3. Suggested Personal Application
  - A. You will probably find that one of these elements stands out more than the others. Focus on that one: pray about it and see if there is something simple and practical that you can do to work on it.
  - B. Next we take a look at the goals of edification. These goals will us see an even more practical view of what God expects of us in this process of spiritual growth.

## **THE FOUR GOALS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

### ***The Goals of Spiritual Growth: Introduction***

1. The goals of spiritual growth refer to our part in the process of growing in Christ-likeness.
  - A. In the means of edification we saw five specific things God uses in our lives to facilitate the spiritual process (five things He uses to make us grow up).
  - B. In this section of study we want to focus in on the goals we need to be striving toward in order to grow in Christ. These will be things we can do in order to put ourselves squarely in the middle of God's will so that He can give the increase (so He can conform us to Christ's image).
2. The goals of spiritual growth show us four specific areas where we are required to sacrifice (commitment and effort) in order to grow:
  - A. **The Word of God:** There must be a commitment, and a daily, diligent effort to learn and apply the Scripture.
  - B. **The Local Church:** There must be a commitment, and a daily, diligent effort to form part of a sound, biblical local church.

- C. ***The Fellowship of the Saints:*** There must be a commitment, and a daily, diligent effort to develop and foster friendships with other zealous Christians.
- D. ***The Ministry:*** There must be a commitment, and a daily, diligent effort to minister to others, especially by evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved (i.e., making other disciples).

### ***Goal #1: Commitment to the Word of God***

1. A disciple must be committed to both learning the Bible and doing what it says.
  - A. In order to grow in Christ (in order for edification to take place), the disciple must be committed to both learning and doing what the Bible says.
  - B. Following the Lord implies both hearing and doing His Word—learning and applying what the Scripture says.

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. [Luke 6.46-49]

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. [Jam 1.22]

- C. In order for spiritual growth to occur (in order to be perfected), the disciple must learn doctrine and then apply that doctrine through reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. [2Tim 3.16-17]

2. This goal touches on at least two of the means of edification.
  - A. Knowledge of the Bible: We ought to be committed to growing in our knowledge of Scripture always (it's never enough when it comes to Bible knowledge).
  - B. Obedience to the Bible: The best “follow-up” advice you can give in a witness encounter is this: “Read the Bible daily and do what it says.”
3. Without a commitment to the Word of God, the disciple will not grow.
  - And if we want to continue to grow, we need to continue to make a greater and greater commitment to the Bible—to learning it and obeying it.

### ***Goal #2: Commitment to the Local Church***

1. The following principles were covered in detail previously under the section titled ***The Foundation of Spiritual Growth***. For the purpose of review, the same information is contained in this study on the second goal of spiritual growth.
2. During our dispensation (the Church Age), God has established the local church as the “institution” through which He is accomplishing His plan and purpose.
  - A. (1Tim 3.15) The local church is the pillar and ground of the truth—it is the essential and necessary structure for following Christ today.
  - B. (Eph 4.11-12) Only when the saint commits to the local church (within that church’s leadership structure; v11) will he grow in perfection (v12).

3. When we gather together as a congregation, two things take place that are essential to growth:

A. Pastors: God ministers to the congregation through the pastor(s) of that congregation.

- i. (Acts 20.28-32) The pastor is the one who has been given the responsibility to “feed” the flock of God (his local congregation) and to “fend off the wolves.”
  - Without being committed to one local church, the saint will be malnourished and therefore easy prey for the enemy.
- ii. (1Tim 4.13-16) The pastor is the one God placed in the Body of Christ to teach doctrine and to exhort the saints to obey it.
- iii. The local church provides the necessary structure for church discipline.
  - a. Spiritual growth requires a strong commitment to the local church because part of the growth process will include exhortation and (eventually) correction.
  - b. Without being committed to a local church, the disciple that receives exhortation and correction (including church discipline) will simply leave and look for another church.
  - c. Many today have forsaken the local church and actually think they can grow in Christ by listening to sermons online. That does not result in spiritual growth because there is no personal relationship with a pastor or personal accountability to a congregation (i.e., there is no “church discipline”).
- iv. We need to be committed to a local church because we need a pastor who will teach us, exhort us, and even correct us when we need it.

B. Members: God ministers to the congregation through the members of that congregation.

- i. (1Cor 12.27) The members of a local church are members of a body; they are uniquely joined together (notice the “ye” is not “we” in this verse; Paul is referring to the local church in Corinth, of which he was not a part; he is not referring to the “universal” Church of which he was a part).
- ii. (1Cor 12.7) In the local church the Spirit of God manifests Himself through the members (each and every one of them) “to profit withal.” And what is the “profit” for all...?
- iii. (1Cor 14.26) The Spirit manifests Himself through the members of the local church, as we gather together as one local body, “unto edifying.”
- iv. The saint must be a committed member of a local church to grow as God designed.

4. The local church also plays a key role in our suffering.

A. Remember: Suffering (enduring suffering) is one of the means God uses to conform us to Christ.

B. Our local church is our spiritual family and we will suffer together just like brothers and sisters suffer as they grow to maturity in a physical family (we have to “learn to get along”).

- And God will use the problems we have between us to make us grow in Christ-likeness (in forgiveness, mercy, grace, love, etc.).

C. This church is also our refuge from the suffering we enduring in the world.

- We ought to be able to come here and know it's “safe”; here we can rest and recuperate in order to get back out in the world and preach the Gospel to the lost.

5. If we want to grow in Christ, we need a strong commitment to the local church.

A. (Eph 2.19-22) Our growth happens when we are committed to being “built together.”

- B. (Eph 4.16) Edification occurs when the members of a local church gather together and minister one to another in the love of Christ.
- C. Without a growing commitment to one local church, the disciple will not grow in Christ as the Lord has designed.

### ***Goal #3: Commitment to the Fellowship of the Saints***

1. The principle here is this: If we want to grow in Christ, we need friends who are zealous, passionate, and committed Christians—Christians who are more mature than we are, or who at least challenge us to stretch ourselves and walk closer to the Lord with greater submission and zeal.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. [Prov 13.20]

- A. This kind of fellowship will motivate us (because motivation is more “caught” than taught).
  - B. This kind of fellowship will give us examples we can follow in order to better follow Christ.
2. For example: The first means of edification is identification with Christ.
    - A. What does that look like in daily life? How do you actually do that?
    - B. Find a committed Christian who is really identified with Christ (for example Mark Cahill) and follow his example in your own life context.
    - C. And what would be even better than a Mark Cahill (who lives in Atlanta) is to find a good example in our own local church and commit to fellowship with him. That would make a difference!
  3. In addition to being committed to the local church, we need to be committed to biblical fellowship with other committed Christians (in this church and in other like-minded churches).

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. [Prov 27.17]

- A. Commit to making friends and spending time with those who are zealously committed to Christ and the mission of being and making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. [1Cor 15.33]

- B. This is key to living and exchanged life consistently.

### ***Goal #4: Commitment to the Ministry***

1. Discipleship is the process of being conformed to the image of the Master, Jesus Christ.
  - A. Jesus came to this earth to seek and to save the lost, and even though He ascended into heaven, He has not stopped doing that very same thing (through His Spirit and His ambassadors: us).
  - B. God expects us, as His children, to “suffer with Christ”—to labor with Him under the same yoke, in the same field, doing the same work as He. That’s “ministry.”

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. [Rom 8.16-17]

2. We need to grow consistently in our commitment to the work of the ministry that God gave us.
  - A. We need greater and greater commitment to evangelism (if not, we will stagnate in our spiritual growth). We need to always set new goals and challenge ourselves to do more.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto

them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. [2Cor 5.18-20]

**B. We need greater and greater commitment to edification.**

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. [Eph 4.11-16]

- i. We not only need to be committed ourselves to these four goals (in order to be disciples); we also need to help others to do the same (in order to make disciples).
- ii. That means we are all called to the ministry of edification (just like we are all called to evangelize):
  - a. We need to help other believers grow in knowledge of and obedience to the Bible.
  - b. We need to help other believers grow in their commitment to the local church.
  - c. We need to help other believers grow in the fellowship of the saints (maybe we need to be the zealous, commitment, mature examples that others can follow and imitate!).
  - d. We need to help other believers grow in their commitment to ministry, training them to evangelize the lost and to edify the saved.

***Summary and Review: The Four Goals of Spiritual Growth***

1. Use these four goals of edification to evaluate your commitment level to each one of them. Used in this way, they form an even more practical “measuring stick” than the five means of spiritual growth.
2. Think of these four goals as four life-long, daily commitments God expects of us if we hope to grow spiritually toward maturity in Christ.
3. How are you doing in your commitment to the Lord?
  - A. How is your commitment to the Scripture? Are you putting forth daily effort to learn the Bible and obey what it says?
  - B. How is your commitment to the local church? Have you found a good church? If so, have you committed to being a member of that church (even when it becomes uncomfortable for you)?
  - C. How is your commitment to the fellowship with other zealous, mature saints?
  - D. How is your commitment to the ministry? Are you regularly putting forth the effort to evangelize the lost and edify the saved?
4. The final section of study in this lesson is the practical application (or “how-to”).
  - A. If we want to see God using the five means of spiritual growth to conform us to the image of Christ, and if we want to establish ourselves in the four goals of spiritual growth so that we know we are in a position where God can make us grow...
  - B. ...then we need to develop three essential habits of spiritual growth.

## THE THREE ESSENTIAL HABITS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

### *Three Essential Habits*

1. These three habits are essential for the healthy growth and development of a follower of Jesus Christ.
  - A. These three habits are like guidelines one would tie to a sapling tree and then stake them down into the ground. These habits (as guidelines) form a structure to help us grow straight and true.
  - B. These three habits are also the essential ingredients to our “spiritual exercise” program that will produce strong, healthy, mature Christians.
2. These three habits are not all you need to mature spiritually, but they are essential to the process.
  - If you want to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and grow spiritually toward godliness and Christ-likeness, you will have to sacrifice in order to commit to putting forth the daily effort to develop three life-long habits.
3. These three things are referred to as “habits” because they need to constantly and consistently form part of our daily lives if we hope to be like Christ and live like Him.
  - A. It's like the secular proverb says (commonly, but wrongly, attributed to Samuel Smiles):
 

*Sow a thought, and you reap an act;  
Sow and act, and you reap a habit;  
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;  
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.*

~Anonymous
  - B. If we sow a thought, we reap an act because we will first think about what we will later do.
 

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he... [Prov 23.7]

    - i. This section of study is going to sow a thought about spiritual maturity its relationship to three habits we should develop in our lives.
    - ii. The goal of sowing that thought is to reap an act (action)—it is for us to build these three habits in our lives.
  - C. If we sow the action long enough (about 40 days, or roughly six weeks), we will find that the act becomes a habit—it becomes part of our lifestyles and daily routines.
  - D. If we sow these three habits long enough, they will eventually result in a change in us—our character.
    - i. We ourselves cannot change our character; only God can change that.
 

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. [1Cor 3.6]

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [Gal 5.22-23]
    - ii. However, if we consistently do what God has called us to do, we will find that He will conform us, little by little, into the image of His Son.
  - E. And if we sow this kind of Christ-like character (spiritual maturity), we will find a harvest of reward in our final destiny because we will have lived and labored according to God's will.
  - F. It all starts with a thought that leads to an action. That action must be repeated constantly and consistently until it becomes a habit. Godly habits will result in godly character. And that kind of character will result in a glorious destiny with Christ.



4. Each of the following three habits will be described in more detail in subsequent lessons. Here our goal is to simply present and introduce each habit in order to begin thinking about how we can change our routines in order to incorporate them into our daily actions.

- A. Habit #1: Grow Closer to God—the “TAG” System
- B. Habit #2: Grow Together—Fellowship with Other Like-Minded Christians
- C. Habit #3: Grow by Giving—Time, Talents, Treasure, and Testimony

### ***Habit #1: Grow Closer to God – The “TAG” System***

1. In order to grow in Christ, we must grow closer to God. And that means we need to spend “Time Alone with God” (TAG time).

2. The eternal life we have been given in the Lord Jesus Christ is all about knowing God.

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. [John 17.3]

3. When Christ called out His 12 Disciples, He said they were being separated for two specific things. And observe which came first.

And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach. [Mark 3.14]

- A. The Disciples were first called out to “be with Him”—to simply be with Christ; to spend time with Him, watching Him, listening to Him, speaking with Him... getting to know Him.
- B. And then, after they spent time with the Lord, learning of Him, they were to go forth and preach of Him.

4. Even the enemies of the gospel recognized that which made the Disciples different: they had been with Jesus.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. [Acts 4.13]

5. If we hope to be conformed to the image of Christ (if we hope to mature spiritually), we too need to “be with Jesus.” We need to spend personal time alone with God in order to know Him.

- A. This requires that we listen to what He has to say to us. And in the Church Age, that means we need to spend time reading and meditating in the Scripture.
- B. And then we need to respond to the Lord according to what he “says” to us in His Word. We call this prayer.
- C. This is exactly how we get to know one another: communication. You talk to me, I respond to you; you respond to me... and we grow in our knowledge of each other.
- D. To know God we need to hear His words (from Scripture) and then we need to respond accordingly (through prayer).
- E. This “communication” with God (through the Bible and prayer) must become a daily habit if we hope to grow in Christ toward spiritual maturity. And here is where a structure will help us develop that habit.

6. The “TAG” System: An accountability system to help a believer develop the habit of growing closer to God by spending personal time with Him in the Word and prayer.

But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all

things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.  
[1Tim 4.7-8]

- A. Just like a structure can help you develop good habits in diet and exercise, so a good structure can help you develop good habits to grow in godliness.
- B. This system is not a “heavy yoke” that “burdens” God’s people with “legalism.” It is a simply system that can also serve as an accountability structure to help lazy people (us!) develop a little discipline in our walk with the Lord.
- C. It’s like a pastor once said in a message on Luke 14:

*Now I’m not a sports fanatic, and I am far less patriotic now than I was as a young man. But if you want to learn character, learn to play a sport competitively or join the military. Both of those require discipline. The coach and the instructor make you go til you drop. That is good for a young man. If he can take what he learns in that regard and apply it to the Christian life, he can really do something for the Lord. ~Dr. Peter S. Ruckman*

#### 7. The “TAG” (Time Alone with God) system is simple:

- A. **Read**: We hear from God today through Scripture, so our time alone getting to know Him must center around reading the Bible.
- B. **Reflect**: It does not do a whole lot of good to read without thinking about what you are reading. So, as we read the Bible, we need to *meditate* on what we are reading—we need to *reflect* on it.
- C. **Record**: Memory is always enhanced when the hand connects with the mind, and we should do that each day. We should write down (record) the one key thought God has given us in His Word for that day.
- D. **Respond**: Pray. We should respond to what God has just “told” us in His Word. We need to pray to God based on what we recorded from our time reflecting on the Scripture we read for the day.
- E. This needs to be a basic, fundamental habit of our day—each and every day. Later, in a separate lesson, we’ll go into more detail on the specifics of how to do each of these four things.
  - i. What we need to understand now is this: In order to grow spiritually, we must grow closer to God.
  - ii. And that means we need to spend time alone with God communicating with Him. We listen to God by reading the Scripture and we respond to what He says through prayer.

#### ***Habit #2: Grow Together – Fellowship with Other Like-Minded Christians***

- 1. If we want to grow in Christ toward spiritual maturity, we will be “builted together.”  
In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. [Eph 2.22]
- 2. The “independent spirit” and the “Lone Ranger attitude” have no place in biblical Christianity. We need other Christians.
- 3. If we desire to grow up in Christ, we need to be in fellowship with the other members of the Body of Christ (specifically, with those members of our local body—our local church).

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. [Eph 4.16]

- A. Other Christians will not only minister to us, but they will also obligate us to learn how to love the unlovable, how to be patient with the irritating, and how to deal with conflicts so we can work together to accomplish the Mission.
- B. You will never grow in Christ without developing the habit of being in fellowship with other Christians. Therefore, we will be spending some time in another lesson studying this topic out in some detail.

### ***Habit #3: Grow by Giving – Time, Talents, Treasure, and Testimony***

1. Even the smallest of sapling trees must give in order to survive. It cannot continue taking in carbon dioxide without giving out oxygen. And though it may be a very small bit that is given back (saplings don't have many leaves!), it is still necessary for the tree to give in order to grow.
2. In the same way, in order for a Christian to grow, he must develop the habit of giving, especially in the following four key areas:

- A. **Time**: Time is what life is made of, and God wants our lives!

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. [Eph 5.15-16]

- B. **Talent**: God has given each of us certain talents, gifts, abilities, and skills; and He expects us to use those to glorify Him and bless others.

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. [1Pet 4.10]

- C. **Treasure**: God wants the Christian to grow in the grace of giving of his earthly treasure (yes, that means *money*).

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. [Mat 6.21]

- D. **Testimony**: The greatest thing a Christian could ever give to another person is the gospel. And one of the easiest, most effective ways of witnessing is through your own salvation testimony. But regardless of how we do it, we all need to do it! We all need be evangelizing the lost.

Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. [Luke 8.39]

## **CONCLUSION**

Each of the three essential habits of spiritual growth will be developed in subsequent lessons. What we need to understand now is this: Spiritual growth will not happen by accident; we have to sacrifice to grow. And that means we have to commit to spiritual growth and then put forth the daily, diligent effort to grow.

### **Remember our purpose, our mission, and the key principle in spiritual growth and maturity:**

- **Our Purpose**: To glorify God and enjoy Him forever. How do we do this? By accomplishing the mission...
- **Our Mission**: To be and make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Key Principle**: To make spiritually mature disciples, we must first be spiritually mature disciples.
- ✓ A disciple is an apprentice; he follows the Master in order to be like Him and live like Him.

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. [Luke 6.40]

- ✓ This is God's ultimate goal for all of us and this is why we are called “Christians” (which means “little Christs”).

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. [Rom 8.29]

- ✓ This means we need to stop being spiritually immature children and grow up in Christ!

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. [Eph 4.14-15]

- ✓ And that, like any other exercise program, requires sacrifice because we have to commit to doing it and then we have to show a little diligence and discipline to put forth the daily effort required to grow in godliness.

But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. [1Tim 4.7-8]

### Do you want to grow spiritually?

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. [Ps 1.3]

- If so, then you need to be planted where you can receive the nourishment you need to grow. You need to set down roots in a biblical local church.
- And then you need to “stake out” three basic habits (like three guidelines on a sapling that help it grow straight and true) in order to build a strong trunk, both tall and wide. That strong trunk is what will withstand the winds of doctrine that blow and the storms of life that assail all of us.

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. [Eph 4.14-15]

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- If you want to grow spiritually, here is where you must start. It will require sacrifice. It will not be easy, nor will it be comfortable. It requires commitment and effort; it requires diligence and daily discipline.
- But here is where we find the abundant life in Christ. Here is where we find our true joy. Here is where we really enjoy God! Because here is where we can rest assured we are living according to God's good and perfect will. Here is where we glorify and please Him. And that will always be our greatest pleasure and joy!

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. [Php 3.7-14]

**LESSON REVIEW**

1. What is the daily and life-long goal of the disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ that is mentioned at the beginning of this lesson?

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2. What is our purpose in life (why are we here)?

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3. How do we fulfill that purpose?

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4. What is our mission (what are we supposed to do)?

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5. What is the key principle mentioned in the introduction to this lesson and what does it have to do with our mission?

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6. What is the purpose of this lesson?

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***The Foundation of Spiritual Growth***

7. What does the Bible say is God's ordained institution through which we accomplish His plan and purpose today? What verse teaches this truth?

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8. Why are local church pastors foundational to your spiritual growth?

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9. Why are the members of your local church foundational to your spiritual growth?

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10. How is the local church foundational to your suffering?

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***The Process of Spiritual Growth***

11. When does your spiritual growth begin and how does that relate to discipleship?

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12. What is the end (or goal) of your spiritual growth?

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13. When will we finally reach this goal? What does that mean for us today?

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***The Illustrations of Spiritual Growth***

14. Explain how the growth and development of a person illustrates the spiritual growth process.

A. What does a ***baby*** need and what does this show us about growing in Christ?

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B. What does a ***child*** need and what does that teach us about growing in Christ?

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C. What does a ***youth*** need and what does that teach us about growing in Christ?

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D. What does the ***adult*** show us about the spiritual growth process?

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15. What are the four words that begin with the letter "M" that are illustrated in each state of growth:

A. Babe: M\_\_\_\_\_

B. Child: M\_\_\_\_\_

C. Youth: M\_\_\_\_\_

D. Adult: M\_\_\_\_\_

16. Explain how the growth and development of a tree illustrates the spiritual growth process.

A. What does a newly "born" sapling need and what does this show us about growing in Christ?

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B. What does the development of the tree's trunk teach us about growing in Christ?

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C. What do the leaves of a tree teach us about growing in Christ?

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D. What does the fruit of a tree teach us about the spiritual growth process?

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17. What are the four words that begin with the letter "M" that are illustrated in each state of growth:

A. Roots: M\_\_\_\_\_

B. Trunk: M\_\_\_\_\_

C. Leaves: M\_\_\_\_\_

D. Fruit: M\_\_\_\_\_

***The Cost of Spiritual Growth***

18. Is spiritual growth automatic? Briefly explain your answer.

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19. What is the metaphor (the picture) Paul uses in Philippians to exhort believers to put forth continual effort in their spiritual growth? What does that mean for us today?

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20. What does Peter say about spiritual growth and diligence?

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21. What does it mean to "exercise" ourselves unto godliness?

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22. According to Luke 14.25-33...

A. What did Jesus state emphatically in v27 and v33?

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B. What does v28 teach us about the cost of discipleship and about the multitude that say they want to follow Christ?

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C. According to v26, what will we have to sacrifice if we want to follow Christ?

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D. According to v27, what does following Christ require? How is that illustrated in carrying a cross?

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E. In v28-30, what is our foundation and what does that have to do with further growth in Christ?

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F. According to v31-33, ultimately what must you sacrifice to grow in Christlikeness? And why is that?

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G. What is the point to be made in Luke 14.25-33?

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### ***The Five Means of Spiritual Growth***

23. List the five means of spiritual growth (the five things God uses to make us grow up in Christ).

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

24. In your own words, explain what it means to identify with Christ.

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25. Explain why learning the Bible is important for your spiritual growth. Use Bible verses to support your answer.

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26. Complete the following sentence on sound counsel for anyone: \_\_\_\_\_ the Bible and \_\_\_\_\_ what it says.

27. What did Jesus say about our obedience to His Word in Luke 6.46-49?

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28. Using 1Corinthians 8.1 and Hebrews 5.11-14, explain why it is essential that we "use" the Scripture (obey it, apply it) and not just know it.

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29. What do the following verses say to the Christian about suffering?

A. Acts 14.21-22

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B. Philippians 1.29-30

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C. 1Thessalonians 3.3-4

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D. 2Timothy 3.10-12

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30. What does it mean to live an "exchanged life"?

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***The Four Goals of Spiritual Growth***

31. How would you describe the difference between the goals of spiritual growth (edification) and the means of spiritual growth (edification).

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32. List the four goals of spiritual growth (the four things we, as followers of Christ, are strive to reach). Give a brief description of each one.

A. \_\_\_\_\_

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B. \_\_\_\_\_

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C. \_\_\_\_\_

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D. \_\_\_\_\_

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33. What are the two parts of the goal to commit to the Word of God? And, what is the best advice you could give anyone?

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34. What do we gain through the pastor of a local church when we commit to being members of that church?

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35. What do we gain through the members of a local church when we commit to being members of that church?

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36. Briefly explain the benefit found in the fellowship of the saints.

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37. What two specific activities comprise the work of the ministry given to us in Christ (both words start with an "e")? Who is responsible for each (explain your answer a little bit)?

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***The Three Essential Habits of Spiritual Growth***

38. Explain the benefits of developing healthy habits in your life.

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39. What are the three essential habits of spiritual growth?

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

40. According to Mark 3.14, what should come before going forth to preach Christ?

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41. How do we listen to God and hear from Him today?

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42. How do we respond to God when He "speaks" to us?

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43. Explain the "TAG System," especially the four "R's."

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44. Explain the second habit of growing together in fellowship.

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45. According to the third habit, what should we be giving and why should we give?

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## SPIRITUAL GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT Comparison Chart

### THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSON

|  | <b>Babe</b>   | <b>Child</b>  | <b>Youth</b>   | <b>Adult</b>   |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Main Need</b>                           | Protection, love, and basic nourishment                           | Knowledge and rigid structures to teach how to apply that knowledge                             | Strength, experience, responsibility as an individual                      | Leadership ability, consistent self-discipline, responsible reproduction   |
| <b>Key Motivator</b>                       | His spiritual vacuum (an insatiable appetite)                     | His discipler (“because the teacher says so”)   | Himself (because he wants to)  | God and the ministry (a desire to please the Father)   |
| <b>Disciple-Maker's Role</b>               | <u>Mother/Nurse</u> : Nourish, protect, cherish                   | <u>Teacher</u> : Equip and train for life-long service  | <u>Coach</u> : Help to develop strength and responsibility                 | <u>Peer/Colaborer</u> : Motivate for the long haul   |
| <b>Physical Picture</b>                    | Every newborn baby needs a healthy, loving family.                | “Go to school” and learn how to live correctly.   | Learn responsibility and participate in the work being done in the family. | Show leadership in taking care of his own needs, consistent self-discipline, and responsibility in raising a family. |
| <b>Spiritual Reality</b>                   | Every believer needs to commit to a sound, biblical local church. | Developing knowledge and habits that will result in the life-long process of growing in Christ. | Sacrifice in order to participate in the ministry.                         | Sacrifice to be a disciple (grow daily in Christ) and to make disciples (evangelism and edification).                |
| <b>Commitment</b>                          | Local Church  | Scripture   | Service  | Reproduction   |
| <b>The Sacrifice (commitment + effort)</b> | <i>Membership</i>   | <i>Maturity</i>   | <i>Ministry</i>  | <i>Mission</i>   |

## THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF A TREE

|  | Roots  | Trunk  | Leaves   | Fruit  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Main Need</b>                           | <u>Provision and protection</u> : Set down roots in a healthy environment              | <u>Stability and Strength</u> : broad, tall, strong trunk  | <u>Participation</u> in the environment  | <u>Reproduction</u> : Bear fruit that contains the seeds to reproduce after his kinds  |
| <b>Key Motivator</b>                       | The need for basic provision (nourishment) and protection (dangers in the environment) | The need to be established, stable, and strong (to withstand storms and uphold branches, leaves, and fruit).     | The need to give in order to continue growing (give out oxygen, take in carbon dioxide). | The need to reproduce and thereby glorify God (by doing <u>what</u> God designed, <u>how</u> He designed): The seed is in the fruit! |
| <b>Disciple-Maker's Role</b>               | Nourish & Protect  | Teach & Train  | Provide & Guide<br><i>Provide opportunities, give advice, then get out of the way.</i>   | Labor & Love<br><i>Be a colaborer, a peer, an equal.</i>   |
| <b>Focus</b>                               | Plant yourself in a sound, biblical church   | Learn and apply Scripture (stake out three strong guidelines to grow straight and true: three essential habits!) | Serve according to your divine design (or your divine duty!)                             | Go and make disciples (evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved)   |
| <b>Expectation</b>                         | Set down roots!  | Grow strong!   | Participate!   | Bear fruit in order to sow seeds!  |
| <b>Commitment</b>                          | Local Church   | Scripture  | Service  | Reproduction   |
| <b>The Sacrifice (commitment + effort)</b> | <i>Membership</i>  | <i>Maturity</i>  | <i>Ministry</i>  | <i>Mission</i>   |

