

"Spiritual Growth"

Some folks grow older, while other folks grow in integrity and character. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're examining the desire and the goal to grow spiritually.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The God of heaven is not merely interested in providing for your physical needs, He also wants to help you grow strong spiritually and to become the man or woman of God that He intends for you to be. God cares about your heart, your thoughts, and your hope for the future. He wants you to have the spiritual strength to endure whatever storms you face with confidence. Confidence in His love and in His grace. Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and we want to be a part of your life each week.

Now just as people are of different ages and maturity levels physically, so many are at different maturity levels spiritually. Some act childish, some are uneducated, and some have not grown in their love for God. The Lord Jesus gave this answer to the lawyer's question, "which is the great commandment in the Law?" He said in Matthew 12:37 to 40, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

To love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds demands everything from us. To love God with our whole being is intentional and demands that we discipline ourselves and put God first. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6 and verse 33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness." Spiritually mature Christians have their priorities in place. They know what really matters in christianity. And many Christians depend upon others to tell them what they need to know rather than search the Scriptures for themselves. Mature Christians are able to discern right from wrong.

Now we offer this study on spiritual growth free! If you'd like a printed copy and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have programs and free materials on our website, www.searchtv.org. You can also see us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song, we'll read from Hebrews 5:11 to 14, and we'll examine what we can do to grow spiritually in Christ.

Our reading comes from the book of Hebrews chapter 5 verses 11 to 14. And here the Hebrew writer laments because of the weakness and the immaturity of some Christians.

Concerning him (that is Melchizedek) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 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. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to mature in our faith to grow strong, to become people who understand the things that You would have us to be and to do and to show You our love and to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

Many Christians haven't matured in the faith, because they've become dull of hearing. They haven't taken time to seek the truth for themselves. Many are weak and spiritually dying because they're looking in the wrong place for spiritual truth. Many have gone to the feel-good religions that entertain; others are enamored with a false health and wealth gospel. A Christianity that doesn't put God first is no Christianity at all. A Christianity that doesn't listen to what God says about sin isn't faithful to God.

Some believe that God's grace can save them whether they repent or not. They're willing to contradict God rather than admit that they've sinned. They demand that loving a person means that we have to approve and accept their sinful behavior even when they will not repent. This is simply not true. Repentance is still demanded of us all! And no matter who you are or how religious you once were, God will not accept you if you persist in ignoring Him and continue in sinful behaviors.

After David sinned with Bathsheba and was discovered, he realized how he had lost the favor of God. He could say in Psalm 51:3 to 4, "For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified (speaking of God) when You speak And blameless when You judge." God desired that David be honest with himself. And he cried out in verses 6 to 9, David did, "Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities."

David didn't make excuses for his sins and iniquities. David didn't blame others and he didn't demand others approve of him in his sin. David realized his committing adultery with Bathsheba and causing the death of her husband Uriah was wrong. He knew his heart was wrong and he needed to be washed from his sin. He prayed in Psalm 51:10 to 12, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit." David knew that he needed a clean heart and a steadfast spirit. That he needed God to be close and he wanted God's salvation to be restored to him. He wanted God's willing spirit again.

When you quit going to church, quit studying your Bible, and quit praying, you're turning away from God and from the things that give you wisdom, peace, and hope for eternal life. You lose the joy of God's salvation and God's favor. Like David, many of us long to be purified and delivered from the sins that we've committed. People outside of Christ need to become Christians, and people who have wandered away from the Lord's church need to repent and come back to God.

Next, if you wish to be spiritually mature, then search the Scriptures and study them. Don't rely solely on someone else just because he or she is a religious leader. The real standard of truth is not in people but in the written Word of God. Check out with Scripture what you hear. Check me out to see whether what I'm saying is true. Psalm 1:1 to 3 says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers."

God wants us to progress in our faith to add many things to our spiritual lives. 2 Peter 1:5 to 7 says: "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control,

perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.”

Now in addition to our faith, we must with all diligence add virtue or moral excellence. Faith in God leaves no place for moral compromise. God wants His people to live holy, unspotted lives. James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” Oh it’s absurd to think that God accepts our worship when we live ungodly lives.

We must with all diligence add to our moral excellence, knowledge. This knowledge is God’s teaching. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 15, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” We need to know God’s Word so that we can know God Himself and His will for our lives.

We must add with all diligence to our knowledge, self-control. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:25 to 27, that “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and (I) make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” If we don’t discipline ourselves, friend, we can lose our souls.

We must add with all diligence to our self-control the idea of perseverance or patience. True Christians don’t quit the Lord just because things are difficult. Jesus bore the cross for our sins until He died. He didn’t give up on us. We must not give up on Him. Acts 16:22 to 25 tells of the faith of Paul and Silas at Philippi. They were beaten and jailed but they never gave up their faith: “The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Such faith and endurance is what every Christian should strive for. Mature Christians aren’t babies who cry at the least inconvenience.

We must add with all diligence to our perseverance godliness. Godliness takes place when God is foremost in our hearts and lives. We don’t follow our own will but follow the will of God. Godly people take God seriously. You will never mature spiritually until you take God seriously. Mature Christians strive to be like Christ. 1 John 2:3 to 6 says, “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

We must add with all diligence to our godliness brotherly kindness. Brotherly kindness is simply brotherly love and affection in action. We treat our brothers and sisters in Christ with kindness and affection as if they were our siblings in the flesh. 2 Corinthians 8:1 to 5 tells of the Macedonian Christians who gave to the churches in Jerusalem who were financially supporting the needy saints in Jerusalem. He says: “Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of

participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”

We must have that feeling too and that love for others. We have to add with all diligence to our brotherly kindness love. Love is unselfish concern and care for others. The Lord Jesus asks us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12 and verse 33). And to love God includes loving your brother and your neighbor. 1 John 3 verse 18 says, “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” 1 Corinthians 13:4 to 8 reminds us that, “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, (love) does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; (love) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”

2 Peter 1:8 to 11 says, “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

When these characteristics and values are present in our lives, they make us useful in the eyes of God and fruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But a person who doesn't have these things has become blind to what really makes a Christian. Mature, spiritual Christians belong to the Lord Jesus and walk like He walks. Immature Christians haven't gained a strong knowledge of the Lord or of the truth. They have forgotten the most important things that they should know. Leaders have to coddle them like little children who want their way all the time.

Now earlier we read about some Christians who had become dull of hearing. Sadly some Christians today don't want to hear the truth and preachers who like to teach only what pleases people is what they go after. Hebrews 5:12 to 14 says: “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. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

Well why does this matter? Well you may be an immature Christian and not realize it. You may rely on others to spoon feed you this feel-good religion that never asks you to repent or to grow in faith. That's not the Christianity of Scripture! Please take Christ seriously and grow strong!

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful for Your word that teaches us and helps us to mature. Father help us not to ever be dull of hearing but to hear and listen closely to the things that You have taught us so that we might love You and do Your will. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Where are you in your spiritual walk with the Lord? Are you like a child needing milk, or have you grown in your faith and knowledge of God's word? Do you show that you can discern between good and evil trusting God's word to be your standard? Some today judge right and wrong by their feelings or by popular culture, and many are approving sinful practices? Who is first in your life, God or yourself? Do you let every little thing come between you and serving God? How much time do you spend in giving the Lord your service in prayer, or Bible study? Do you use your time and your money to serve the Lord?

Mature Christians love everyone, but they also love God with all their heart and soul and mind. They're not willing to ignore God and what God calls sinful. Loving people means telling them the truth rather than letting them believe a lie about the cost of sin. The truth is often hard to hear but it is necessary. Repentance is how we heal of the brokenness in our lives. And Jesus called people to repent because He loved them and didn't want them to perish.

We become Christians today the same way they became Christians in the first century. We come to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, believing that He's truly the Son of God and He died on the cross for our sins and He was raised from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures. We turn from sin in repentance; we confess our faith; and we're baptized in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2 verse 38). Now baptism into Christ is an immersion in water, and it's when God acts upon us to save us, to make us His children, and to add us to His church. And so become a Christian today.

We hope our study on spiritual growth has caused you to think about growing stronger in your faith and love for God. If you live in the United States you want a free printed copy, send your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. There's a schedule of our programs and a map of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. SEARCH is on YouTube! And we ask that you subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry" and then like the programs. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

Show God your love by worshiping at church. You need a church family. And if you can attend, don't neglect worshiping at church. Don't stop. There's probably a church of Christ near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.