

# HOW TO GROW IN GRACE

2 Peter 3:18

By Andy Manning

## I. INTRODUCTION

- a. Have you ever been stuck?
  - i. When I was in seminary, I was a manager for the seminary's landscaping company. I was in charge of the "hand-mowing crew". We did the weed-eating, the push-mowing, the edging, and the blowing. A few of my guys had just finished picking up trash in a big open field, and so even though I wasn't supposed to, I decided to drive the truck through the field to pick them – just to be nice. And the truck got stuck in the mud. I was terrified that we weren't going to be able to get ourselves out, and that my boss was going to find out. Fortunately, with the guys in the back pushing, we were able to get out of the mud. Being stuck wasn't fun.
  - ii. Many Christians feel like that with their relationship with God. They want to grow spiritually, but they feel stuck. They don't see any growth. They haven't seen any growth in a long time. And they don't know how to fix it.
  - iii. Today we're going to address that problem: "How to Grow in Grace."

## II. TEXT

- a. **2 Peter 3:18** "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
- b. Last week we learned 8 Insights About Spiritual Growth; and we learned the 2 Ways to Grow:
  - i. Grow in grace: Grow in the qualities that are empowered by grace.
  - ii. TWO: Grow in knowledge: Grow in your understanding of the truth, and in intimacy with God.

## III. HOW DO WE GROW?

a. Two Competing Views

i. The Catholic view of spiritual growth.

1. Total dedication to spiritual growth. "Holiness as a special vocation."
2. Example: Must come out of the world. Monasticism. Drop out of business. Celibacy. No children.
3. Catholics divide Christians into two groups: the religious and the laity. The religious are the profession Christians who devote all of their time and energy to spiritual growth. The laity cannot do that because they are too preoccupied with other things.
4. Problem: This view teaches that we live to grow instead of we grow because we live.

ii. The Protestant view of spiritual growth.

1. Indirect rather than direct.
2. We cannot make ourselves grow.
3. We can only create the conditions for growth.
4. **Martyn Lloyd-Jones**: "All we have to do is to realize that there are certain conditions that lead to growth, that encourage growth, and that promote growth. Your business and mine is to fulfil those conditions, and if we fulfil them the growth will look after itself."
5. **John 15:5** "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me."
6. Stay close and fruit happens.
7. Our job is not to grow, but to remain/abide/stay close. Christ produces the growth.
8. Spiritual growth is for everyone.

b. Positive Conditions for Growth

- i. Private Means of Grace: (Means of Grace: the instruments that God is pleased to use in order to accomplish salvation and sanctification in the heart of men.) Many call them spiritual disciplines.

1. Bible Study. **1 Peter 2:2** “Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that you may grow up into your salvation,”
  2. Private prayer. **Colossians 4:2** “Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.”
  3. Reading. **Proverbs 2:3-5** “furthermore, if you call out to insight and lift your voice to understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it like hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God.”
- ii. Public Means of Grace:
1. Corporate worship.
    - a. Preaching. **Colossians 1:28** “We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”
    - b. Singing. **Colossians 3:16** “Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”
    - c. Praying. **Matthew 18:19** “Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”
    - d. Lord’s Supper. **Luke 22:19** “And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”
    - e. Tithes and offerings. **1 Corinthians 16:2** “On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and save in keeping with how he is prospering, so that no collections will need to be made when I come.”
  2. Fellowship.

- a. **Proverbs 27:17** “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another.”
  - b. **William B. Sprague** (1830; Lectures to Young People): “hardly anything can serve more effectually to invigorate our pious affections, or to heighten the interest with which we regard the objects of faith, than a close and fraternal fellowship with Christian friends”
- 3. Service. **Galatians 5:13** “For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.”
- 4. Evangelism. **Acts 1:8** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
- iii. Discipline: Consistency.
  - 1. Inconsistency doesn’t work with diet, or exercise, or relationships. It doesn’t work with the means of grace.
- c. Negative Conditions: Avoid anything that might hinder spiritual growth. The following are like weeds and pests that will hinder growth.
  - i. Avoid temptation.
    - 1. I recently heard about a man who was attacked by a mountain lion while running some trails in the Colorado wilderness. Fortunately, the man survived the incident by killing the mountain with his bare hands. But I wondered what he could have done to avoid the attack. Simple: Do not run where there are deadly mountain lions and grizzly bears! Many Christians are like that runner. They don’t have to expose themselves to so much temptation, but they do it anyway, putting themselves in position to fail.
    - 2. The best way to overcome temptation is to avoid it altogether.

3. The Bible says that God always provides us with a way out of temptation (1 Cor 10:13), but sometimes the way out is to avoid the tempting situation altogether. The moment we decide to expose ourselves to unnecessary temptation is the moment that we forfeit God's help!
- ii. Avoid sinful companions.
    1. **1 Corinthians 15:33** "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good character."
    2. **JC Ryle** "Nothing perhaps affects man's character, more than the company he keeps. We catch the ways and tone of those we live and talk with, and unhappily get harm — far more easily than good. Disease is infectious — but health is not!"
  - iii. Do not take pride in your progress.
    1. **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."
    2. **James 4:6** "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."
  - iv. Do not pursue growth for selfish reasons.
    1. One hindrance to growth is selfish motives: Inner peace; healthier relationships; financial prosperity; the applause of men.
    2. **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."
  - v. Do not pursue growth to earn salvation.
    1. To trust in works is to dishonor God.
    2. **Isaiah 64:6** "All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment; all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities carry us away like the wind."

#### IV. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF GROWTH?

- a. The False Way of Discerning Growth

- i. Compare ourselves to others.
  - ii. Confuse activity with achievement.
    - 1. Many Christians have “rocking-horse” spirituality: A lot of motion but no progress.
- b. The True Way of Discerning Growth
- i. An increasing sense of my own sinfulness. Note Paul’s example:
    - 1. **1 Corinthians 15:9** “For I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”
    - 2. **Eph 3:8** “This grace was given to me – the least of all the saints – to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ.”
    - 3. **Phil 3:12** “Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect”
    - 4. **1 Tim 1:15** This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them.
    - 5. **JC Ryle** “The man whose soul is growing, feels his own sinfulness and unworthiness more every year.”
  - ii. An increase in holiness.
    - 1. Holiness is moral sinlessness; Christlikeness.
    - 2. **1 Peter 1:15** “But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct.”
    - 3. “In all your conduct”: Sexuality; Words; Thoughts; Finances; Health and Fitness, etc.
    - 4. If you are growing then you will see “a more habitual vigilance against besetting sins and temptations” (Archibald Alexander).
  - iii. Less desire for the world.
    - 1. **JC Ryle**, “Increased spirituality of taste and mind.”
    - 2. Less interested in the things of the world; less tempted by them.
    - 3. **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.”

4. **JC Ryle:** “The ways and fashions and amusements and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in his heart. He does not condemn them as downright sinful, nor say that those who have anything to do with them are going to hell. He only feels that they have a constantly diminishing hold on his own affections and gradually seem smaller and more trifling in his eyes. Spiritual companions, spiritual occupations, spiritual conversation appear of ever-increasing value to him.”
- iv. An increasing grief over the state of the world.
  1. The sinfulness of the world – sins against God and man.
  2. The sinners who are on their way to hell.
- v. A growing desire for God.
  1. Not merely God’s blessing; but God Himself.
  2. **Psalm 42:1-2** “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and appear before God.”
  3. This will show itself in regular and habitual communion with Christ.
  4. **JC Ryle:** “It is possible to have ‘union’ with Christ – and yet have little if any ‘communion’ with Him.”
- vi. An increasing love for others.
  1. **1 John 4:8** “The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”
  2. In your deeds – kindness and goodness and generosity.
  3. In your words.
  4. In your attitude – gentleness; patience; forgiveness; avoid arguing and gossip and complaining.
- vii. An increasing desire and effort to reach the lost.
  1. The more you love God, the more you care about the things He cares about; and cares most about lost souls.
  2. **Romans 10:1** “Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation.”
  3. **JC Ryle** “The man who is really growing, will take greater interest in the salvation of sinners every year. Missions at

home and abroad, efforts of every kind to spread the gospel, attempts of any sort to increase gospel light and diminish gospel darkness — all these things will every year have a greater place in his attention.”

viii. Increasing spiritual mindedness.

1. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** “Pray constantly.”
2. Your mind is increasingly on God and in communion with Him throughout the day.

ix. Less worry and depression.

1. **Archibald Alexander** “An entire and confident reliance on the promises and provident of God, however dark may be your horizon, or however many difficulties environ you, is a sign that you have learned to live by faith; and humble contentment with your condition, though it be one of poverty and obscurity, shows that you have profited by sitting at the feet of Jesus.”
2. Worry is the absence of faith. When the disciples were afraid of the wind and the waves Jesus said, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Mt 6:30; Mt 8:26
3. Discontentment and depression are caused by relying upon material circumstances for happiness. Phil 4:4; Phil 4:11

## V. CONCLUSION

- a. Nothing in this life is more rewarding than spiritual growth.
- b. Happiness and holiness are inseparable.
- c. **Thomas Watson** “Let God have his will by being holy—and you shall have your will by being happy.”
- d. Will you renew your commitment to spiritual growth today?

## VI. Primary Sources:

- a. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 2 Peter, Banner of Truth.
- b. JC Ryle, “Growth in Grace”.
- c. Archibald Alexander (1772—1851), “Practical Directions How to Grow in Grace and Make Progress in Piety”.
- d. William B. Sprague, 1830, “Lectures to Young People”.