

GROW IN GRACE
2 Peter 3:18
By Andy Manning

I. INTRO

- a. God has a plan for your life. He created you for a purpose. He placed you here for a reason. God created you to glorify Him, to love Him, to know Him, and to serve Him.

- b. But when you first become a Christian, you are not very good at glorifying God. You are not very good at loving God. You are not very close to God, and you don't know very much about God. And when you first become a Christian you are not a very effective and productive servant of God.

- c. And that is why the Bible commands us to grow.

- d. **2 Peter 3:18** "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."

II. 8 INSIGHTS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- a. **ONE: Growth requires life.** Dead things cannot grow. Only living things grow. To grow spiritually, you must be spiritually alive. This is what happens when God saves you. You are born again. You receive new life. You are regenerated.
 - a. **2 Corinthians 5:17** "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!"

 - b. Before you can start growing spiritually, you must be born spiritually. You have to get saved. You must repent of your sins and place your faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

- b. **TWO: Growth is a sign of life.** Since growth requires life, then growth is a sign of life. This is a word of encouragement to Christians who lack assurance of salvation. If you see yourself desiring to grow in Christ, and if you see in yourself some signs of spiritual growth, then those are signs that you are saved.

- c. **THREE: A lack of growth is a sign of death.** Living things grow. That is true of every organism under the sun. So, if you are not growing, then that is a sign of spiritual death. That is a sign that you have not been saved.

- d. **FOUR: Growth is a command.** It is something we must intentionally pursue. If you are not intentionally pursuing spiritual growth, then it is a sin. **1 Thessalonians 4:3** “For this is God’s will, your sanctification....” Sanctification is another word for spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is God’s will for your life. If you have ever wondered what God’s will is for your life, it is spiritual growth.

- e. **FIVE: Growth is our responsibility.** If we are commanded to grow, then that means that growth is our responsibility. It depends on us. Spiritual growth is not passive, it is active. If someone is growing, it is because they are doing the things that are required for growth. But if someone is not growing, then it is because they are not doing those things.
 - a. Spiritual growth ultimately is by the power of God. We cannot grow but by the Spirit and grace of God.

 - b. But you must complete the circle. You must do your part.

 - c. If you are not growing, then it is your fault. And if you want to grow, then you can grow as much as you want to. The only thing standing in your way is you.

- f. **SIX: Growth is progressive and gradual.**

- a. That is the nature of growth. Think of a tree. A tree grows gradually, over a long period of time. It is the same with spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is not instantaneous.
 - b. You cannot read a book, or attend a conference, or have hands laid on you that will instantly make you a mature Christian. It takes time. It takes work. It takes effort. There are not shortcuts.
 - c. **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** said, “Now this, again, I feel, is a very important distinction, because failure to recognize this has accounted for much unhappiness in the life of many a Christian person. There are many Christians who spend most of their lives in going round from Convention to Convention, hoping that eventually they are going to receive what they call ‘IT’, seeking to get it, hoping that something tremendous will take place and that they will receive holiness and sanctification as they have already received their justification.... No, no; growth of necessity is a gradual and a progressive matter.”
- g. SEVEN: You are either growing or declining.**
- a. The verse starts with the word “But.” It is a contrast. Peter is saying, “Instead of doing one thing, grow.”
 - b. The preceding verse tells us more. **2 Peter 3:17-18** “Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stable position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
 - c. There are two options. You are either being led away, or you are growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.
 - d. There is no standing still in the Christian life. There is progress or regress. The spiritual life is a steep mountain; you are either ascending or descending. It is a battle; you are either advancing or

retreating. It is race; you are either winning or losing. You are growing, or you are backsliding.

- e. “But grow” is the antidote to a poison. The poison is found in verse 17; being led away by the error lawless people and falling from your own stable position. Peter is saying that if you want to avoid slipping into sin and error, then you must focus on growing.
- f. **Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** said, “The only way to avoid falling in the Christian life is to advance. The only way to avoid slipping back is to go forward. There is no such thing as being static in the Christian life....”

h. EIGHT: Growth is possible.

- a. That God commands us to grow proves that growth is possible. God would not command us to do something were it not possible. Spiritual growth is possible.
- b. This is good news for the Christian who is struggling with a besetting sin; with a sinful addiction; with a harmful, destructive addiction. You can change. You can improve. You can outgrow that addiction, that temper, that habit, that flaw, that fault.
- c. I think that growth is not just possible, but inevitable. Remember, living things grow. If you are spiritually alive, then you can't help but grow. God will grow you. But your growth can either be small or great. It can be fast or slow. It can be easier or harder. And that depends on you.

III. TWO WAYS TO GROW

- a. What does it mean to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

- b. First, what it does not mean. It does not mean to grow more saved. There are no degrees of justification, and regeneration, and redemption, and forgiveness. Either you are saved, or you are not. Either your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life or it is not. Either the Holy Spirit indwells you or He does not.
- c. Second, what does it mean? There are two ways that a Christian must grow.
- d. **ONE: Grow in grace: Grow in the qualities that are empowered by grace.**
 - i. The most common definition of grace in the New Testament is the unmerited favor of God bestowed upon undeserving sinners through the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - 1. That is the sense in **Ephesians 2:8** "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift."
 - 2. A popular acronym for GRACE is God's Riches at Christ's Expense.
 - ii. But that is not the meaning of the word grace in this context. In this context, grace is something that we can grow in. It is something of which we can have a little or much. So in this context it means to grow in the qualities that are empowered by grace.
 - iii. Throughout the history of Christianity, the Christian virtues have often been called graces.
 - 1. Why? Because they are possible only because of the grace of God.

2. **2 Peter 1:3** “His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”
3. Through salvation, or the saving knowledge of Christ, God has given us everything required for life and godliness. We can grow spiritually because God has given us the resources and the strength – the grace – to grow.
- iv. So to grow in grace is to grow in the Christian graces.
- v. A short list of the Christian graces is found in **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.”
- vi. Another common list of Christian graces is in **Galatians 5:22-23** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control.”
- vii. Notice that the graces in this list are called the fruit of the Spirit. They are empowered by the Spirit. It is only by the indwelling Spirit given to believers that they are possible to possess. The Christian is empowered for virtue by the grace of God, and therefore they are called the Christian graces.
- viii. **JC Ryle** commented on **2 Peter 3:18**. “When I speak of growth in grace, I only mean an increase in the degree, size, strength, vigor and power — of the graces which the Holy Spirit plants in a believer's heart. I hold that every one of those graces admits of growth, progress and increase. I hold that repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage and the like — may be little — or great, strong — or weak, vigorous — or feeble, and may vary

greatly in the same person at different periods of his life. When I speak of a man growing in grace, I mean simply that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith is becoming stronger, his hope is becoming brighter, his love is becoming more extensive, his spiritual-mindedness is becoming more marked, he feels more of the power of godliness in his own heart — and he manifests more of it in his life.”

e. TWO: Grow in knowledge: Grow in your understanding of the truth, and in intimacy with God.

- i. There are two kinds of knowledge that a Christian must grow in.
- ii. First, grow in your understanding of the truth. **2 Peter 1:5** “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge.”
 1. Paul explains why Biblical knowledge, or understanding God’s truth is so important. **Colossians 1:9-12** “For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven’t stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, 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, 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light.”
 2. Paul prayed that the Colossians might grow in knowledge. Why?
 - a. One: So that you may walk worthy of the Lord.
 - b. Two: So that you may be fully pleasing to him.

- c. Three: So that you may bear fruit in every good work.
- d. Four: So that you might grow in the knowledge of God (knowledge of God leads to more knowledge of God).
- e. Five: So that you may be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might.
- f. Six: So that you may have great endurance.
- g. Seven: So that you may have great patience.
- h. Eight: So that you may have joy.
- i. Nine: So that you may give thanks to the Father. In other words, growing in spiritual knowledge – understanding Biblical truth – is necessary to all spiritual progress.

3. **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** said, “As a Christian I am not to stop merely at a knowledge of forgiveness and a knowledge of salvation; I am to grow in my understanding and in my knowledge of the whole scheme and plan and purpose of salvation.... I must busy myself with Christian doctrine. I must learn to understand the doctrine of God and His Being, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of sin, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of the ultimate and the last things.”

iii. The second kind of knowledge you must grow in is in intimacy with God.

- 1. Personal, experiential, relational knowledge of Christ.
- 2. You may know all about Abraham Lincoln, but you do not know him. And you can't, because He is dead.
- 3. But Jesus is alive. And His Spirit lives inside of You. And He wants you to have a real relationship with Him. He wants

you to talk to Him; to hear from Him; to love Him; to know Him.

4. **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** went on. “But I think that, in addition [to growing in your understand of Biblical truth], it means this: not only the knowledge concerning Him, but a knowledge of Him. I must grow in my knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which is meant my communion with Him; my sense of a personal relationship to Him must increase... There is a mystical knowledge of Christ possible to us. The Christian is not left with a mere knowledge concerning Christ, there is a knowledge of Christ.... You mustn’t stop at knowing things about Christ; there must be a sense of personal knowledge.”

IV. WHY GROW?

- a. Before we close today, let’s do one more thing. Let’s think about the question, Why grow? Of course, we must grow because God commands it. But what are the benefits of spiritual growth?
- b. If you go back to 2 Peter 1, the Apostle gives a list of **six benefits of spiritual growth**. In verses 5-7, He commands us to grow – to make every effort to grow in the Christian graces. And then in verses 8-11 he lists some of the benefits.
- c. **2 Peter 1:8-11** “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.”

d. Notice the six phrases that underlined.

i. **ONE: Usefulness to God.** "they will keep you from being useless"
2 Peter 1:8.

1. Adults are more useful than children. They are stronger, smarter, more experienced, and more mature.
2. The more you grow in grace and knowledge, the more useful you will be to God.
3. God has to do a great work in you before He can do a great work through you.
4. Don't you want to be used by God? Don't you want to see Him work through your life to touch and impact others? That is the benefit of spiritual growth.

ii. **TWO: Productivity.** "or unfruitful" 2 Peter 1:8.

1. God created you to bear spiritual fruit. To be a productive Christian. To accomplish things – many things. God created your life to count. To make an impact. To make a difference. To build. To problem-solve. To meet needs. To help. To contribute to His purposes.
2. Many Christians are just taking up space; they are just sucking air. They aren't accomplishing anything of value. They aren't achieving anything of significance.
3. But the benefit of growth is productivity. More growth means more fruitfulness.
4. Adults are more productive than children. Children play; adults work, and accomplish, and get things done.

iii. **THREE: Clarity in decision-making.** "the person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted" 2 Peter 1:5-11.

1. Life is all about choices. Many of us are still suffering today because of bad choices, and foolish decisions in our past. How do you get good a decision-making? Grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

2. Adults are much better at decision-making than children.

iv. **FOUR: Assurance of salvation.** "make every effort to confirm your calling and election" 2 Peter 1:5-11.

1. God wants you to know for sure that you are saved (1 Jn 5:13).

2. But many Christians do not have that assurance of salvation. They are filled with doubt, and fear, and uncertainty.

3. Where does assurance come from? Spiritual growth. Growth is a sign of life. As you see yourself growing, you will gain more assurance that you have life.

v. **FIVE: Stability against backsliding and false teaching.** "if you do these things you will never stumble." 2 Peter 1:5-11; 2 Pt 3:17-18.

1. Baby Christians are very vulnerable to backsliding and to falling away into false teaching.

2. As a pastor, I hate it when a new "Christian" book comes out that is filled with lies.

3. I fear that the baby Christians in our church will read it and be led astray.
4. I hate it when I hear that one of our church members has been listening to a TV or radio preacher who is spouting off nonsense.
5. I fear when I see that one of our members has been spending a lot of time with their non-Christian friends.
6. But as you grow in grace and knowledge, you grow in stability. You grow in strength. It's harder to pull you down, and to lead you astray. You become more of an influencer than an influence.

vi. **SIX: Eternal rewards.** "richly provided for you" 2 Peter 1:5-11.

1. Heaven is guaranteed to all Christians. But the size of your heavenly reward depends on what you do in this life.
2. As you grow, you will do more and more to store up eternal treasure for yourself in the life to come.
3. Spiritual babies have a lot of earthly treasures, and very few heavenly treasures. But spiritual adults have fewer earthly treasures and an abundance of heavenly treasures.

V. CONCLUSION

- a. When the Barna Research Group did a survey involving 152 separate items comparing the general population with those who called themselves Christians, they found virtually no difference between the two groups. They found no difference in the attitudes of Christians and non-Christians and they found no difference in the actions of Christians and non-Christians.

- b. That's very sad. This will be the case between new believers and unbelievers. There will not be that much of a difference between the two. But if a seasoned Christian is not much different than an unbeliever, it because they have not been obedient to the command to grow.
- c. Make a decision today to grow. To do whatever it takes. To get serious about spiritual growth.
- d. Next week we will talk about how to grow, and how to tell if you are growing.