

## “DO YOU DESIRE A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD?”

I Thessalonians 2:10-12

### I. INTRODUCTION:

1. Nearly everyone recognizes the need to grow in various areas of life:
  - ✓ Personally (e.g., our children need to grow physically, emotionally, academically; relationships),
  - ✓ Business (e.g., growth in terms of size and efficiency),
  - ✓ Science/medicine (R&D, etc.).
2. Most importantly: Do you desire to grow as a Christian and have a closer walk with God? I doubt, and certainly hope, that there are none in this audience who would answer “no” to this important question.
  - A.. Growing as a Christian is essential! 2 Pet. 3:18; Eph. 4:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:2
  - B. Sadly, it is all too common that many Christians **DO NOT** grow (1 Cor. 3:1; Heb. 5:11-14).
  - C. Just like physical growth, spiritual growth must be constant, well-rounded, and balanced; the Christian must grow in knowledge, in zeal, in faith, in Christ-like character, in good works. 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 1 Cor. 11:1
3. This lesson is intended to help all of us grow ever closer to God and more productive in our service to Jesus Christ.

### II. DISCUSSION:

*First of all, in order to walk closer to God it is critical we are aware of things which act as...*

#### 1. Hindrances to Growth

- A. **Lack of effort:** Growth in any realm is **NEVER** automatic; it doesn't just happen by chance.
  - (1) A child does not grow unless he/she is fed! A child doesn't learn unless taught!
  - (2) A business does not grow unless there is a “business plan” that is wisely implemented!
  - (3) Neither is growth “in Christ” automatic for the Christian! Someone has wisely observed, “Calvinists preach ‘once saved always saved’, but we practice it!”
  - (4) One may still be a “babe” after many years. (cf. Heb. 5:11-14; 1 Cor. 3:1). You can't take what you are taught and just “sit on it”; you must act upon it! And, teach it to others!
  - (5) Spiritual growth requires effort, but those who are spiritually lazy simply follow the course of least resistance and as a result will forever remain “babes,” **IF** they do not fall away altogether! 2 Pet. 1:9
- B. **Discouragement:** Many people make a good beginning, but get discouraged and quit (Lk. 8:13-14).
  - (1) There can be many reasons: church troubles, personal/family problems, lack of encouragement from others, etc. It can even happen to “strong” Christians; remember the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:4).
  - (2) We need to imitate the example of the apostle Paul; recall all of his problems! 2 Cor. 11:24-28 Few of us will even come close to going through Paul's problems! He even became extremely discouraged at times (2 Cor. 1:8). But he put his faith and hope in God and did not “lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:8-9); Why? Because he knew the things on this side of eternity are only temporary (2 Cor. 4:16-5:1). Paul constantly encourages us to not grow weary in doing good (Gal. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:58).
- C. **The Law of Disuse:** What happens to an arm or leg in a cast? Atrophy! (e.g., my ankle)
  - (1) The same is true of Christians. “Use it, or lose it!” We lose what knowledge, abilities, and opportunities we have when we do not use them!
  - (2) Unless we are “diligent” we will simply “drift away” from the Lord (Heb. 2:1; 5:14).

D. **The Law of Interference:** Why do you weed your garden? Why does the farmer spray herbicides on his corn or soybeans? Because crops, trees and flowers do not grow well when crowded by other plants. Weeds are a source of competition for water, nutrients, and sunlight!

- (1) Similarly our spiritual growth will be hindered if we allow other things to crowd out our spiritual life:
  - (a) Businessmen may become too busy to attend to God's business (Lk. 12:15).
  - (b) A woman may get so occupied with housekeeping that she has little time for God (Lk. 10:38-42).
  - (c) Young people may be so busy with school activities that prayer, worship, good works and Bible study are crowded out.
  - (d) Preachers can become so tied down with preparing sermons/Bible classes, meetings, etc., that they too do not spend enough time alone with God.
- (2) Jesus warned about the danger of interference (Mk. 4:18-19).

*In an effort to prevent us from surrendering to these hindrances, let us consider some ways to...*

## 2. **Promote Our Spiritual Growth**

### A. **Active involvement in the work of the congregation:**

- (1) When to start? Begin immediately! **NOW!** 2 Cor. 6:2
  - (a) It is important **NOT** to delay (remember the “hindrances”, esp. “lack of effort” and “the law of disuse”).
  - (b) Have you ever asked anyone (or even yourself) at Westside: \*\*  
**“What can I do to make this congregation grow?”**  
-OR-  
**“What can I do to make myself grow?”**
  - (c) Regardless of how much, or how little, ability you may think you have...there is plenty of work you can do to make this congregation and yourself **GROW!**
  - (d) You see, ability and opportunity for this church or for you to grow is not the problem...the problem is **DO YOU HAVE THE DESIRE FOR THIS CHURCH OR FOR YOURSELF TO GROW?**
  - (e) Regardless of what you think of my abilities as a preacher or the abilities of the “stronger” members. Growth will never be what it ought to **OR** can be here until **EVERYONE** does his/her part (Eph. 4:15-16).
  - (f) Because, growth doesn’t have anything to do with how “smart” you are, how “old” or “young” you are, whether you’re a male or female; how much “ability” you have or don’t have, etc.! The only **ONE** thing that **REALLY** matters: **DO YOU REALLY WANT TO DO IT?**
  - (g) We must ever remember that even the most humble service can be a source of joy as long as we do it to please God. No job is too small! Psalms 84:10; John 13:12-17
- (2) A couple of important thoughts on our service to the congregation:
  - (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 (i.e., “self-starters”).
  - (b) Also, don’t do things necessarily expecting the praise of others (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16).
  - (c) “Don’t criticize, energize!” When something is lacking don’t be critical, but use it as an opportunity to step up and show others (not tell) what needs to be done.

### B. **Start a program of regular private devotions:**

- (1) Spend time each day alone with God, engaged in prayer, Bible study, singing (Psalms 1:1-3).

- ☛ Many Christians can describe in intricate detail their hobbies yet cannot do so concerning the religion they hope will take them to eternal bliss.
  - ☛ How does one gain knowledge of their hobbies? **STUDY! TIME SPENT DOING IT!**
  - ☛ The same is true spiritually...you don't gain knowledge of God's word and grow as a Christian by osmosis; it requires diligent study and application of God's word! 1 Pet. 2:2
  - ☛ God's word is described by the Psalmist as "*sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*" (Psa. 19:10), but many treat it like it tasted like "caster oil"!
- (2) Many Christians do not grow because they try to exist on a "spiritual starvation diet"! Jn. 12:48
  - (3) But **consistently** spending time in personal devotion will help supply the spiritual nourishment necessary for spiritual growth (Psa. 1:3; akin to the law of sowing and reaping! 1 Tim. 4:7-8).

**C. Form/participate in an informal Bible study group:**

- (1) Meet regularly with other Christians in an informal setting to study the Bible together (e.g., over coffee one morning a week).
  - (a) There is no "rule" that says you can't study the Bible anywhere else but in this building!
  - (b) There is no "rule" that says you can't study the Bible on any day other than Sunday or Wednesday! There's no rule the "class" has to be 45 minutes long!
  - (c) There's no "rule" that says you have to have a "preacher" to teach a Bible class! You can do it! Or, if you need some help, ask for help!
- (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) If you implement some of the suggestions in this lesson it will naturally lead to increased opportunities for you to share the gospel (e.g., invite others to the informal studies).
- (2) Even if you don't do the actual teaching, you can do what Andrew did: you can lead a friend to Christ! Jn. 1:40-42
- (3) If you remain actively involved in leading others to Christ it is very unlikely you will ever stop growing in Christ yourself!
- (4) A sure sign of spiritual apathy is when we lose the desire to share our faith with others. Did you ever stop to think of what it says about us when we never, or only rarely when it is really convenient, share the gospel with others? Judgment is coming! 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Mk. 9:47-48; Rev. 20:15 That should motivate all of us! 2 Cor. 5:10-11
- (5) I wouldn't wish that eternal fate on anyone, would you? Consider your relatives, your friends, your neighbors...have they obeyed the gospel? If not they are lost! Ezek. 33:8

**E. Practice constant and brutally honest self-examination:**

- (1) The Scriptures call us to examine ourselves in our relationship with Christ (2 Cor. 13:5).
- (2) Here are just a few of the questions we should ask ourselves often:
  - (a) Do I have more Bible knowledge than I did one year ago? And, am I applying that Bible knowledge in my life?
  - (b) Am I as interested in Jesus Christ today as I was on the day I was baptized?
  - (c) What is the name of the last person I helped become a Christian? The last Christian I helped to grow in the faith? The last person I invited to services?
  - (d) Am I enjoying life as a child of God?
  - (e) Am I improving my life, my disposition, and becoming more like Christ? Am I really different than people that are not Christians? How hard is it for others to detect a difference?

- (f) Do I set a good example for other Christians? Am I concerned about what example I set?
  - (g) Am I growing in such activities as Bible study, prayer, and worship?
  - (h) If every member of this congregation were as strong/weak in the faith as I am; how long would the congregation here last?
- (3) Self-examination is not an easy process and, if we are honest with ourselves, it is not necessarily **FUN!** But, true spiritual growth is impossible without it!

### III. CONCLUSION:

1. "The trouble with many men is that they have got just enough religion to make them miserable." (Billy Sunday) Unfortunately, and sadly there is a lot of truth to that statement. However, such was never God's intention (Jn. 10:10b; Phil. 4:6-7) ("If there is not joy in religion, you have got a leak in your religion.")
2. So how about you? Do you have a "leak in your religion?"

#### **"DO YOU DESIRE A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD?"**

**Heb. 12:11:** Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

3. Let none of us be satisfied to just plod along indifferently in regard to our relationship with God Almighty!
4. The decision is yours, totally, absolutely and completely yours. What will your answer be? Where will you spend your eternity? Do you really desire a closer walk with God?

Some of this lesson is based on an original outline by Mark A. Copeland ([Executable Outlines](#))