

Steps to Spiritual Maturity

Week 1 - How We Grow up in Christ

1 Peter 2:1-3: *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

What does it take to grow up and become spiritually mature? Why do some Christians not grow as they should? God's word presents steps we can take toward growth and spiritual maturity by Bible study, patience, and diligent practice of good works.

Introduction:

People understand the concept of growth in the physical development of humans, and we know why it is important.

Babies are immature physically and mentally, but we expect them to develop. If they don't, there is a problem.

Spiritual growth is a similar concept but is far more important.

Growth is development or improvement toward a goal called "maturity" (or, in the Bible, "perfection"). When one is "born again" as a child of God, he is spiritually immature. As time passes, he should develop the qualities or abilities, which the Bible says, characterize the mature.

Many Scriptures describe the need to grow and mature spiritually:

Ephesians 4:14,15 NLT: *Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.*

2 Peter 3:18: *but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2 Thessalonians 1:3: *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other*

Philippians 1:9 ESV: *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment*

Many problems result when believers fail to grow: some go back to the world, others cause strife because of ignorance or become stumbling blocks because of worldliness, or indifference.

The purpose of this series is to study the steps each Christian should take to grow spiritually.

Romans 8:29 (AMP): *For those whom [God] foreknew - of whom He was aware and loved beforehand - He also destined from the beginning (foreordaining them) to be molded into the image of His Son [and share inwardly His likeness], that He might become the first-born among many brethren.*

Our destiny as believers is to grow up in Jesus. It's to be fully conformed to His image, which was placed within us the moment we were born again. It's a staggering thought that you and I could ever truly be transformed into that divine image. It seems almost impossible that we could be like Jesus. But God says we can be.

In fact, in **Ephesians 4:13**, the Bible says He has equipped us with everything necessary so that we might continue growing and developing in Him.

If anyone other than the Spirit of God had inspired this verse to be written, I wouldn't be able to believe it. But the Spirit of God did inspire it to be written! So as amazing as it seems, we must simply believe that He has the ability to conform us to Jesus so completely that we "*become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself!*" (**Ephesians 3:19 AMP**)

Just as a baby needs to do certain things to grow physically, so Christians need certain kinds of activities to grow spiritually. They need to have a desire to grow, they need the right spiritual food, exercise and practice, and time and patience. When Christians don't grow, it is because they lack one or more of these.

Group Discussion

1. In your own words, explain **1 Peter 2:1-3**: *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*
2. What impacts you the most from these verses? How can you apply it in a practical way now?
3. What are some detrimental affects of not growing spiritually?
4. What do you think Paul meant when he wrote, "that we are destined to be molded into the image of His Son"?
5. What do you think a life "molded into the image of His Son" would look like? How do you think that would change the life of a believer?

Steps to Spiritual Maturity Week 2 - A Desire to Grow

1. We Will Never Grow Unless We Want to Grow

In the physical realm, children WANT to grow.

Parents and kids become so excited when kids learn something new - the first step, first word, or when they draw their first picture. Everyone wants them to develop new abilities. Parents sometimes use this to encourage children.

Likewise, in spiritual matters, Christians must WANT to grow.

1 Peter 2:2: *as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*

There are basically five levels of spiritual growth:

Spiritually Dead – Those who are not born again

Spiritual Infant – Those who have received Jesus as Lord, but still don't know much about what it means to be a Christian.

Spiritual Child – Those who are young in faith, yet are learning how to understand Biblical concepts and terms.

Spiritual Young Adult - They are action/service-oriented, zealous, God-centered, others-centered, and mission-minded; but they often don't think in terms of reproducing disciples.

Spiritual Parent - They are intentional, strategic, reproduction-minded, self-feeding, mission-minded, team-minded, and dependable

Jesus intends for us to grow. In order to progress through the different stages of spiritual growth there must be a desire to grow.

Matthew 4:19: *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

The word 'desire' means to crave. This is not a suggestion, but it is a command.

Psalm 42:1-2: *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*

We have to have a hunger and thirst for growth. Hunger is an intense desire. If we never desire to be any more than we are now, we will never grow.

2. We Must Maintain This Desire to Grow.

Some believers once wanted to grow, but now have lost the desire. They started off on fire for the Lord, but lost their zeal. They develop a spirit of indifference or negligence. Others develop a level of maturity and stagnate. They are satisfied, thinking no more growth is needed. The Scriptures teach that growth is always needed.

Philippians 3:12-14: *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

The Apostle Paul, as mature as he was, did not consider himself to have achieved maturity, but continued striving to improve. He forgot past achievements (and failures) and pressed on to greater accomplishments.

Matthew 26:31-35: *Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'³² But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."³³ Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."³⁵ Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples.*

Peter thought he had reached a level where he would never deny Jesus. But that very night he denied Him three times.

1 Corinthians 10:12: *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

Christians never reach the point where we are so mature that we cannot fall.

Group Discussion:

1. In your own words, explain **Psalm 42:1-2:** *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*
2. Do you have that burning desire to grow? Why or Why not?
3. Where do you think you are on the spiritual development chart?
4. What can a believer do to create a desire to grow?
5. What could hinder spiritual growth?
6. What can we do to help each other grow?

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Week 3 - Nourishment

1. We Need Spiritual Food from God's Word.

A child cannot grow physically without proper food. Good parents are concerned about proper nutrition. They want children to eat what is good, not bad for them.

Likewise spiritually we cannot grow without feeding on God's Word.

1 Peter 2:2: *As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.*

2 Peter 3:18: *Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Matthew 5:6: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*

The Bible is not what we read when we have read everything else. It's not what we listen to when we have nothing else to listen to. The Word is not an accessory in our life, but a necessity.

Daily interaction with God's Word is fundamental to being a Christian. Everyone interacts with the Word in different ways. There are lots of ways we interact with the Word. Some do it by computer, while others do it by physically picking up their Bible and looking up verses.

Colossians 3:16: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

2. To Get This Nourishment We Must Study The Bible

Matthew 4:4: *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*

Job 23:12: *I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured (esteemed) the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.*

In our life there is a need for spiritual nourishment. This nourishment can only come through the Word of God.

Hebrews 5:11-14 ESV: *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.¹⁴ But solid food is*

for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Christians were rebuked for not growing, as they should have, because they had not studied. Time and again believers fall away or are spiritual malnourished because they do not eat properly.

2 Timothy 2:15: *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

Acts 17:10-11: *Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

The Bereans were able to determine whether truth was taught because they searched the Scriptures DAILY. We need REGULAR nourishment.

Take this test to check your spiritual nourishment.

How much time did you spend this week watching TV?

How much time watching sports or entertainment, or reading the paper, magazines, etc.?

How much time did you spend on some hobby or outside interest, that may not be immoral but is not necessary?

How many hours did you spend studying your Bible?

Which do you nourish the best: your spirit, soul, or your body?

Group Discussion:

1. Looking at the spiritual nourishment test above, what priority does bible reading have in your life?
2. What are some spiritual disciplines, that when added to our daily priorities, can help a believer with their bible reading?
3. What do you think a healthy spiritual diet should consist of?
4. In your own words explain **2 Timothy 2:15:** *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* (Give an example of how to practically apply this verse).
5. What can we, as a group, do to assist you in establishing a healthy spiritual diet?

Steps to Spiritual Maturity

Week 4 – Seven Practical Steps – Part 1

Step One: Learn To Forget

Philippians 3:13-14: *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

To grow spiritually, we must do the things Paul suggests in these verses. Notice Paul doesn't believe he has "arrived" yet. He says he is still pressing toward the mark. The person who thinks he has arrived and knows it all will never grow spiritually.

You can't live on yesterday's blessings. If you do you are living on stale manna. If you're satisfied with what happened in the past, you are not reaching toward the future blessings God has in store for you.

You also must learn to forget your past mistakes, failures, and sins. As long as Satan can keep those past failures before you, he holds you in a position where you will not develop spiritually, and your prayers and faith will not work.

Step Two: Learn To Forgive

Ephesians 4:32 *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

Notice Paul said, "Be kind to one another even as God forgave you." That means forgiveness is not optional. How did God say He forgives?

Isaiah 43:25: *I will blot out your transgressions and I will not remember your sins anymore.*

What Is Forgiveness:

1. It is not forgetting
2. Forgiveness is not tolerating sin.
3. Forgiveness is not seeking resentment, revenge, or repayment.
4. Forgiveness is resolving to live with the consequences of another's sin.
5. Forgiveness is not using the past against those we have forgiven.

Step Three: Learn To Pray

You cannot grow spiritually and be a success in your Christian walk without developing a prayer life. A successful prayer life must be built upon the Word of God.

John 15:7 *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*

Jesus did not say to ask God for everything you can think of. Asking what you will and having it done for you is conditional on the rest of the verse: "If you abide in me." To abide in Jesus means not only to be born again, but also to walk in continual fellowship with Him. Look at the other conditional part of that verse: "and my words abide in you." You'll never be successful in your prayer life if you don't know God's Word. God's Word must abide or live in your heart.

It is through times of daily communing with God, fellowshiping and worshipping Him that bring forth a vibrant prayer life.

The word "ask" in verse 7 has a far deeper meaning than what most people realize. It implies you and God are so intertwined, your lives so closely joined together that when you ask Him something, it's not really you asking - it's Him asking too.

Daily fellowship promotes devotion to God. It keeps Him in the center of our heart and lives. It will cause you to become wonderfully addicted to Jesus and His presence. Religion teaches us that prayer is a duty rather than a delight, and therefore it becomes drudgery. But when we begin to discover the wonders of daily communion with God will begin to enjoy the joy of His presence. The devil will try to distract you to keep you from that place of prayer, but if you will be persistent, you'll build a great discipline into your life that you will be unable to live without.

Group Discussion:

1. How will living in the past hinder our spiritual growth? What can we do to prevent this?
2. How will unforgiveness hinder our spiritual growth?
3. Is there someone you need to forgive and haven't? What seems to be hindering you?
4. In your own words explain **John 15:7** *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.* (How does this apply to prayer)?
5. What is the greatest hindrance to your prayer life? How can you improve your prayer life? How can we help you?

Steps to Spiritual Maturity

Week 5 – Seven Practical Steps – Part 2

Step Four: Learn To Trust

Proverbs 3:5-6: ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*

Five Key Words:

1. **Trust** - The word “**trust**” in Hebrew means, “to lean with the full body,” “to lie upon,” “to rest the full weight upon.”

2. **Lean** - To “**lean**” means to rest upon something for partial support.

3. **Understanding** - refers to the mental processes by which you analyze a problem, break it down into its smaller parts, and then make a decision about what you are going to do.

4. **Acknowledge** - in the Hebrew is a command. You could translate this by saying, “In all your ways **know Him.**” The Hebrew word means to know deeply and intimately. It’s the kind of knowing that comes with personal experience. Seen in this light we could translate this verse, “In all your ways know God intimately ... deeply ... personally. When you know God that way in every area of your life, He will direct your paths.”

5. **Direct** - A more literal translation is: “He will make straight your paths.”

Step Five: Learn To Worship

Romans 11:36: *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

Romans 12:1: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that*

you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (your spiritual act of worship).

Paul tells us that worship is glory and sacrifice. Glory means weightiness, heaviness, prominence, and preeminence. Whoever or whatever is in the position of glory in your life is that person or thing that centers your existence.

Since we are finite, created beings, we only have limited resources; so much time, so much money, so much energy. We cannot divest ourselves of these resources unendingly, so we make decisions that reveal where our worship is directed.

Paul says, “This is our spiritual act of worship.” Someone or something is in glory. We sacrifice for the glory of that person or thing. That is, by definition, worship. If you start to see everything in your life as worship you’ll approach it differently.

One of the best ways to understand worship is to contrast it with idolatry. The opposite of worship is idolatry. Again, we’re all unceasing worshipers going after someone, going after something, pouring ourselves out. And if it’s not God, it’s not that we cease to worship, it’s that rather we misdirect our worship towards someone or something other than God. That’s idolatry.

Romans 1:25: *Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

Those who commit idolatry, worship someone or something other than God.

Group Discussion

1. In your own words, what is the meaning of **Proverbs 3:5-6:** *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*
2. Why is trust so important to spiritual growth?
3. Why do you think believers struggle with trusting God? What prevents you from trusting God?

4. In your own words quote **Romans 12:1**: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

5. How does worship affect our spiritual growth? What hinders you from being a worshipper of God?

Steps to Spiritual Maturity
Week 6 – Seven Practical Steps – Part 3

Step Six: Learn To Give

This spiritual principle is of utmost importance in the life of a believer. The way we grow is very much determined by what and how we sow. If you want to grow you have to sow – sow the Word. Galatians 6:9 tells us not to be deceived because whatever we sow is what we will reap.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 ESV: *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*

Some Outstanding Characteristics of the Macedonian Church:

1. They gave out of great affliction with joy – verse 2 – They made giving a priority, not a problem
2. They gave out of deep poverty with generosity – verse 2 – Giving is a matter of willingness, not a matter of wealth
3. They gave beyond their own means of their own accord – verse 3 – Giving is a choice, not a demand
4. They viewed giving as a privilege, begging us earnestly – verse 4 – Giving is a matter of opportunity, not obligation
5. They first gave themselves to the Lord – verse 5 – Giving is a matter of love, not constraint

The Biblical principal for giving is based on these verses is: **The right attitude produces the right action, which provides God's blessings!** Our life here on earth will be measured by what donation we make during our stay and not by the duration of our stay. Therefore, it becomes important that we take on the heart of the Father – God so loved that He gave. God called us to be a giver and not a taker.

Step Seven: Learn To Witness

Matthew 28:19-20: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*

Matthew 4:19: *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

Acts 1:8: *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

I am thoroughly convinced that the greatest witness you can be to the world is to live a life that's sold out to the Lord. Like the old proverb says, "What you are speaks so loud, I can't hear what you say."

I believe in personally witnessing to people, of course. But I don't think we should go around trying to push the gospel off on everyone. We are called to go into all the world and preach or proclaim the Gospel, the good news. We are called to proclaim the good news; not to force people to receive the good news.

You see, the Lord knows who is open to the gospel and who isn't. If you don't wait for His leading, you will do a lot of laboring and never win anyone to the Lord. And many people won't appreciate your efforts. You might even do more harm than good.

I believe the greatest witnessing tool is a life really lived for the Lord. So learn to

witness as the Holy Spirit leads you. But first and foremost, be a witness. It's important to your spiritual growth.

Group Discussion

1. Using your own words, explain **2 Corinthians 8:1-5 ESV**: *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*
2. How does this message help you grow spiritually?
3. Give a definition from Scripture of a disciple.
4. How does an understanding of discipleship help you to grow spiritually?
5. What hinders you from being a witness?