

“DO YOU DESIRE A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD?”

Ephesians 4:14-15

I. INTRODUCTION: I

I. **2** 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, efficiency and profitability),
- ✓ 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 any in this audience who would answer “no” to this important question.

A.. Growing as a Christian is essential!

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

Eph. 4:14-15: “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, **15** but, speaking the truth in love, may **grow up** in all things into Him who is the head — Christ —”

1 Pet. 2:2: “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may **grow** thereby,”

B. Sadly, it is all too common that many Christians **DO NOT** grow:

1 Cor. 3:1: “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.”

Heb. 5:11-14: “...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 first 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 unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. **14** But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

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: **I**

Pet. 1:13-16: “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; **14** as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; **15** but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, **16** because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

3. **3** This lesson is intended to help all of us grow ever closer to God and be 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...

I. **4** 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, monitored, evaluated, and modified when needed!

- (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). We can’t take what you are taught and just “sit on it”; we must act upon it! We must live 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:** “receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”
- B. 5 Discouragement:** Many people make a good beginning, but get discouraged and quit (**Lk. 8:13-14:** “But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. 14 Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”).
- (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:** “...we despaired even of life.”). 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. 6 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:** “...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”).
- D. 7 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:** “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”).
 - (b) A woman may get so occupied with housekeeping that she has little time for God (Lk. 10:38-42: Martha was more worried about being a good hostess than listening to Jesus’ teaching.).
 - (c) Young people may be so busy with school activities that prayer, worship, good works and Bible study are crowded out.
 - (d) Notice how many people are glued to their “smart phones”!?
 - (e) 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**: “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”).

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

2. 8 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 be **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, how long you’ve been a Christian, etc.! The only **ONE** thing that **REALLY** matters: **DO YOU REALLY WANT TO DO IT?**
- (g) We must always 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! **Psa. 84:10**: “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”; Jn. 13:12-17
- (2) A couple of important thoughts on our service to the congregation:
- (a) The best servant is the 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. 9 Start a program of regular private devotions:

- (1) Spend time each day alone with God, engaged in prayer, Bible study, singing (**Psa. 1:1-3**: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”).

- ☛ 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! AND 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 (newborn babe, sincere milk of the word)
 - ☛ 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 "castor 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. 4:8: "*For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*").

C. 10 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/month).
 - (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! I'll literally come running!
- (2) This provides opportunity for mutual sharing and encouragement which leads to even more knowledge and spiritual growth.

D. 11 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 with others (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. 12 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? Am I concerned about the example I set?
 - (g) Am I growing in such activities as Bible study, prayer, and worship?
 - (h) Am I making progress on the sins that are particularly problematic for me?
 - (i) 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: 13

1. "The trouble with many men is that they have got just enough religion to make them miserable."
(Billy Sunday)
 - A. Unfortunately, and sadly there is a lot of truth to that statement.
 - B. However, such was never God's intention (Jn. 10:10b; **Phil. 4:6-7**: "*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 understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*")("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?"

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- 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? Eph. 3:20

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