

HOW TO GROW UP AS A CHRISTIAN

Week 2

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Several years ago Dave Ferguson wrote a book called *The Big Idea* in which he cited some very concerning statistics. 85% of Americans called themselves Christians. Here's what researchers have found about them.
 - i. Self-identified Christians are no more likely than non-Christians to correct a cashier who gives them too much change.
 - ii. Self-identified-Christians are just as likely to have an elective abortion as non-Christians.
 - iii. Self-identified Christians divorce at the same rate as non-Christians.
 - iv. The Barna Research Group did a survey involving 152 items comparing the general population with those who call themselves Christians, and they found virtually no difference between the two groups. There was no difference in the attitudes and actions of Christians and non-Christians.
2. First, that is very sad. Second, it leads you to ask why. The answer is that most Christians are not growing spiritually.
3. God loves you just the way you are. There's no doubt about that. But there's more to God than that. God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way (Max Lucado). God expects and demands that you grow up. He wants you to become more and more like Jesus.
4. When you first get saved it is obvious that you will still act and talk and look a lot like nonbelievers. That's expected, because you are a baby-Christian. But expects you to grow up and become more and more like Jesus, and less and less like the world.
5. **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.
6. Notice that spiritual growth is a command. If it is a command, that means that you have a role to play in your spiritual growth. Believe me. God wants you to grow. If you aren't growing, it's not God's fault. It's

not because He isn't doing His part. It's because you aren't doing your part.

7. What's your part in spiritual growth? Remember that spiritual growth is like farming. Your part is more indirect than direct. A farmer can't actually grow anything; only God can cause the miracle of growth. But that doesn't mean that a farmer is inactive. The farmer's job is to create the conditions for growth. And that's your job spiritually – to create the conditions necessary for spiritual growth.
8. What are the conditions for spiritual growth. They have traditionally been called the ordinary means for grace, or spiritual disciplines; I like to call them growth habits. Just as there are certain habits you must develop to build physical muscles, there are spiritual habits that you must develop to build spiritual muscles.
9. In this two-week series we are covering the five most important spiritual growth habits. If you want to grow, then you must do these things.
10. Now, if you have been a Christian for a long time, then you are very familiar with these, and this sermon might bore you. But in church we have a lot of baby Christians. And they need to be taught how to grow up in the Christian life.

II. THE FIVE GROWTH HABITS

1. The habit of corporate worship.

2. The habit of Home Group.

3. The habit of service.

- i. Make it a habit to find a place of service in the church.
- ii. Of all the things that you can do to stimulate spiritual growth, perhaps nothing is more important than to find a place of service in the church.
- iii. To understand the habit of service, you must understand the Bible's teaching on spiritual gifts.
 1. The Bible says that every Christian has a spiritual gift.
 - a. **1 Peter 4:10** Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.

- b. What is a spiritual gift? A spiritual gift is an empowerment for service given to every Christian for use in the church.
 - c. What are the spiritual gifts? The Bible has five lists of spiritual gifts (Rm 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Pt 4:10-11). Some of the gifts mentioned are service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leadership, mercy, etc. Since none of the lists are identical, most scholars agree that they aren't exhaustive; there are probably many more.
 - d. God has given you a spiritual gift.
2. The purpose of your spiritual gift is to serve others.
- a. 1 Pt 4:10 says "use it to serve others."
 - b. God gave you a spiritual gift for your employment, not your enjoyment. It is not for your advancement, for your ego, or for your entertainment. It is for you to serve others.
3. You are commanded to use your spiritual gift.
- a. 1 Pt 4:10 "use it"
 - b. That's a command.
 - c. 1 Pt 4:10 "as good stewards of the varied grace of God."
 - d. You are a steward. A steward is a manager of God's property. God has given you a spiritual gift, but it's not yours, it's His. You are just a steward, a manager. Your job is to be a good steward; to put your spiritual gift to work for Him.
 - e. The late pastor of FBC Atlanta, Charles Stanley, said the following about spiritual gifts: "If spiritual gifts are God's primary means of administering grace to His people, what does that say about believers who refuse to exercise their gifts for the good of the body? Four things come to mind:
 - i. They are robbing the body of Christ.

- ii. They are forcing other members of the body to carry their load.
 - iii. They are dead weight on the body, dysfunctional limbs.
 - iv. They are out of touch with the Spirit of God.
- 4. God wants you to use your spiritual gift in the church.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 12:7** A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good
 - b. “The common good” doesn’t mean the common good of your soccer team, your company, your neighborhood, etc. It’s talking about the common good of the church.
 - c. **Millard Erickson** (Christian Theology, 891ff) “The gifts are bestowed on the body (the church). They are for the edification of the whole body, not merely for the enjoyment or enrichment of the individual members possessing them.”
- iv. How do you discover your spiritual gift? The Bible doesn’t give us an objective way to discover our spiritual gifts, so here’s my advice. Your spiritual gift is probably going to be a role of service in the church that both benefits the church and fulfills you. If you can find a way to serve that helps the church and that you enjoy, you’ve probably found your gift.
- v. If you want to grow, you need to put your spiritual gifts to use and find a place to serve in the church.
- vi. How many of you have heard of the Dead Sea? The Dead Sea is a body of water in Israel that is completely dead. Nothing lives in it. No plant life. No animal life. The reason is that six million tons of water flow into the Dead Sea every day from rivers and streams, but there’s no outlet. The water is so full of sulfur, and salt, and other nitrous chemicals that nothing can survive. It’s a Dead Sea because it has inflow, but no outlet. There are many Christians who are dead in their walk with Christ. They aren’t growing. They are unhealthy, spiritually. And it’s not because they aren’t getting ministered to. They have inflow, plenty of Bible study, and praise

and worship, and good preaching, and Christian books, and podcasts. They have inflow, but no outlet of ministry. They are receiving, receiving, receiving, but not giving back. To grow spiritually, you need both inflow and outflow.

4. The habit of tithing.

- i. Develop the habit of tithing.
- ii. This one may surprise you. What does tithing have to do with spiritual growth?
- iii. Four Quick Facts About Tithing
 1. Tithing means a tenth.
 - a. That's what the word actually means. You can't tithe three percent, or seven percent. It literally means one-tenth.
 - b. Tithing means giving the first ten percent of your income to God. When you get paid, give the first ten percent off the top to the church.
 - c. When I get paid every month, the first check that I write is ten percent to Church Acadiana. I put it in an offering envelope, bring it to church on the first Sunday of the month, and drop in the offering box.
 2. Tithing is a command.
 - a. **Leviticus 27:30** "Every tenth of the land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD."
 - b. Tithing is not optional. It is not a suggestion. It is a command.
 - c. Tithing is for everyone. It doesn't matter if you are young or old; if you make a lot of money or just a little bit of money.
 - d. I love to see the young people in our church tithing – even very small children. They are being obedient.
 - e. My younger children don't have jobs yet, but they get money for doing chores here and there, and they are faithful to tithe.

- f. I love to see our teens and college students tithe. I like to see that when they get their first job, they start tithing regularly. That's awesome. I love to see obedience.
 - g. Some people think that Christians don't need to tithe because Christians are now under grace and not under law. Three quick responses to that:
 - i. Just because a command was first given in the Old Testament doesn't mean it no longer applies to Christians. Aren't we still obligated to keep the OT commands not to murder, kill, steal, and commit adultery?
 - ii. Tithing predates the law. Abraham tithed hundreds of years before God gave the law to Moses.
 - iii. Jesus commanded us to tithe. Matthew 23:23 (NLT) "You should tithe."
3. Tithing is a blessing.
- a. **Malachi 3:10** "Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way," says the LORD of Armies. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure."
 - b. Tithing doesn't leave you ten percent poorer, it makes you richer beyond measure.
 - c. **Tony Evans** "Tithing is believing God can do more with 90% than you can do with 100%."
 - d. A man in our church told me that he started tithing, and in three months his income went up 33%.
 - e. There was another man in our church who started tithing, and within a month his company offered him a promotion with better hours, better work, and better pay.
4. Tithing helps you to grow.

- a. **Deuteronomy 14:23 (NLT)** “Bring this tithe to the designated place of worship—the place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honored—and eat it there in his presence. This applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the firstborn males of your flocks and herds. Doing this will teach you always to fear the LORD your God.”
- b. Notice that tithing teaches you to fear God. To fear God is to put God first. It is to make Him your top priority and to always do what He says. Tithing helps you to learn to fear the Lord.
- c. Every month we have to pay rent to meet here at the BCM. When I pray rent, it reminds me that the building doesn’t belong to us. Meeting here is a privilege, not a right. We are not in charge of the building; we can’t do whatever we want with it. We need to use it in a way that honors and pleases the owner. We have to follow their guidelines. And it reminds me that they will hold us accountable for how we use it. The same is true with tithing. Every time you tithe, it reminds your life belongs to God. You are not the boss; You are not in charge. You need to live your life in a way that pleases God. And He will hold you accountable.
- d. Ultimately spiritual maturity could be defined as obedience. Obeying God’s word. And obedience can be hard at times. But probably the hardest thing to obey God with is your finances. If you develop the habit of tithing, then it becomes much easier to obey God in every other part of your life.
- e. **Dr. D. James Kennedy** “The tithe is not just God's way of raising money for His work; it is also His way of raising Christians in His image.”

- f. **Dr. Adrian Rogers** “God doesn’t need us to give Him our money. He owns everything. Tithing is God’s way to grow Christians.”
- g. Tithing will help you grow.

5. The habit of a daily quiet time.

- i. Develop the habit of spending quality time with God every day.
- ii. What is a daily quiet time?
- iii. It’s been called many things over the centuries: the morning watch; personal devotions; appointment with God; personal devotion time.
- iv. “A daily quiet time is a daily time of personal fellowship with God through the Word and prayer. More specifically, it’s a period of time you set aside to be alone with God, usually in the morning, to talk to Him and to listen to Him as you prepare to be used by Him that day.”
- v. How does a daily quiet time help you to grow? Christianity is a relationship with God.
- vi. What do you have to do to get to know someone and grow closer to them? I’ll use my relationship with Lydia as an example. I know Lydia very, very well. How did I get to know her so well? Three things: I have spent quality time with her. I have had meaningful communication with her. And I have observed her in a variety of situations.
- vii. That’s the same way that you get to know God. And that’s what a daily quiet time does for you. A daily quiet time helps you spend quality time with God; it helps you have meaningful communication with God as you talk to Him through prayer and listen to Him through the Bible. And it helps you observe God in a variety of situations as you read the Bible and see how God has worked throughout history.
- viii. How important is a daily quiet time?
- ix. Did you know that God commanded the kings of Israel to have a quiet time? When a new king came into power, he was to write out his own copy of the Bible, he was to keep it with him at all times, and he was read it every day.

1. **Deuteronomy 17:19 (NLT)** He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the LORD his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees.
- x. King David was known as a man after God's own heart. How did He develop such a strong relationship with God? He had a daily quiet time.
1. **Psalm 5:3 (NLT)** "Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly."
 2. **Psalm 119:149** "I rise before dawn and cry out for help; I put my hope in your word."
- xi. Even Jesus had a daily quiet time.
1. **Mark 1:35** "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying."
- xii. And Jesus taught that you should have a quiet time.
1. **Matthew 6:6** But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
- xiii. How do you have a quiet time?
1. Set aside a specific time. To give yourself plenty of time, you set aside at least thirty minutes a day. And it's very important to set aside a specific time. Don't just say, "I'll have a quiet time when I get some free time every day." Set aside a specific time. It's like anything else. If you want to exercise consistently, you need to set aside a specific time – Monday through Friday, at 7 am, or MWF right after work. If you don't set aside a specific time, you won't be consistent.
 2. Find a good place. You need a place where you can be alone, and where you don't have to worry about people hearing you if you cry, or if you want to talk aloud or sing aloud to God.

3. Get a Bible. It is very important that you use a Bible translation that is easy to read, such as the Christian Standard Bible, New International Version, or the New Living Translation
4. Get a journal. This can be as simple as a five-subject notebook.
5. Develop a routine. Let me share with a proven routine.
 - a. Journal. Write about what God is teaching you, and about how you need to grow. I like to journal at least one-hundred words before moving on.
 - b. Pray. It's important to have balanced prayer. Use the acronym ACTS for your daily prayer time.
 - i. Adoration: Begin by praising God for who He is. "God, I love you. I praise You because You are almighty, holy, faithful, and good."
 - ii. Confession: Admit your sins in detail to God, ask for forgiveness, and rededicate your life to Him.
 - iii. Thanksgiving: Thank God for what He has done for you.
 - iv. Supplication: Ask God for what you need.
 - c. Read. Use a Bible-reading plan to read systematically through the Bible. If you are a new Christian, I recommend that you begin by reading through the New Testament over and over several times. Begin with the book of Matthew and read one or two chapters every day. When you are ready for something else, use one of the Bible-reading plans on the church website (<https://churchacadiana.com/bible-reading-plans/>).
- xiv. I got saved in the summer after sixth grade. And I remember that immediately God gave me a hunger to know Him. So I began reading the Bible every day, one chapter at a time, beginning with the New Testament. I had a highlighter, and any time a verse would jump out at me I would highlight it. It didn't take long

before my Bible was all marked up, and I started growing rapidly in my faith.

xv. You might think, “I don’t have time for a daily quiet time.”

Remember, we all make time for what’s important to us. Don’t ever use time as an excuse. If something is important enough, you will make time for it. But I also want to tell you about Bobby Bowden. Bobby Bowden was the head football coach at Florida State University for 33 years. He is considered to be one of the greatest college coaches of all time. Imagine how busy college football coaches are. But Coach Bowden was devoted Christian, and he woke up every day at 4 am to have a quiet time. He went on to say that he wouldn’t have a spiritual life if it wasn’t for that single habit. If a super-successful head coach found the time for a quiet time, then you can too.

III. CONCLUSION

1. As your pastor, I want you to grow, and I know what it’s going to take. You must commit to the five growth habits.
2. But let me remind you of three important truths.
 - i. First, don’t confuse the spiritual growth habits with spiritual maturity. The definition of spiritual maturity is not going to church every Sunday, it is Christlikeness and intimacy with God.
 - ii. Second, don’t practice the growth habits for the wrong reason; not to earn your way to heaven, but to become like Jesus, grow closer to God, and glorify God.
 - iii. Third, don’t underestimate the importance of consistency and persistence. Going to the gym once, or sporadically, is not going to get you in shape. The same goes for the spiritual growth habits. There’s no easy, microwave recipe for spiritual growth. It takes consistency and persistence.