

THE BENEFITS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

2 Peter 1:8-11

By Andy Manning

At Church Acadiana we talk a lot about spiritual growth. I preach about it. We give you tools for it. We have programs for it. We pray for it. We even reward you for it – gift cards are given to those who complete a reading list.

The Bible commands us to grow. **2 Corinthians 13:11** “Become mature.”
Ephesians 4:15 “Let us grow in every way into him who is the head – Christ.”
Hebrews 6:1 “Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity.” **2 Peter 3:18** “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

And spiritual growth is not easy. It takes hard work. **2 Peter 1:5** “Make every effort.” **1 Timothy 4:7** “Train yourself in godliness.”

Obviously spiritual growth benefits God. It pleases Him. It glorifies Him. It furthers His kingdom.

But does it benefit us? Is all the effort and time and attention that we put into spiritual growth worth it? That’s what we’re going to look at today.

In 2 Peter 1:5-7, Peter tells us to grow spiritually – to cultivate the Christian virtues. And then in verses 8-11, our passage for today, Peter gives us eight benefits of spiritual growth.

Let’s do a quick review of **2 Peter 1:5-7** “5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, 6 knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, 7 godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” Let’s take a moment to review the meaning of these virtues.

- 1) Saving faith: Relying on Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

- 2) Living faith: Confidence in God; that He is who He says He is, and that He will do what He promised to do.
- 3) Goodness: Always doing good works and acts of charity.
- 4) Knowledge: Knowing and understanding God's word.
- 5) Self-control: Doing what is right, even when you don't feel like it.
- 6) Endurance: Doing what is right despite adversity.
- 7) Godliness: Devotion to God resulting in a life that is pleasing to Him.
- 8) Brotherly affection: Be especially loving to fellow believers.
- 9) Love for others: Doing what is best for people, not what makes them feel good; giving them what they need, not what they want.
- 10) Love for God: Delighting in God, desiring Him, and treasuring Him above all else.

This is a great definition of spiritual maturity: A large measure of saving faith, living faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, love for others, and love for God.

In **vv. 8-11** Peter is going to give us eight benefits of spiritual growth. Let's begin by reading the passage.

8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins. 10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble. 11 For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

EIGHT BENEFITS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1. You will be more useful to God.

2 Peter 1:8 "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless"

This verse implies that God wants to use you for His glory and for His purposes. **2 Timothy 2:21 (ERV)** “The Lord wants to use you for special purposes.”

How does God want to use you?

- 1) To glorify Him. 1 Corinthians 1:31 “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.”
- 2) To witness to the lost. Acts 1:8 “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
- 3) To serve your church. Ephesians 4:16 “From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.”
- 4) To help other believers grow. Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...”
- 5) To care for other believers. Romans 12:13 “Share with the saints in their needs...”
- 6) To do good works. Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.”
- 7) To help the poor and needy. James 1:27 “Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”
- 8) To care for your spouse. Ephesians 5:33 “To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.”
- 9) To care for your parents. Ephesians 6:2 “Honor your father and mother....”
- 10) To lead your kids to Christ. Ephesians 6:4 “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”
- 11) To be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Matthew 5:13, 14 “You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world.”
- 12) To comfort the brokenhearted. 2 Corinthians 1:4 “He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

This verse also implies that some Christians are more useful than others. In fact, some Christians are useless to God. How sad! To be useless to God is to miss the purpose of your life. To waste your life.

There are some athletes that aren't very useful to the coach; there are some employees who aren't very useful to the manager; there are some teachers who aren't very useful to the principal; and there are some Christians who aren't very useful to God. There are some Christians who hurt more than help the cause of Christ.

You don't want to be that Christian. You want to be useful to God. You want God to use you to the max.

You want to be like Mark. **2 Timothy 4:11** "Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry."

We want to be like Onesimus. **Philemon 1:11** "Once he was useless to you, but now he is useful both to you and to me."

How can you become more useful to God? Spiritual growth. **2 Peter 1:8** "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless...."

2. You will be more productive.

2 Peter 1:8 "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful"

This verse implies that God wants you to be fruitful, or productive.

Being unfruitful is a bad thing.

God is glorified when you bear fruit. In fact, God wants you to bear "much fruit." **John 15:8** "My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove

to be my disciples.” This verse also teaches that bearing fruit is the way you prove to be a true Christian.

Bearing fruit is the reason God saved you. **John 15:16** “You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain...”

Bearing fruit is a sign that you are wise. **James 3:17** “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense.”

What does it mean to be a fruitful Christian? It means to be a productive Christian. It means that you are making the most of your time on earth. You are making a difference. You are living a significant life. You are living a life that matters. A life that counts. A life of contribution. A life of importance. You are not just taking up space. You are not just sucking air. You are productive.

God wants you to produce **eight kinds of fruit**.

- 1) The fruit of repentance. Repentance is turning away from a self-centered life to a God-focused life. **Matthew 3:8** “Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance.”
- 2) The fruit of the Spirit – Christ-like character. **Galatians 5:22-23** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control.”
- 3) The fruit of another Christian – winning others to Christ. **Colossians 1:5-6** “... the gospel that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world.”
- 4) The fruit of good deeds – serving others in love. **Colossians 1:10** “so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God”
- 5) The fruit of a productive ministry – making a difference for the cause of Christ. **Romans 1:13** “... I often planned to come to you... in order that I might have a fruitful ministry among you....”

- 6) The fruit of helping others progress in the faith. **Philippians 1:22-25** “Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me... for your progress and joy in the faith.”
- 7) Fruit that will last – things that will last and matter for eternity. **John 15:16** “I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain.”
- 8) The fruit of praise – a life that praises and glorifies God, and leads others to do the same. **Hebrews 13:15** “Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

This verse also implies that just like usefulness, some Christians are fruitful and some are unfruitful. Some are productive and some are unproductive. Some Christians live significant lives, and others live insignificant lives. Some make a real difference, and others don't.

How can you become a productive Christian? How can you live a life that is important, significant, and that makes a difference for eternity? Spiritual growth. **2 Peter 1:8** “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful”

3. You will make better decisions.

2 Peter 1:9 “The person who lacks these things is blind”

Peter says that the person who lacks these things – the qualities that makes up spiritual maturity – is blind. When you are blind, you can't see where to go. That's what it is like when you lack spiritual maturity – you can't see where to go in life. You end up making really foolish decisions.

I saw a meme on Facebook a while back that said, “The new iPhone 10 costs \$999. The entire menu at Cracker Barrel costs \$881. Make wise choices.”

Life is all about choices. By the time you reach the age of 75, you will have made almost 2,000,000 decisions. Your life is the sum total of your decisions. You better learn how to make good decisions.

In the movie “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade,” Indiana searched for the Holy Grail, which was the cup that was used by Christ in the Last Supper. Anyone who drank from that cup would have eternal life. So after a long search, Indiana Jones finds the location of the grail. But it is guarded by a knight in shining armor. And the room doesn’t just contain the Holy Grail; it is filled with cups. Big cups, little cups, beautiful cups, ugly cups, silver cups, golden cups, wooden cups. The knight tells Indiana how it works. He says that you must guess which cup is the Holy Grail. If you guess right, eternal life. If you guess wrong, instant death. And then he says, “Choose wisely.”

That’s the way life is. You have to choose wisely, because you don’t get a redo on decisions. Once you make a decision, you are stuck with it.

And your decisions will either move you closer to where you want to go, or they will hurt you.

Every person in this room has a story about a bad decision they made, and how it really hurt them, and how they wish they could go back and undo it. But you can’t. You have to make wise decisions the first time around.

Think about all of the big decisions that you have to make in life. Who to marry. When to get married. When to have kids. How many kids to have. Where to send your kids to school. All the decisions that go with raising kids. Your choice of friends. Where to go to college. What to study in college. Whether or not to take that promotion. Whether or not to accept that transfer. Which house to buy. Which car to buy. Where to go to church. How to spend your free time. How to spend your money. Life is filled with big decisions; decisions that matter; decisions that have consequences; decisions that will have a ripple effect for years down the road.

How do you get better at decision-making? Spiritual growth. The more you grow spiritually, the better you will be at making decisions. More faith, better decisions. More goodness, better decisions. More knowledge, better decisions. More self-control, better decisions. More endurance, better decisions. More godliness, more brotherly affection, more love for others and for God, better

decisions. The more you grow spiritually, the more your eyes will be opened to the right way to go.

Psalm 25:12 “Who is the person who fears the Lord? He will show him the way he should choose.”

4. Your focus will be on eternity.

2 Peter 1:9 “The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted”

The Christian lacking spiritual maturity is shortsighted.

They are focused on earth rather than heaven; on the temporal rather than the eternal. They are focused on impressing people rather than pleasing God. They are focused on looking good rather than being good. They are focused on serving themselves rather than Christ. They are focused on making lots of money now rather than storing up treasures in heaven. They are focused on experiencing heaven on earth, rather than suffering for Christ to bring more people to heaven. They are focused on pleasure, and fun, and comfort, and entertainment, rather than evangelism, discipleship, service, and generosity. They are in love with this present world rather than God. They are focused on becoming famous rather than making God famous. They are focused on accumulating rather than giving. They are focused on being cool rather than being Christ-like. They are focused on retirement rather than impact. They are building their own kingdom rather than living for God's. They are pursuing the American dream rather than dreaming of heaven. They are striving for a beach body instead of serving Christ's body. They long for Friday rather than Sunday. They live for long walks on the beach rather than long conversations with God. They love to eat and hate to fast. They binge on Netflix and never miss a game, but their place in church is mostly unoccupied. They get as close to sin as possible without crossing the line, and they only seek as much religion as they need to make the cut. These are all signs of spiritual immaturity.

The Bible says to focus not on this life but on eternity. **Colossians 3:1-2** “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the

right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”
Many Christians have their minds set on earthly things.

The Bible says not to love the world. **1 John 2:15** “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Many Christians are in love with this world.

The Bible says not to even be friends with the world. **James 4:4** “You adulterous people! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God.”

To focus on earth rather than eternity is to waste your life. This world is passing away. **1 John 2:17** “And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.” **Matthew 24:35** “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Everything on this earth will pass away; only what you do for God will last. Only what you do for Christ really matters.

When you die, it won’t matter how much money you made, or what kind of car you drove, or how famous you were. It won’t matter how much pleasure you experienced, or how much fun you had. It won’t matter how much you traveled, and how many vacations you took. It won’t matter how beautiful you were, or how popular you were. It won’t matter how big your house was. When you die, the only thing that matters is what you do for Christ.

How can you make sure that your focus is on eternity rather than earth? Spiritual growth. As you grow in maturity in Christ, you will not be shortsighted. You will not get distracted by the temporary, the earthly, the immediate, the world. Your focus will be on Christ, and on eternity.

5. You will accomplish the goal of your salvation.

2 Peter 1:10 “The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins.”

The Christian who is not pursuing spiritual maturity has “forgotten the cleansing from his past sins.”

Why did Jesus save us and cleanse us from our sins? Not just so we can go to heaven, but so that we can live for Christ on earth.

But the Christian who is not pursuing spiritual maturity has forgotten that. They think being a Christian just means believing in Jesus so you can go to heaven when you die. But that’s only part of it. Christ died for us so that you might live for Him. **2 Corinthians 5:15** “And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.”

Christ died for you so that you can live for Him. He died so that you would grow in Christian virtue, and become more like Jesus. He died for you so that you would serve Him; and save the lost; and build the church; and glorify Him; and sing His praises; and share with those in need.

Titus 2:11-12 “11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age.” Christ didn’t merely save us from hell; He saved us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts, and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way.

Titus 2:14 “He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.” Christ didn’t merely die to redeem us from the punishment of sin, but from a life of sin. He saved us so that we would be a people for His own possession, eager to do good works.

When Christians neglect spiritual growth, they are missing the point of salvation. But when you focus on spiritual growth, then you are accomplishing the goal of your salvation – not just to get you to heaven, but to get heaven inside of you and change the way you act and think.

6. You will have assurance of salvation.

2 Peter 1:10 “Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election”

God wants you to know for sure that you are saved. Theologians call this “assurance of salvation.” **John MacArthur** said that “assurance is one’s confidence that he possesses that eternal salvation.” **1 John 5:13** “I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Many Christians live with a sense of doubt about their salvation. They are question mark Christians rather than exclamation point Christians. They are concerned Christians rather than confident Christians. They live with the fear of hell rather than the anticipation of heaven.

But other Christians are confident. They have total assurance. No doubt. They know without a doubt they if they died today, they would go to heaven.

Where does that assurance of salvation come from? How do you get it?

First, you need to know the provision for salvation – Jesus Christ and Him crucified. If you don’t know how God has saved us from sin, then you are probably not saved.

Second, you need to know the method of salvation – faith in Jesus Christ, not good works. If you are relying up on good deeds to earn your way to heaven, then you are probably not saved.

Third, you need to know the signs of salvation – the marks of a person who is saved. If a person possesses certain marks, or traits, or qualities, then it is more likely that they are saved. But if a person lacks certain marks, traits, or qualities, then it is less likely that are saved.

What are these marks? Poverty of spirit (Mt 5:3); Sorrow for sin (Mt 5:4); Doing the will of God (Mt 7:21); Love for God and Christ (Jn 8:42); a transformed life (2

Cor 5:17); Standing firm in the faith (Heb 3:6); Love for other Christians (1 Jn 1:10); the inner witness of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 3:24); and finally Christian character. **1 John 2:6** “The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.”

2 Peter 1:10 “Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election”

Peter is saying that as you make every effort to grow in Christ, you will also be making every effort to confirm your salvation. You can tell a tree by its fruit. You can tell a Christian by their Christ-like character. As you see yourself striving for and living according to Christ-like character, your confidence will grow that you are indeed saved.

7. You will not backslide.

2 Peter 1:10 “if you do these things you will never stumble.”

Peter is not saying that if you increase in Christian virtue that you will never lose your salvation, because it is impossible to lose your salvation. Rather He is saying that if you focus on spiritual growth then you will not backslide.

Many Christians struggle with backsliding. They lack consistency in their Christian walk.

They are like those people who can't stick to a healthy lifestyle. They lose ten pounds, and then they gain 15; they lose 10, and then they gain 20.

Some Christians are like those dysfunctional married couples who can't seem to find harmony. One week they love each other, and the next week they can't stop fighting; on Monday he's prince charming, and on Tuesday he's Darth Vader; on Monday she's Mary Poppins, and on Tuesday she's Cruella.

Many Christians are like that. They are very active in church one month, and then out of church for two months; they are holy one month, and living in sin for six

months; they feel very close to God one month, and very far from God the next; they are on fire for God one month, and then angry at God the next; they serve God one month, and they forget about God the next; they have the faith to move mountains one day, and the next they aren't sure if God exists.

Many Christians are like that famous song "Hot 'n Cold," by Katy Perry:

'Cause you're hot then you're cold
You're yes then you're no
You're in then you're out
You're up then you're down
You're wrong when it's right
It's black and it's white
We fight, we break up
We kiss, we make up
(You) You don't really want to stay, no
(You) But you don't really want to go-o
You're hot then you're cold
You're yes then you're no
You're in then you're out
You're up then you're down

Many Christians are like that. They don't abandon Christ, but they keep backsliding. They can't find consistency, and steadfastness, and perseverance, and endurance in their Christian life. The Christian life is supposed to be "a long obedience in the same direction,"¹ but that's not how it is for many Christians.

And backsliding has some very serious consequences. You miss out on God's best. You lose the joy and peace that come from the Holy Spirit. You make bad decisions that can really hurt you. You hurt the reputation of Christ and the church.

¹ *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* is the title of a book by the late Eugene Peterson, who also authored *The Message Bible* paraphrase.

How can you avoid backsliding? How can you have a relationship with God that stays hot and on fire; how can you keep the candle burning; how can you stay passionate; how can you keep from backsliding? **2 Peter 1:10** “if you do these things you will never stumble.” If you make every effort to keep growing in Christ, then you won’t backslide.

There’s no standing still in the Christian life. You are either growing, or backsliding. The only way to avoid backsliding is to make every effort to keep growing.

8. You will increase your heavenly reward.

2 Peter 1:11 “For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.”

The list of virtues in 2 Peter 1:5-7 is often called “the ladder of virtue.” But this ladder is not a ladder to heaven. We don’t get to heaven by being good. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done. It is a free gift, and it is received by faith.

The reason that salvation is not based on merit is because only perfect people deserve heaven. If we were given what we deserved, it would be eternal hell. Cultivating the virtues does not get us to heaven. They are the ladder to spiritual maturity, but not the ladder to heaven.

However, increasing in the ladder of virtues will benefit us in heaven. Our entry into heaven will be “richly” provided for us.

Your place in heaven is bought by Christ, but the size of your heavenly reward is bought by you. There will be degrees of rewards in heaven.

And that is only just. Would it be right for one Christian who served Christ diligently and faithfully and sacrificially her whole life to be given the same reward as a man who was wicked his entire life until he finally accepted Christ on his

deathbed? They are both saved; they are both loved equally by Christ; but their works on earth were not equal, and neither will be their reward.

Hard work pays off. The harder your work at a musical instrument, the better you can play. The harder your work at a sport, the better you can compete. The harder you work at your job, the more valuable you will become to the market. The harder your work at school, the better your grades will be, and the better your scholarships will be. Hard work pays off. And the harder you work at spiritual growth, not only will you become more spiritually mature and enjoy the present blessings, but your heavenly reward will increase and grow.

HOW TO GROW

So spiritual growth not only benefits God, but it benefits you. **1 Timothy 4:7-8** "... Train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."

Let me close by giving you a simple eight-step plan for spiritual growth. These eight steps will help you cultivate the virtues and qualities in 2 Peter 1:5-7.

- 1) Make Sunday church a priority (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- 2) Get baptized (Matthew 28:19-20).
- 3) Connect with other believers in a Home Group (Colossians 3:16).
- 4) Establish the habit of a daily quiet time (Luke 5:16).
- 5) Join the church (Philippians 2:1-2).
- 6) Volunteer regularly at church (Ephesians 4:16).
- 7) Bring your tithe to church (Malachi 3:10-11).
- 8) Share the gospel regularly with people far from God (Acts 1:8).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read 2 Corinthians 13:11. The Bible commands us to become mature – to grow spiritually. What are you doing to be obedient to this command?

2. Read 2 Peter 1:5-7. Do you remember the definitions of the virtues in this passage? Write down the definitions that you remember.
3. How does our spiritual growth benefit God?
4. Read 2 Peter 1:8-11. How does spiritual growth benefit us?
5. 2 Peter 1:8 says that a benefit of spiritual growth is that we will become more useful to God. What are some ways that God wants to use us? How does spiritual growth make us more useful to God?
6. 2 Peter 1:8 also says that a benefit of spiritual maturity is that you will be more productive (fruitful). What are the different kinds of fruit that God wants us to produce? How does spiritual growth make us more productive?
7. 2 Peter 1:9 says that the absence of spiritual growth makes a person blind – leading to bad decisions. How does spiritual growth help us make better decisions?
8. 2 Peter 1:9 says that the person lacking spiritual maturity is shortsighted – focusing on earth rather than eternity. Why is it important to stay focused on eternity rather than life on earth? How does spiritual growth help us to stay focused on eternity?
9. 2 Peter 1:10 says that a benefit of spiritual growth is assurance of salvation. What is assurance of salvation? How does spiritual growth increase our assurance of salvation?
10. 2 Peter 1:10 says that a benefit of spiritual growth is that you will never stumble – you will not backslide. What are the dangers of backsliding? How does spiritual growth help you to avoid backsliding?
11. What are some steps we can take to grow spiritually?