

Spiritual Growth

SB - ASK: What does spiritual growth mean to you?

Hear, Believe, Repent, confess, Baptized and live a Christian life. The last part adds live a Christian life, in some ways it would be easier without that last part, but it requires spiritual growth.

There is no official and exact definition of spiritual growth. We - and many others - use personal spiritual growth as synonyms for other terms like e.g. personal spiritual development. But scripture gives us insight.

1. Ongoing, never ending
2. People at different places in spiritual growth
3. I visualize it as stair steps
4. Perfecting is a process – till we meet Jesus

We all want to hear like in the parable of the talents:

Matt. 25:23 NASB:

²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

This is not what I want Jesus to say about me:

Hebrews 5:11-14 NASB:

¹¹ Concerning him (Jesus) 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 have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- a. Call for teachers
- b. Adults cannot live on milk for long
- c. Depth of spiritual life

1 Corinthians 9:27, NASB:

²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Philippians 1:6, NASB:

“⁶ *For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

- Christ has started the work in you to grow spiritually through the Holy Spirit

- Confident that what was started will continue to the end
- Promise to perfect us till Jesus comes Bring to completion when we meet Jesus

Colossians 2:6-7, NASB:

⁶Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

- Jesus is the source of spiritual growth.
- Continue to believe in, obey in the Christ that was preached to you
- Rooted in Christ
- Built up in Him
- Established in the Faith
- How???

Keys to Spiritual Growth

James 4:7-8, NASB:

⁷Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- Resist Satan
- If we wish God to be very near to us we must seek to dwell very near to him. Only sin keeps us afar off.
- Remove sin doing – actions (hands)
- Remove sinful thought from the heart (Purify hearts)
- Even at my spiritual age – I have to continue to resist sin
- ASK: Name things that are physical – things we can see that are sin – steel, drugs, porn, gossip, etc.
- ASK: Name sins that are from the heart – thoughts – Lust, jealousy, some fears, Etc.
- If we flee sin what fills the void – we determine if it is good or still sinful – Matt. 12:43-45

Plan for Spiritual Growth

2 Peter 1:3-8, NASB: (start vs. 5)

³seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. ⁵Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, ⁶and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, ⁷and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. ⁸For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- We should be growing more like Jesus daily. Faith is the basis of the Christian life and all are expected to possess it, but out of it must grow in other areas.
 - With diligence growing our faith
 - Striving to build the following areas:
 - Moral Excellence - Virtue (behavior showing high moral standards) - the natural fruit of a trusting faith in God. Not a physical strength but a moral strength. Galatians 5:22-23 But **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things **there** is no law.
 - Having high moral standards is a natural outcome of trusting God – He rubs off on us.
 - We have a foundation of moral excellence and then we build on the next levels:
 - Knowledge (wisdom of God) - The moral standard must be guided by knowledge or it will run into "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.
 - Self-control – restrain from the things of this world
 - Perseverance - Unflinching, patient endurance.
 - Godliness - A reverence for things divine shown by growing more and more into the divine likeness.
 - Till now all have been internal – what do within ourselves.
 - Brotherly Kindness - An active good will towards the saints.
 - Love
 - Vs 8 - If these qualities abound they will be fruitful, showing that they have knowledge of Christ in reality.
 - These may not come in this order but all need to happen in each of our lives to grow.

REVIEW:

So, spiritual growth includes:

(1) increasing in your knowledge and understanding of God's Word (Heb. 5:12-14)

(2) decreasing in your frequency and severity of sin (James 4:7-9)

(3) increasing in your practice of Christ-like qualities (2 Pet. 1:3-8)

(4) increasing in your faith and trust in God. (2 Pet. 1:3-8)

Perhaps the best summary of spiritual growth is becoming more like Jesus Christ.

What is the ultimate goal in spiritual growth – to be more like Jesus. Like Jesus now, but I can be more like Jesus. We will never reach being fully like Jesus.

SB - ACTIVITY:

What are two of the areas where you need to grow spiritually and then be specific as to examples of need.

Share with your partner what is most challenging for you and why.

How to Grow Spiritually

First you have to want to grow spiritually

1 Corinthians 11:1

Paul says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

- Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of what it truly means to be spiritual.

James 4:7-8, NASB:

⁷ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- Draw near to God is essential
- You have to want to draw near to God. Can't continue to sin
- Sin is in the opposite direction of spiritual growth because sin is not a part of Christ.
- Flee from sin
- Knowing what is your weakness
- WWJD
- Do you want to draw nearer or are you satisfied where you are?

Spiritual growth is impossible without connection to Christ.

John 15:4-5, NASB:

⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

- We cannot grow without staying connected to Jesus.
- SB - ACTIVITY: What would spiritual growth look like without connection to Jesus?
 - o Gal. 5:16-25
 - o ¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. ¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, ²⁰ idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom

of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit as well.

- Can we use fruit to gauge spiritual growth? Gal. 5:16-25
- Outward action shows condition of the heart
- What from both lists do we do well and not well
- Can't bear fruit without connection to Christ
- Again, think about the power of our thoughts

Ways to build the connection

SCRIPTURE

John 5:39, NASB:

“³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;”

- Reading the Bible keeps me connected to Jesus

Romans 15:4, NASB:

“⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

- The Scriptures were written to help us learn and grow in faith.
- Hope comes from being ingrained in the Bible
 - Receive instruction
 - Have perseverance
 - Be encouraged
 - Have hope

2 Peter 1:19, NASB:

“¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.”

- God's Word is light to guide and lead us from darkness.
- Light – to come from darkness
- Fight off sin

Psalms 119:11, NASB:

“¹¹ Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.”

- Keep Bible verses in your mind to fight sin.

Having a steady daily diet of scripture reading is required for spiritual growth. The Bible is the true regular source we have to hear from God.

PRAYER

Philippians 4:6-7, NASB:

“⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

- Prayer is another key way to help us grow spiritually.
- No anxiety
- Pray, Pray, Pray
- Make supplication – ask for need
- Be thankful
- Give peace
- Guard your heart in Christ

1 John 5:14-15, NASB:

¹⁴ This is the confidence which we have ⁱⁿ before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

- Be very specific about what you are asking
- Pray within what would be acceptable to God
- Do this with the expectation He will answer

Jude 1:20-21, NASB:

“²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”

- Prayer is needed to build your faith.
 - o See God in action answering prayer
- Praying out of heart and soul that are indwelt and filled with Holy Spirit.
- Nurtured by being in the love of God
- Looking for His return

DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:7-11, NASB:

“⁷ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? ⁸ But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹ All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

- Discipline is part of growing spiritually

- Without discipline we would stray too far to return or make it very hard to return.
- Discipline shows the right way.
- Do not like at the time
- But brings “peaceful fruit of righteousness” - It is never pleasant to endure the chastening, but it afterwards benefits by the holier life it insures.
- Discipline can bring about spiritual growth

Trials

We don't like trials but they polish us and strengthen our faith

Romans 5:3-5, NASB

“³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

- Trials bring about spiritual growth Through:
 - Perseverance – the ability to remain under difficult situations and not give in
 - Proven character – develops character
 - Hope – confidence that God will see you through, not at all disappointed in our confidence in God to take us through
 - God love sustains us during the trial

James 1:2-4, NASB:

“² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Spiritual Transformation

Think about the more you spend time with someone the more you pick up their speech, mannerisms, Etc.

By looking to Jesus, we become more and more like Him and show His glory!

2 Corinthians 3:18, NASB:

“¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

- Moses did not wear a veil when approaching God Ex 34:34
- We as Christians, with no veil are a reflection of Jesus glory
- Mirror - Looking to Jesus and beholding in his covenant, in our hearts and minds as in a mirror, and contemplating his glory.
- Transformed - To look to Jesus has a transforming power. If we gaze upon him, we will become like him. As Moses unveiled before the Lord shone with the glory of the Lord, so we shall reflect the glory of Christ, and show forth his likeness.

- Glory to glory – progressing in higher stages of glory
- By looking to Jesus, we grow in him.
- We can grow spiritually by looking to Jesus.

SB - ACTIVITY:

Answer this question:

What would you be doing in your life to prove you have grown spiritually?

How would other see the growth?

What Does Spiritual Growth Actually Look Like?

You're Learning More about God and digging deeper in His word – from milk to solid food (Hebrews 5:11-14) - ¹¹ Concerning him (Jesus) 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 have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil

You're Knowledge is growing – 2 Peter 3:18, ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. Growing in Grace – Wanting to share the heart of God.

You Find Yourself Wanting to Obey God - John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” One of the natural expectations of a growing Christian is faithfulness and obedience to the commands of God. Not out of duty, but out of love for Him. Our obedience results from what Jesus has done for us and of our love for Him.

You're Growing as a Person - The bearing of good fruits: In Galatians 5:22-23(read earlier) and Colossians 1:10, ¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

You're Less Worried About Personal Preferences and More Concerned about Unity - Ephesians 4:13-14, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

You're Willing to Speak the Truth in Love - Ephesians 4:15-16, ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

You're Engaged in Community - Hebrews 10:23-25

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

It's easy to call ourselves Christians. It's easy to stay where we are. Growing takes work. We have to be intentional.