



# Spiritual Growth



**Sermon Outlines On The Subject Of Spiritual Growth**

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# Spiritual Growth

## Spiritual Growth Is A Choice

### INTRODUCTION

1. The blessings enjoyed in Christ include not only **redemption**, but **renewal**...
  - a. In baptism, we undergo a "washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit"  
- **Ti 3:5**
  - a. From baptism, we rise to "walk in newness of life" - **Ro 6:4**
2. The renewal we find in Christ involves the concept of spiritual growth...
  - a. Just as a healthy physical life is one of growth
  - b. So a healthy spiritual life is a process of growth
3. Sadly, not all Christians grow spiritually...
  - a. Many have been Christians for years, with little change or improvement
  - b. They are no more, often less, useful to the Lord than when they first became Christians
  - c. Failing to grow, they become stagnant, like a pool of water
4. That is because "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**"...
  - a. It doesn't happen by default (unlike physical growth)
  - b. Spiritual growth (like emotional maturity) occurs only when we choose to grow

-- **If we do not make that choice, and stick to it, there will be no spiritual growth!**

[To encourage us to make the right choice regarding spiritual growth, consider that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**"...]

### I. COMMANDED BY GOD

#### **A. IMPLICITLY STATED IN THE GREAT COMMISSION...**

1. The Great Commission is found in **Mt 28:18-20**
  2. Jesus commanded His apostles to make disciples
    - a. Baptizing them
    - b. Teaching them to observe all things He commanded
- **Implicit in the command to teach, is that disciples would be obedient learners, i.e., constantly growing as they learned and obeyed their Lord**

#### **B. EXPLICITLY STATED IN THE APOSTOLIC EPISTLES...**

1. Peter ends his second epistle with a command to grow - **2 Pe 3:18**
  - a. We are to grow in grace
  - b. We are to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ
2. Peter begins his second epistle describing how we are to grow - **2 Pe 1:5-8**
  - a. Adding to your faith such graces as virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc.
  - b. Abounding in these graces, being fruitful, which implies growth

-- **Christians who did not grow, were sternly rebuked - e.g., He 5:12-6:1**

[Spiritual growth is a not an option, reserved for a few select Christians. The Word of God commands us to grow! We should also remember that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**" that...]

## **II. REQUIRES DILIGENT EFFORT**

### **A. UNLIKE PHYSICAL GROWTH...**

1. People grow physically by default (unless there is some disorder)
  2. No effort is required on our part; we mature physically whether we want to or not
- **Don't think that just because you grow older, you are growing spiritually!**

### **B. SPIRITUAL GROWTH REQUIRES CONCENTRATED EFFORT...**

1. Jesus said it requires labor - cf. **Jn 6:27**
  2. Paul wrote that it requires work, pressing on - cf. **Ph 2:12; 3:13-14**
  3. Peter wrote that it requires diligence - cf. **2 Pe 1:5,10**
- **Like physical health, spiritual growth requires regular exercise - cf. 1 Ti 4:7-8**

[Spiritual growth is not easy. We must work at it. Today. Tomorrow. Always. But we can take comfort in knowing that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**" which is...]

## **III. ASSISTED BY GOD**

### **A. WE ARE NOT ALONE IN OUR EFFORTS...**

1. While we work out our salvation, God is at work in us - cf. **Ph 2:12-13**
  2. Just as He was with us in producing our new birth - cf. **Ti 3:5**
- **God desires to complete the work He started when He saved us - cf. Ph 1:6**

### **B. WE ARE STRENGTHENED BY GOD IN OUR EFFORTS...**

1. He strengthens us by His Spirit in our inner man - cf. **Ep 3:16**
  2. He empowers us with unimaginable power that is in us - cf. **Ep 3:20**
  3. He provides the armor to stand strong in the power of His might - cf. **Ep 6:10-11**
- **There is no excuse not to grow, for Christ strengthens us! - cf. Ph 4:13**

[With God as our aid, spiritual growth is possible. And not mediocre growth, but spiritual growth beyond what limits we might think hinder us! Finally, let us remember that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**" that is...]

## **IV. BLESSED BY GOD**

### **A. THE BLESSINGS BEGIN IN THIS LIFE...**

1. As we grow in grace - cf. **2 Pe 3:18**
  - a. We experience the blessings of the grace in which we stand
  - b. Such as peace with God, rejoicing in hope - cf. **Ro 5:1-2**
2. As we grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ - cf. **2 Pe 3:18**
  - a. We experience the blessings of adding virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc. to our

faith

- b. Such as a victorious life, in which we do not stumble so as to fall - cf. **2 Pe 1:10**
- **Indeed, it is spiritual growth that ensures the "abundant life" now that Jesus promised! - cf. Jn 10:10**

## **B. THE BLESSINGS CONTINUE INTO THE LIFE TO COME**

- 1. We will experience an "abundant entrance" into the everlasting kingdom - **2 Pe 1:11**
- 2. In some way, our works do follow us - cf. **Re 14:13**
- **At the very least, we know that our labors will not be in vain! - cf. 1 Co 15:58**

## CONCLUSION

- 1. We have been talking about growth; but not just any growth, for not all growth is good...
  - a. The hearts of some grow dull - cf. **Mt 13:15**
  - b. The love of many grow cold - cf. **Mt 24:12**
  - c. There is the danger of growing weary in doing good - cf. **Ga 6:9; 2 Th 3:13**
  - d. There is possibility of growing corrupt according to deceitful lusts - cf. **Ep 4:22**
  - e. There is danger of growing wanton against Christ - cf. **1 Ti 5:11**
  - f. There are those who grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived - cf. **2 Ti 3:13**
  - **Like the growth of cancerous cells, the wrong growth can be deadly!**
  
- 2. We have been talking about spiritual growth, the kind of growth that is...
  - a. Commanded by God
  - b. Requires diligent effort
  - c. Assisted by God
  - d. Blessed by God
  - **It is this kind of growth that Peter enjoined as he closed his epistle - 2 Pe 3:18**
  
- 3. What kind of growth is taking place in our spiritual lives?
  - a. Is it a deadly kind of growth, creating dull hearts, love that is cold, weariness in doing good, even moral corruption?
  - b. Or is it a vibrant kind of growth in which we are abounding in love, joy, and peace, being faithful and fruitful in our service to Jesus Christ?
  - **The one kind of growth is often the result of neglect, the other kind of growth comes only when we make the right choice!**

If we desire to experience the blessings of the right kind of growth, then never forget that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**"! Are you making the right choice today and every day...?

*"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." - Mt 11:28-30*

# Spiritual Growth

## Spiritual Growth And Self-Esteem

### INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous lesson we saw that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**"...
  - a. Commanded by God - cf. **2 Pe 3:18**
  - b. Requiring diligent effort - cf. **Ph 2:12**
  - c. Assisted by God - cf. **Ph 2:13**
  - d. Blessed by God - cf. **2 Pe 1:8-11**
2. Yet many Christians do not reach their potential for spiritual growth...
  - a. Character development is minimal, abilities likewise underdeveloped
  - b. Years pass by with little progress
3. I am persuaded a major reason is poor self-esteem...
  - a. Causing Christians to underestimate their true potential
  - b. Hindering their efforts to grow

[What is self-esteem? How does it affect our spiritual growth? Let's begin by taking a look at...]

### I. SELF-ESTEEM AND THE CHRISTIAN

#### **A. UNDERSTANDING SELF-ESTEEM...**

1. Self-esteem is our internal feelings and evaluation of ourselves based on our "perceived" self-image
  - a. How we feel about ourselves
  - b. Based on how we view ourselves
2. Self-esteem and self-image are closely related, based mostly on feedback during childhood
  - a. Feedback may come first from others (parents, peers, other important figures)
  - b. But then reinforced by our own self-talk (what we tell ourselves)
3. Healthy self-esteem is enhanced by childhood experiences that include:
  - a. Being praised
  - b. Being listened to, being spoken to respectfully
  - c. Getting attention and hugs
  - d. Experiencing success in sports or school
  - e. Having trustworthy friends
4. Childhood experiences that lead to low self-esteem include:
  - a. Being harshly criticized, yelled at, or beaten
  - b. Being ignored, ridiculed or teased
  - c. Being expected to be "perfect" all the time
  - d. Experiencing failures in sports or school
  - People with low self-esteem were often given messages that failed experiences

(losing a game, getting a poor grade, etc.) were failures of their whole self

5. The consequences of poor self-esteem:
  - a. Can create anxiety, stress, loneliness and increased likelihood for depression
  - b. Can cause problems with friendships and relationships
  - c. Can seriously impair academic and job performance
  - d. Can lead to underachievement and increased vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse

-- These negative consequences themselves reinforce the negative self-image and can take a person into a downward spiral of lower and lower self-esteem and increasingly nonproductive or even actively self-destructive behavior

## **B. THE CHRISTIAN'S BASIS FOR SELF-ESTEEM...**

1. The Christian has two primary reasons for having a healthy self-image:
  - a. Dignity by virtue of **divine generation**
    - 1) We were created in God's image - cf. **Gen 1:26-27**
    - 2) We were created to exercise dominion - cf. **Gen 1:28**

-- God has further demonstrated His high estimation of mankind by His love - cf. **Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:10; Ro 5:8**
  - b. Dignity by virtue of **spiritual regeneration**
    - 1) Yes, we are sinners, but we have been regenerated - **Ti 3:5**
    - 2) We are now loved as His children - cf. **1 Jn 3:1**
2. Christians have other reasons for having a good self-esteem
  - a. The blessing of continued forgiveness when we sin - **1 Jn 1:9-2:2**
  - b. The blessing of God's Spirit to help us overcome sin - **Ga 4:6; Ro 8:12; Ep 3:16**
  - c. The blessing of God's family (the church) to help us - **He 3:12; 10:25**
  - d. The blessing of God's own assurance never to forsake us - **He 13:5-6**

[There is much that could be added to the fact that God highly esteems His children. While we are sinners, He wants us to have the proper estimation of ourselves. But now let's address more directly the subject of...]

## **II. SELF-ESTEEM AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

### **A. POOR SELF-ESTEEM HINDERS SPIRITUAL GROWTH...**

1. Not believing they are capable of growing, some tell themselves:
  - a. "I could never do that (teach a class, preach a sermon, etc.)..."
  - b. "I will make too many mistakes..."
2. Prone to giving up too soon, some tell themselves:
  - a. "I just don't have the ability..."
  - b. "I am only a one talent individual..."
3. Poor self-esteem on an individual basis can easily carry over to how the group feels
  - a. "We are too small as a church to do..."
  - b. "We are too poor..."

-- All such excuses are indications of poor self-esteem, and prevent spiritual growth from occurring!

## **B. PROPER SELF-ESTEEM ENHANCES SPIRITUAL GROWTH...**

1. Consider the healthy self-esteem the apostle Paul had:
  - a. For himself - cf. **Ph 4:13**
  - b. For others - cf. **Ph 1:6; 2:12-13**
2. We should have a similar estimation of ourselves
  - a. We can do whatever God wants us to do, because Christ strengthens us!
  - b. We may not all do the same, but we can contribute much to the glory of God!  
- cf. **Ro 12:3-8; 1 Pe 4:10-11**
- Instead of making excuses, tell yourself: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"* - **Ph 4:13**

## **C. PRACTICAL STEPS FOR IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM...**

1. Identify and accept your strengths, weaknesses--everyone has them, no one is perfect
2. Take an **"I can"** attitude and offer yourself encouragement along the way
3. Set realistic goals, and then take joy in your achievements (giving God the glory!)
4. Don't try to be someone else, but be thankful of who you are
5. Explore your own talents, learn to love and appreciate the unique person you are (God loves you, your brethren love you, shouldn't you?)
6. Eliminate negative self-talk; consider the following:
  - a. It takes about 20 positive statements about ourselves (the foundation of our self-esteem) to counteract even just 1 negative personal statement!
  - b. It doesn't take a continual repetition of negative statements from our parents, peers, and others throughout our childhood to cause low self-esteem
  - c. Once we get a couple in our head, we can use them over and over again; again and again we take those false negatives and repeat them unconsciously (completely unaware) - it's like having a constant heckler with you

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Poor self-esteem is a major hindrance to spiritual growth...
  - a. We make excuses for not trying
  - b. We often give up before we make progress
2. On the other hand, spiritual growth greatly enhances self-esteem...
  - a. As we grow, our achievements encourage us to do more
  - b. As we grow, we gain confidence that we are on the right track - cf. **1 Jn 3:18-19**
3. Rather than let a mistaken estimation of self to hinder our service to God...
  - a. Allow God's estimation of us to enhance our self-image and self-esteem
  - b. Allow God's estimation of us to encourage the spiritual growth He desires
- We will feel better about ourselves when we do!



# Spiritual Growth

## Goals For Spiritual Growth

### INTRODUCTION

1. Thus far in our study of spiritual growth I have sought to establish the following...
  - a. Spiritual growth is a choice that we must make
    - 1) Commanded by God
    - 2) That requires diligent effort on our part
    - 3) Yet we are assisted by God in our effort
    - 4) And we are blessed by God both in this life and the one to come
  - b. Spiritual growth is too often hindered by low self-esteem
    - 1) Too many Christians sell themselves short, because they do not view themselves capable of attaining higher levels of spiritual growth
    - 2) Not believing in their God-given capability, they are prone to making excuses for not trying, and therefore not growing
  - Yet because God commands us to grow, we need to have faith that we can grow
2. But what should be our goals regarding spiritual growth?
  - a. For what are we to strive, making diligent effort?
  - b. By what measurement can we determine that spiritual growth is taking place?
3. As with any venture, having goals and attaining them is essential to success...
  - a. The athlete excels when he or she sets goals, and attains them
  - b. The successful business man understands the importance of goals

[So it is with the Christian. We must have goals, and measurable ways of attaining them. In this lesson, I want to offer some thoughts in this regards. First, for the Christian there needs to be what I call...]

### I. BEHAVIORAL GOALS

#### **A. OUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO BE LIKE CHRIST...**

1. Jesus intimated such in talking about discipleship
  - a. A disciple is to become like his teacher - cf. **Lk 6:40**
  - b. Jesus wants us to become His disciples - cf. **Mt 28:19-20**
2. Paul made it clear that this is the goal of our redemption
  - a. God's desire is that we be conformed to the image of His Son - **Ro 8:29**
  - b. As we are being transformed, it is in the image of Christ - cf. **2 Co 3:18**
  - c. We are to be renewed according to the image of Christ - cf. **Co 3:10-11**
- **So an essential element of spiritual growth is to become more Christ-like, renewing our behavior to conform to the example of Jesus Christ**

#### **B. THIS INVOLVES GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST...**

1. Which Peter commanded in **2 Pe 3:18**

2. Not just academic knowledge, but personal knowledge through character development - **2 Pe 1:5-8**
  - a. We must add spiritual graces to our faith, such as virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love
  - b. It is with the development of such graces that we are truly fruitful in the knowledge of Christ - cf. **2 Pe 1:8**
- **These graces were best personified in Jesus Christ; the more we grow in them, the more we truly know and understand our Lord and Savior!**

### C. THE CHALLENGE OF REACHING OUR BEHAVIORAL GOALS...

1. It requires diligent effort - cf. **2 Pe 1:5,10**
2. It requires sustained effort - cf. **Ga 6:7-9**
- **As stressed before, such growth does not come naturally; if we are not careful, we may revert back to our former conduct and character - cf. 2 Pe 2:20-22**

[True spiritual growth demands a renewal of mind and character (cf. **Ro 12:1-2**), in which the goal is to become like our Teacher, Jesus Christ! But as members of His body, the church, there other goals to attain. What I refer to as...]

## II. FUNCTIONAL GOALS

### A. THE CHURCH IS A BODY WITH MANY MEMBERS...

1. In which every member is important - cf. **1 Co 12:12-22**
2. In which not every member has the same function - cf. **Ro 12:3-5**
3. In which every member must do its part - cf. **Ep 4:16**
- **The Lord's church grows only as each member does his part in the body of Christ**

### B. AS MEMBERS OF THE BODY, WE MUST GROW...

1. We must find and develop our unique function(s) in the body of Christ - **Ro 12:6-8**
  - a. For some, it may be laboring in the Word (preaching, teaching)
  - b. For others, it may involve ministering to others (visiting, serving)
  - c. For many, it may involve a multitude of talents and abilities
2. We must utilize our gifts (functions) in the service of God - cf. **1 Pe 4:10-11**
  - a. Those who speak, doing so as the oracles of God
  - b. Those who serve, with the strength God supplies
- **Failing to grow brings reproach (e.g., He 5:12-14;), for we are guilty of wasting what God has given us (cf. Mt 25:14-30)**

### C. THE CHALLENGE OF REACHING OUR FUNCTIONAL GOALS...

1. The challenge of **determining** our function(s) in the body of Christ
  - a. Not all members have the same function; what is mine?
  - b. Am I lacking in certain talents, or are they simply needing to be developed?
  - c. Am I truly a one-talent individual, or using that possibility as an excuse not to develop what I am truly capable of?
2. The challenge of **developing** our function(s) in the body of Christ
  - a. While some skills may come naturally, others may take time and energy

- b. Is my lack of development the result of indifference or laziness?
  - c. Am I selling myself short through negative self-talk?
  - d. Am I allowing the allurements of the world to preoccupy my time and energy?
- **We need to be honest with ourselves; indeed, the day of Judgment will reveal whether or not we have been honest (cf. 2 Co 5:10; Mt 25:14-30)**

[Finally, a thought or two about...]

### **III. CONGREGATIONAL GOALS**

#### **A. INDIVIDUAL GROWTH IS INTERTWINED WITH CHURCH GROWTH...**

- 1. A primary function of the church is the edification of the saints - **Ep 4:11-16**
  - 2. We are challenged to minister our gifts to one another - **1 Pe 4:11**
- **As we grow individually, so we grow as a church, and vice versa**

#### **B. CHURCH GOALS SHOULD INCORPORATE INDIVIDUAL GOALS...**

- 1. A congregation's goals **should allow** for the fulfillment of individual goals
    - a. Providing encouragement through its educational programs
    - b. Providing opportunity for Christians to serve in their various roles
  - 2. A congregation's goals **will require** the fulfillment of individual goals
    - a. Does a church have a goal for growth? It requires teachers and others who minister to the flock
    - b. Does a church have a goal for spreading the gospel? It requires preachers and those who will support them - cf. **Ro 10:14-15**
- **To grow individually, we benefit greatly with the help of congregational goals!**

#### **C. THE CHALLENGE OF REACHING OUR CONGREGATION GOALS...**

- 1. It depends heavily upon the cooperation of all the members
  - 2. If we are not united in the need for spiritual growth, it is unlikely we will set congregational goals that will nourish such growth
  - 3. If we are not growing individually, any congregational goals will unlikely be met
- **If we desire to grow as a congregation, we need to be growing as individuals, and set our goals to allow for such!**

### **CONCLUSION**

- 1. Spiritual growth requires the setting and obtaining of goals...
  - a. Individuals must have both behavioral and functional goals
  - b. Both individuals and congregations must have similar goals
- 2. As we obtain our goals as individuals and as congregations...
  - a. Christ will be glorified!
  - b. As disciples and as members of His body we will become what He desires us to be!

If we desire to grow spiritually, then we need to set and strive for behavioral, functional, and congregational goals that will inspire us in the right direction!

# Spiritual Growth

## Habits For Spiritual Growth

### INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous lesson we talked about goals for spiritual growth...
  - a. **Behavioral goals** - in which we seek to become like Jesus, emulating His character
  - b. **Functional goals** - in which we aim to determine and develop our abilities and functions in the body of Christ
  - c. **Congregational goals** - in which brethren unite in our aspirations to grow as a congregation as well as individual Christians
2. To meet our goals requires the development of good habits...
  - a. Habits are stepping stones which ensure that we eventually meet our goals
  - b. Habits are things done on a frequent basis (daily, weekly, etc.) that slowly produce a certain effect-- Unless we establish good habits, bad habits will set in that hinder our spiritual growth!

[What are some good habits that will help us meet our spiritual goals? Let's first consider a few that will help us meet our behavioral goals, what we might describe as...]

### I. BEHAVIORAL HABITS

#### **A. BIBLE READING...**

1. The Word of God is crucial to growing spiritually - **1 Pe 2:2**
  - a. David described the value of God's Word - **Psa 19:7-11**
  - b. He also illustrated the blessedness and fortitude of one who meditated daily on the Word of God - **Psa 1:1-3**
2. The Christian who wants to grow spiritually must therefore develop the habit of daily Bible reading...
  - a. Such as reading through the Bible each year (about 3 chapters a day)
  - b. Or perhaps the New Testament one year, the Old Testament the next-- **By feeding upon God's Word daily, we receive the spiritual nourishment necessary to grow; have you developed the habit of daily Bible reading?**

#### **B. PRAYING...**

1. The practice of prayer is also required for spiritual growth
  - a. Through prayer we find mercy and grace to help - **He 4:16**
  - b. Through prayer we find peace to guard our hearts - **Ph 4:6-7**
2. The Christian must therefore continue steadfastly in prayer - **Ro 12:12**
  - a. Perhaps emulating the example of David - cf. **Psa 55:17**
  - b. And the custom of Daniel, who prayed three times daily - cf. **Dan 6:10**-- **Just as we must listen to God daily through His Word, so we must talk to Him daily if we are to grow; have you developed the habit of praying regularly?**

**C. SINGING...**

1. Praising God in song is also conducive to spiritual growth
    - a. David, the man after God's own heart, developed the practice of praising God daily - cf. **Psa 104:33; 119:164**
    - b. If we teach one another through songs, do we not also teach ourselves when we sing? - cf. **Co 3:16**
  2. The Christian should make singing a habit that is second nature to him or her
    - a. When happy, we should sing - **Ja 5:13**
    - b. In times of trial, we should sing - cf. **Ac 16:25**
- As we develop the habits of daily Bible reading and prayer, let us also develop the habit of singing praises to God daily if we seek to grow!**

**D. ASSEMBLING...**

1. Assembling together with other Christians is very important - **He 10:24-25**
    - a. It is a means of stimulating one another to love and good works
    - b. We exhort one another in our service to Christ
  2. Therefore Christians should make a strong habit of attending church
    - a. Attending as often as possible, for worship, Bible study, etc.
    - b. The more we attend, the stronger the habit becomes; the less we attend, the weaker the habit becomes
- Christians who make it a habit to skip the assemblies struggle in their efforts to grow spiritually; no Christian has become stronger by neglecting the assembly!**

[The formation and exercise of such behavioral habits builds the foundation for solid spiritual growth that leads to maturity in Christ. Bible study, prayer, and singing bring us closer to God which can transform our character (cf. **2 Co 3:18**). Assembling together brings us closer to one another, and provides the opportunity to develop our functional goals in the body of Christ. That leads us to our next point, in which we consider what I call...]

**II. FUNCTIONAL HABITS****A. ASSEMBLING TOGETHER WITH THE CHURCH...**

1. Yes, we have already mentioned the habit of assembling with Christians
    - a. But that was in connection with your personal spiritual growth
    - b. If we are to reach our functional goals, it will be within the framework of the local church
  2. Through frequent assembling with the church...
    - a. We become familiar with identities and needs of other members
    - b. We learn what functions are needed in the body of Christ - cf. **Ro 12:3-8**
    - c. We are given opportunity to be of service to one another
- The habit of going to church is essential if we are going to be of much use to the Lord's church; otherwise, we cannot be counted on for much service**

**B. PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK OF THE CHURCH...**

1. Such as the habit of participating in the assemblies of the church...

- a. E.g., teaching classes, preaching, Bible reading, leading singing
  - b. E.g., ushering, counting attendance, serving the Lord's Supper
  - c. E.g., a young man desiring to grow might develop the habit of participating in the following activities, starting with what is easy and progressing to the more difficult:
    - 1) Serving on the Lord's table
    - 2) Reading Scripture
    - 3) Leading the closing prayer
    - 4) Leading the opening prayer
    - 5) Serving as usher, welcoming and seating visitors
    - 6) Presiding at the Lord's table
    - 7) Making announcements
    - 8) Extending the invitation
    - 9) Leading singing
    - 10) Teaching the adult classes
    - 11) Preaching sermons
2. Such as the habit of providing for other services needed in the church
    - a. E.g., greeting visitors, ministering to the sick, encouraging the weak, teaching the gospel to the lost
    - b. E.g., cleaning the building, providing maintenance for the building and grounds, preparing the Lord's Supper
- **If we hope to reach our functional goals in which we are useful to the Master, then we need to make participation in the work of the church a habit!**

[Finally, a thought or two about...]

### **III. CONGREGATIONAL HABITS**

#### **A. DEFINING ROLES THAT ARE AVAILABLE...**

1. Participation in functional roles is more likely when members are aware of what needs to be done
  2. A congregation can encourage spiritual growth by clearly defining what functional roles are available for service
- **A congregation needs to be in the habit of letting its members know what kind of functional roles are available**

#### **B. PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND SERVE...**

1. Opportunities to learn, to serve, and thereby grow need to be provided - **2 Ti 2:2**
    - a. E.g., providing training classes to develop various abilities
    - b. E.g., making sure those trained are making good use of their abilities
  2. The habit of developing a duty roster can assist in this
    - a. In which people are assigned to serve in various capacities
    - b. Making sure that all who wish to serve are given opportunities
- **Each congregation should have some habitual way of training and involving its members in the work and worship of the church**

### C. ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES OF SERVICE...

1. A congregation should also be in the habit of encouraging spiritual growth
  2. One good habit is to let the inexperienced gain experience; for example...
    - a. Allowing those who desire to preach the opportunity to do so
    - b. Such as providing one night a month for them to preach
    - c. Such as encouraging them to fill-in preach for neighboring congregations
- **A congregation should have the habit of encouraging participation, even if it means utilizing those who are inexperienced, nervous or awkward, even if it means letting them to go to serve elsewhere as the need arises**

### CONCLUSION

1. Remember, **goals** are obtained whenever **good habits** are established...
  - a. The creation of good habits sets the stage for spiritual growth
  - b. As spiritual habits are developed, spiritual growth is incremental but steady
2. Wholesome and well-rounded spiritual growth occurs wherever...
  - a. **An individual** develops both behavioral and functional habits that will help them along to reaching their behavioral and functional goals
  - b. **A congregation** promotes habits that will encourage participation in its work, especially in helping Christians develop their functional goals in the body of Christ

Are we developing the kind of habits that will help us grow spiritually?

# Spiritual Growth

## The Importance Of A Positive Attitude

### INTRODUCTION

1. A good start toward spiritual growth is achieved when we...
  - a. Accept the challenge to obey God's command to grow - **2 Pe 3:18**
  - b. Believe we are capable of growing with God's help - **Ph 4:13**
  - c. Set both behavioral and functional goals as described in the Scriptures
    - 1) Striving to develop Christ-like behavior - **2 Pe 1:5-8**
    - 2) Seeking to determine and develop our function in the body of Christ - **Ro 12:3-5**
  - d. Create good habits that slowly but surely help us reach those goals
    - 1) Habits that change our behavior (Bible reading, prayer, etc.) - **1 Pe 2:2; Ph 4:6-7**
    - 2) Habits that utilize our functions in the body of Christ (assembling, participating) - **He 10:24-25; Ro 12:6-8**
2. For spiritual growth to continue, however, requires maintaining a positive attitude...
  - a. Believing that all our efforts will be worthwhile - e.g., **1 Co 15:58**
  - b. Encouraging us to persevere through difficult times - e.g., **2 Co 4:8-9**

[Paul certainly had a positive attitude. But why is a positive attitude so important to spiritual growth...?]

### I. IMPORTANCE OF A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

#### **A. THE DANGER OF A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE...**

1. Illustrated in the example of the twelve spies of Israel
  - a. Ten did not believe they could take the land of Canaan - **Num 13:31**
  - b. Their negative attitude discouraged the rest of Israel - **Num 13:32-14:4**; cf. **32:7-9**
  - c. It led to Israel complaining and rebelling against God - cf. **Deu 1:26-28**
  - d. It prompted them not to believe in God - cf. **Deu 1:29-33**
  - e. It resulted in many dying in the wilderness - **Num 14:26-38**
2. When negative attitudes are allowed to develop...
  - a. We stop believing in God and in ourselves
  - b. We stop trying to do what God wants us to do
  - c. We discourage those around us
  - d. We fail to reach the goals God has placed before us

#### **B. THE VALUE OF A POSITIVE ATTITUDE...**

1. Illustrated in the example of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem
  - a. The people had a mind to work - **Neh 4:6**
  - b. It helped them overcome ridicule by their enemies - cf. **Neh 4:1-3**
  - c. It led to the rebuilding of the walls - cf. **Neh 6:15**
2. When positive attitudes are maintained...



- a. We continue to believe in God and our ability to serve Him
- b. We keep trying to do what God wants us to do
- c. We encourage those around us, and overcome those who would discourage us
- d. We ultimately reach the goals that God has placed before us

[Spiritual growth, like any other successful venture, requires a positive attitude! With it, God will help us reach our goals for spiritual growth. Without it, we fall short of becoming what God would have us to be. Therefore let's consider a few thoughts about...]

## **II. MAINTAINING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE**

### **A. CHOOSE TO BE POSITIVE...**

1. We can control our attitudes, our moods
    - a. We may not be able to control or change our circumstances
    - b. But we can control how we react to them
  2. For example, we can choose to rejoice when times are hard
    - a. As James commanded - **Ja 1:2**
    - b. As we understand the value of difficult times - **Ja 1:3-4; Ro 5:3-4**
    - c. When we know that hope and prayer can help us to rejoice - **Ro 12:12**
- **With a proper understanding, we can maintain a positive attitude despite our external circumstances - cf. 2 Co 4:16-5:1; Ph 2:17-18**

### **B. BLOCK OUT NEGATIVITY...**

1. By avoiding negative self-talk
    - a. Such as "I can't do it..."
    - b. Such as "It's too hard..."
  2. By constantly reminding yourself of such things as:
    - a. You can do what God wants you to do (i.e., grow) - **Ph 4:13; 2:12-13**
    - b. The more effort you make, the more results you will see - **Ga 6:7-9; 1 Ti 4:15**
    - c. Your labor will not be in vain - **1 Co 15:58**
  3. By avoiding negative people
    - a. Choose your friends carefully - cf. **1 Co 15:33**
    - b. Stay away from "toxic" people (whose negativity poisons other people's attitudes)
    - c. Otherwise you will join what Rick Pitino calls "**The Fellowship Of The Miserable**" and **the killers of the dream**
  4. By surrounding yourself with positive people
    - a. People who will encourage you to do what is right - cf. **He 10:24**
    - b. People who refresh your spirit, not discourage it - e.g., **1 Co 16:17-18; Phe 4-7**
    - c. People like Barnabas, "Son of Encouragement" - e.g., **Ac 4:36; 11:22-24**
- **With the right self-talk and the right companionships, we can avoid becoming hardened by the sin of negativity - cf. He 3:13**

### **C. LIVE IN THE PRESENT, WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE...**

1. Live in the present, not the past
  - a. If anyone could have bemoaned his sinful past, it was Paul - **1 Ti 1:12-15**
  - b. Yet he chose not to dwell on past mistakes (or even past successes), but to press

on in the future - cf. **Ph 3:12-14**

2. Live in the present, with an eye to the future
    - a. This is what Paul did, reaching forward to the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus - **Ph 3:12-14**
    - b. It was the future glory that enabled him to endure the present trial - **2 Co 4:17-18**
- **This mature attitude (cf. Ph 3:15) is what helped Paul to maintain a positive attitude even in the most difficult of times - cf. 2 Ti 4:18**

## CONCLUSION

1. We have every reason to have a positive attitude about our spiritual growth...
  - a. God is ready to help us grow - **Ph 2:12-13**
  - b. He provided tools to us help us grow (the Word, prayer, etc.) - **1 Pe 2:2; Ph 4:6-7**
  - c. He designed the church to provide an environment conducive to growth - **Ep 4:16**
  - d. Our labors will not be in vain, nor go unnoticed - cf. **He 6:10**
  - e. Even when we fall, He provides forgiveness - **1 Jn 1:9**
2. The challenge we face is to not allow our positive attitude to be destroyed...
  - a. Through negative self-talk
  - b. Through negative people
  - c. Through trying circumstances
3. The choice is ours...
  - a. We can choose to be positive through faith in God
  - b. We can block out negativity that surrounds us
  - c. We can live in the present (instead of the past), with an eye on the future

Will we make the right choice? Have you made to choice to follow God?

*"And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

*- Josh 24:15*

# Spiritual Growth

## The Need For Perseverance

### INTRODUCTION

1. In our studies on spiritual growth, we have stressed these essential elements...
  - a. Making **the choice** to obey God's command to grow - **2 Pe 3:18**
  - b. Believing we are **capable** of growth with God's help - **Ph 4:13**
  - c. Setting behavioral and functional **goals**
    - 1) Striving to develop Christ-like behavior - **2 Pe 1:5-8**
    - 2) Seeking to determine and develop our function in the body of Christ - **Ro 12:3-5**
  - d. Developing **habits** that help us obtain such goals
    - 1) Habits that change our behavior (Bible reading, prayer, etc.) - **1 Pe 2:2; Ph 4:6-7**
    - 2) Habits that utilize our functions in the body of Christ (assembling, participating) - **He 10:24-25; Ro 12:6-8**
  - e. Maintaining **a positive attitude** about the value our efforts - **1 Co 15:58**
2. Another crucial element in spiritual growth is **perseverance**, or endurance...
  - a. Which the Hebrew Christians needed to have - **He 10:36**
  - b. Which is part of the Christ-like attitude we are to develop - **2 Pe 1:6; cf. He 12:1-3**
3. The Greek word for perseverance is **hupomone**, which is defined as:
  - a. Steadfastness, constancy, endurance
  - b. In the NT the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings (Thayer)

[As our purpose is one of spiritual growth, let's first review some reasons why we need the virtue of perseverance...]

### I. THE NEED FOR PERSEVERANCE

#### **A. SPIRITUAL GROWTH TAKES TIME...**

1. Time to grow is implied in **He 5:12**
  2. It takes time to **learn**
    - a. To learn the Word of God
    - b. To learn what is expected of us
    - c. To learn what areas of service may be open to us
  3. It takes time to **develop**
    - a. To develop a Christ-like character
    - b. To develop our function(s) in the body of Christ
- **Unless we persevere in our efforts, there will not be adequate time to grow!**

#### **B. SPIRITUAL GROWTH REQUIRES REPETITION...**

1. Repetition is implied in the principle of sowing and reaping - **2 Co 9:6**

2. It takes repetition to **overcome mistakes**
    - a. Mistakes are common when one is starting
      - 1) We are spiritually "babes"
      - 2) We can expect to stumble frequently as we learn to walk
    - b. Repeated efforts help to determine whether one is suited for a particular task
      - 1) Are my mistakes due simply to inexperience?
      - 2) Or might I be better suited to serve in a different capacity?
  3. It takes repetition to **hone skills**
    - a. Sharpening our knowledge and use of the sword of the Spirit - cf. **Ep 6:17**
    - b. Sharpening our abilities and functions in the body of Christ - cf. **1 Pe 4:10-11**
- **Unless we are persistent, we will never progress with the help of repetition!**

### C. SPIRITUAL GROWTH CAN REGRESS...

1. Regression is implied in Jesus' words to the Ephesians - **Re 2:4-5**
  2. We can regress by simply **failing to grow**
    - a. Such was the case with the Hebrew Christians
    - b. Who were reproached for their need to be retaught - **He 5:12**
  3. We can regress by **going back into the world**
    - a. Such was the case with false teachers
    - b. Who were described as entangled in "the pollutions of the world" - **2 Pe 2:20-22**
- **Like physical health, spiritual health requires persistent exercise or we will regress into spiritual sickness**

[The need for perseverance should be clear. What can we do to maintain perseverance...?]

## II. MAINTAINING PERSEVERANCE

### A. DISPLAY SELF-CONTROL DAILY...

1. Note the close relationship between self-control and perseverance - **2 Pe 1:6**
    - a. Self-control must be exercised one day at time
    - b. Self-control exercised daily produces perseverance over the long haul
  2. We display self-control daily as we...
    - a. Engage in daily habits that lead to our goals (e.g., Bible reading, prayer)
    - b. Take the small steps that lead to our destination (e.g., serving in our function)
    - c. Keep trying again and again after apparent failures
- **Perseverance is exercising self-control one day at a time, day after day**

### B. ASSOCIATE WITH LIKE-MINDED INDIVIDUALS...

1. Who are striving for similar goals, through similar habits
  2. Who understand the need for perseverance in their own lives
  3. Who don't get discouraged, who will encourage you likewise - e.g., **He 10:36-39**
- **This is why frequent assembling with other Christians is so important**

### C. KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE PRIZE...

1. With a clear vision of your ultimate goal
  - a. This was Paul's secret to his perseverance - cf. **2 Co 4:16-18; Ph 3:12-15**

- b. It was also enabled Jesus to endure - cf. **He 12:1-3**
- 2. With an appreciation of the daily habits
  - a. How Bible reading produces spiritual growth - **1 Pe 2:2**
  - b. How prayer leads to freedom from anxiety through the peace of God - **Ph 4:6-7**
  - c. How encouraging one another protects against apostasy - **He 3:12-15**
- **We shall persevere as long as we remain focused on our ultimate goal and what it takes to get there!**

## CONCLUSION

- 1. In **The Parable Of The Sower**, note the difference between two soils...
  - a. **Rocky soil** - receives the Word with joy, but endures only temporarily - **Mt 13:20-21**
  - b. **Good soil** - keeps the Word and bears fruit with patience (hupomone) - **Lk 8:15**
  - The difference is found in who has perseverance!
- 2. If spiritual growth is to occur...
  - a. A good beginning is not enough
  - b. Progress in the past is not sufficient
  - We need the virtue of perseverance, today and tomorrow!

*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:*

*"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."*

*But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

*- He 10:36-39*

# Spiritual Growth

## The Value Of Role Models

### INTRODUCTION

1. In previous studies, I have stressed that spiritual growth requires...
  - a. **Choosing** to obey the command of God to grow - **2 Pe 3:18**
  - b. **Believing** that we are capable of growth, with God's help - **Ph 2:12-13; 4:13**
  - c. Behavioral and functional **goals**, in concert with congregational goals - **2 Pe 1:5-8; Ro 12:3-5**
  - d. Developing **habits** to reach our goals - **1 Pe 2:2; Ph 4:6-7; He 10:24-25; Ro 12:6-8**
  - e. Maintaining **positive attitudes** about the value of our efforts - **1 Co 15:58**
  - f. **Perseverance** to remain steadfast in our efforts - **He 10:36-39**
2. To aid us further in spiritual growth, we need to appreciate the value of **role models**...
  - a. We are commanded to emulate others - cf. **Ph 3:17; 4:9**
  - b. Even as they sought to emulate Christ - cf. **1 Co 11:1**

[Why are we commanded to imitate others? Perhaps it is because...]

### I. WE ARE NATURAL IMITATORS

#### **A. CHILDREN IMITATE THEIR PARENTS...**

1. Especially in their early years, children seem to delight in imitating their parents
2. They quickly pick up their parent's mannerisms: the way they talk, walk, etc.
3. It is as though there was some innate reason for them to imitate mom and dad

#### **B. TEENAGERS IMITATE THEIR PEERS AND POPULAR IDOLS...**

1. As children get older, they may not seek to imitate their parents, but they are still active imitators
2. For better or worse (usually worse), they seek to emulate those in their peer group, or those whom they hold in high regard (athletes, musicians, etc.)
3. Despite frequent claims to want to "be themselves", you can usually tell by their behavior who they have been watching or listening to

#### **C. CHRISTIANS IMITATE THOSE THEY HOLD IN HIGH REGARD...**

1. I have observed that many brethren often reflect the attitudes, dispositions, and conduct of those preachers or elders for whom they have much respect
2. This can be good, but in some cases it is not...
  - a. I have known some Christians (including preachers) whose behavior greatly disturbed me, wondering how they could justify their conduct
  - b. But when I saw their peers, or those brethren whom they held in high regard acting in the same way, I began to understand

[So we seem to be natural born imitators. Why should we be careful about who we seek to imitate? Consider...]

## **II. THE VALUE OF ROLE MODELS**

### **A. GOOD ROLE MODELS CAN HELP...**

1. By example, they show us what is possible
  - a. E.g., how a "son of thunder" can become the "apostle of love" - **Mk 3:17; Lk 9:54; 1 Jn 4:7-8**
  - b. E.g., how "uneducated and untrained men" can boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ- **Ac 4:13**
2. By example, they teach us how to reach the same goals
  - a. E.g., to enjoy a wonderful relationship with God - **Ph 4:9**
  - b. E.g., to remain steadfast despite trials - **2 Co 4:16-18**

### **B. BAD ROLE MODELS CAN HINDER...**

1. By example, they fail to show us what is possible
  - a. Perhaps preventing us from learning of our potential
  - b. Certainly not encouraging us to strive for excellence
2. By example, we can pick up their bad habits and dispositions
  - a. As indicated earlier, we are naturally imitators
  - b. It is not long before our conduct is similar to our role models

[If we desire to grow spiritually, we need to have good role models. Where are they? We are blessed with many...]

## **III. ROLE MODELS WORTHY OF EMULATION**

### **A. WE HAVE DEITY...**

1. As Christ encouraged us to do, in showing kindness to our enemies - **Mt 5:43-48**
  2. As Paul instructed the Ephesians to walk in love - **Ep 5:1-2**
  3. What better example do we have, than that of God and Jesus Christ?
  4. Indeed, some of the very titles we wear imply such imitation:
    - a. Children of God
    - b. Disciples of Jesus Christ
- **Do we seek to learn as much about God and Jesus as we do other role models?**

### **B. WE HAVE BIBLICAL CHARACTERS...**

1. To the degree they imitate Christ, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians - **1 Co 11:1**
2. The New Testament is filled with good examples for Christians today...
  - a. For married couples, there is the example of Aquila and Priscilla - **Ro 16:3-5**
  - b. For those blessed with things of this life, there is the example of Philemon and Gaius - **Phile 1-7; 3 Jn 5-8**
  - c. For women, there is the example of Dorcas - **Ac 9:36,39**
  - d. For young men there is the example of Timothy - **Ph 2:19-22**
3. This does not mean to preclude many fine Old Testament examples as well: Joseph,

- Daniel, Barzillai the Gileadite (an old man who helped David in his affliction - **2 Sam 17:27-29; 19:31-39**) and many others
- **Indeed, the Scriptures are filled with many examples worthy of our emulation!**

**C. WE HAVE MANY FELLOW CHRISTIANS TODAY...**

1. As Paul encouraged his fellow Christians to imitate those who provided a similar pattern as did he - **Ph 3:17**
    - a. There are many preachers, teachers, and elders we can emulate
    - b. There are many older women that younger women can emulate - cf. **Ti 2:3-5**
    - c. There are many younger people worthy of emulation - cf. **1 Ti 4:12**
  2. Yet we should be careful, for not all who profess to be Christians behave as they should - cf. **Ph 3:18-19**
  3. It is important, therefore, that we know the Scriptures well enough to know when someone is worthy of our emulation
- **Yet there are many Christians who can teach and encourage us by their own example, if we will but let them!**

**CONCLUSION**

1. If you seek to grow spiritually, take advantage of role models...
  - a. Let them show you what is possible!
  - b. Let them teach you how to obtain the goals you are striving for!
  - c. Let them encourage you to persevere, knowing that others have traveled the same path before you!
2. Since we are natural born imitators, let us make the choice to imitate the good - **3 Jn 11**
  - a. Only then do we have the hope of being "of God"
  - b. The only alternative is to imitate the evil, which prevents us from ever "seeing God"

We conclude this lesson with the following words of Scripture:

***"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." - He 6:11-12***

Are we imitating those who through faith and patience inherit the promises?



# Spiritual Growth

## Concluding Thoughts

### INTRODUCTION

1. In this series, I've emphasized elements necessary to spiritual growth...
  - a. **Choosing** to obey the command of God to grow - **2 Pe 3:18**
  - b. **Believing** that we are capable of growth, with God's help - **Ph 2:12-13; 4:13**
  - c. Setting behavioral, functional, and congregational **goals** - **2 Pe 1:5-8; Ro 12:3-5**
  - d. Developing **habits** to reach our goals - **1 Pe 2:2; Ph 4:6-7; He 10:24-25; Ro 12:6-8**
  - e. Maintaining **positive attitudes** about the value of our efforts - **1 Co 15:58**
  - f. **Perseverance** to remain steadfast in our efforts - **He 10:36-39**
  - g. Inspired by **role models** whose pattern we should follow - **Ph 3:17; 4:9**
2. In this final lesson in the series, I wish to offer some concluding thoughts...
  - a. Pointing out things that can hinder spiritual growth
  - b. Suggesting steps to take to ensure spiritual growth

[As mentioned throughout this series, spiritual growth is not automatic. Indeed, there are a number of things that can work against us...]

### I. HINDRANCES TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

#### **A. LACK OF EFFORT...**

1. Such as failing to set proper goals, develop the daily habits
2. Those who are spiritually lazy tend to follow the course of least resistance
  - a. Such will forever remain "babes" - cf. **He 5:12-13; 1 Co 3:1-2**
  - b. If they do not fall away altogether
- **Just as the lazy man's vineyard lies in ruins and leads to poverty (Pro 24:30-34), so spiritual sloth leads to spiritual ruin!**

#### **B. DISCOURAGEMENT...**

1. Some people make a good beginning, but get discouraged and quit
2. Reasons may vary: church troubles, personal problems, lack of encouragement from others, etc.
3. But consider the example of the apostle Paul:
  - a. Few of us would ever have the problems he had - **2 Co 11:24-29**
  - b. Yet he did not "lose heart" (become discouraged) - **2 Co 4:8-9**
  - c. Why? Because he knew his labor was not in vain - **2 Co 4:16-5:1**
4. And so he encourages us not to grow weary in doing good - **Ga 6:9; 1 Co 15:58**
- **Discouragement happens; we must not allow it to deter us from pressing on!**

#### **C. LACK OF USE...**

1. A knife stays bright when used, but unused it becomes rusty

2. So it is with Christians, we lose what knowledge, ability, and opportunity we have when we do not use them!
  3. To use another metaphor, unless we are earnest in our endeavor, we will simply "drift away" from the Lord - **He 2:1**
- **There is no concept of "retirement" when it comes to the service of the Lord!**

#### **D. INTERFERENCE...**

1. Crops, trees and flowers do not grow well when crowded
  2. So our spiritual growth will be hindered if we let things crowd out our spiritual life
    - a. Businessmen may become too busy to attend to God's business
    - b. A woman may be so occupied with housekeeping that she has little time for the house (family) of God
    - c. Young people may be so busy with school activities that prayer, worship, good works and Bible study are neglected
    - d. Preachers might get so tied down with meetings, administrative duties, etc., that they too do not take time to spend alone with God
  3. Jesus warned about the danger of interference - **Mk 4:18-19**
    - a. By things like the cares of the world, the desires for other things
    - b. Which can choke the word, such that it cannot bear fruit in our lives
- **If we desire a healthy spiritual crop, we may need to "weed out" some things in our lives**

[A lack of effort, discouragement, lack of use, interference: these are some of the things that hinder spiritual growth. Have you allowed them to hinder yours? If so, perhaps the following steps may help put you back on the right track...]

## **II. STEPS TO ENSURE SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

### **A. BECOME ACTIVE IN THE WORK OF THE CONGREGATION...**

1. Begin immediately!
  - a. It is important not to delay (remember the "hindrances")
  - b. There is work for everyone, and it is best to start with something you are able to handle
  - c. Even the most humble service can be a source of joy for those who are doing it to please God - cf. **Psa 84:10; Jn 13:12-17**
2. Offer your services to the elders!
  - a. These men will be glad to find work for you to do in keeping with your ability
  - b. Sometimes they hesitate to call on people for work if they are not sure the people are willing
  - c. But let them know that you have the attitude of Isaiah: **"Here am I! Send me."** - **Isa 6:8**
3. Look for work needing to be done!
  - a. The best servant is one who can see things to be done and does them without having to be told every step to take
  - b. Most of us are good critics; here is how we can put that ability to good use:
    - 1) Whenever we see something we want to criticize, take that as an opportunity

to SHOW (not tell) how it should be done

- 2) Someone else's failure is often our opportunity to be of service
- 3) In other words, "**Don't criticize, energize!**"

**B. START A PROGRAM OF REGULAR PRIVATE DEVOTIONS...**

1. Spend time each day alone with God, engaged in prayer, Bible study, singing praises
2. Such time consistently spent will supply the spiritual nourishment necessary for spiritual growth
3. Many Christians do not grow because they try to exist on a "spiritual starvation diet"!

**C. PARTICIPATE IN AN INFORMAL BIBLE STUDY GROUP...**

1. Meet weekly with other Christians in an informal setting to study the Bible together
2. This provides opportunity for mutual sharing and encouragement which leads to even more knowledge and spiritual growth

**D. BECOME INVOLVED IN LEADING PEOPLE TO CHRIST...**

1. Even if you don't do the actual teaching, you can do what Andrew and Philip did: lead a friend to Christ! - **Jn 1:40-46**
3. Those involved in leading others to Christ rarely ever stop growing in Christ themselves!

**E. PRACTICE CONSTANT SELF-EXAMINATION...**

1. The Scriptures call us to examine ourselves in our relation to Christ - **2 Co 13:5**
  2. Here are some questions we should often ask ourselves:
    - a. Do I have a better Bible knowledge than one year ago?
    - b. Am I as interested in Jesus Christ today as when I was baptized?
    - c. Have I helped someone else to become a Christian?
    - d. Am I enjoying life as a child of God?
    - e. Am I improving my life, my disposition, and becoming more like Christ?
    - f. Do I set a good example for other Christians?
    - g. Am I growing in such activities as Bible study, prayer, worship?
- **Self-examination is not an easy process, but true spiritual growth is impossible without it!**

**CONCLUSION**

1. It is sad, but true, that many Christians are often just religious enough to be miserable...
  - a. But the life of the Christian is intended to be one filled with love, joy, peace, and so much more! - **Ga 5:22-23**
  - b. Where the fruit of the Spirit is not present, a lack of spiritual growth is the reason!
2. Rather than be defeated by things which hinder spiritual growth...
  - a. Make the choice to grow in the Lord!
  - b. Believe that He will assist you in efforts!
  - c. Set the proper goals, develop the habits that will help you reach them!
  - d. Remain positive in your outlook, persevering through the occasional setbacks!

- e. Look to role models for direction and inspiration!

As we thereby grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, we will truly experience the "abundant life" that Jesus provides! - cf. **Jn 10:10**