

HOW TO GROW UP AS A CHRISTIAN

Week 1

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTON

1. Babies are so cute. I have six children. They are all big now, but when they were babies they were so cute. They couldn't clean themselves, dress themselves, or feed themselves. They couldn't walk. They couldn't do chores. They couldn't talk. They had to wear diapers, which I had to change. They often threw up on everything. They often touched things they shouldn't have, and broke things that were important to me. But even with all of that, they were still so cute. But we expect people to grow up. We don't expect people to act like babies all their lives. If my fifteen-year-old son still acted like a baby, if my twenty-one-year-old daughter still acted like a baby, that would be a big problem. People are supposed to grow.
2. It's the same with Christians. When you first become a Christian, you are just a baby. Your spiritual knowledge is very limited. Your character is not very Christlike. You have a lot of sins that still need to be cleaned up. You make lots of mistakes. And that's okay because you are a baby-Christian. But God expects you to grow up. God doesn't want to remain a spiritual baby forever. God doesn't want you to get paused in spiritual puberty. God wants you to become a mature Christian.
3. How do you do that? How do you grow up a Christian? Over the next two weeks I want to talk to you about how to grow up as a Christian.

II. TEXT

1. **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.
2. This verse teaches six facts about spiritual growth:
3. First, notice the command to grow. Spiritual growth is a command. It is not optional. If you aren't interested in spiritual growth, and if you are not making an effort to grow, then you are disobeying God.
4. Second, notice the responsibility to grow. If God commands you to grow, then that means there is something that you must do to contribute to your growth. Yes, growth is not possible without God doing His part, but

- you have a role to play. Spiritual growth is like farming. Only God can cause the miracle of growth, but to get a good harvest the farmer has to do his part – he has to plant, water, pull weeds, apply pesticide and fertilizer, etc. Only God can cause you to grow, but you have a big role to play. I'll explain your role in the next couple of weeks.
5. Third, notice the challenge of growth. If you are commanded to grow, then it is not automatic. Not all Christians grow, and not all Christians grow at the pace that they should. Some have stunted growth; some have delayed growth. This is why there are some Christians who have been saved for years, but they still act like spiritual babies; and there are other Christians who have only been saved for five years, but they are very mature.
 6. Fourth, notice the possibility of growth. The command to grow is exciting and wonderful, because that means that spiritual growth is a possibility. You can change and become more like Jesus. You can overcome your sinful habits and patterns and attitudes.
 7. Fifth, notice the definition of growth. “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God wants you to grow in the grace of Jesus Christ, and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The grace of Jesus Christ refers to the spiritual graces, or the character qualities of Christ, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (see Gal 5:22-23). The knowledge of Jesus Christ refers to knowledge about Him, and intimacy with Him. So spiritual growth means becoming more like Jesus, learning more about Him, and growing closer to Him.
 8. Sixth, notice the goal of spiritual growth. “To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.” The definition of spiritual growth is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. That’s the short-term goal. That’s sort of the means to the end. The ultimate reason and motive for spiritual growth is to glorify God. To glorify God is to praise Him and to cause others to praise Him. It is to enhance God’s reputation, to spread His fame. That’s the ultimate goal and purpose of the Christian life (1 Cor 10:31). The ultimate goal of spiritual growth is not to make you look good; it is not to increase your happiness and make your life better; it is

not so you can be a better spouse or parent; the ultimate goal is the glory of God.

III. YOUR PART IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1. If you have a role to play in spiritual growth, then what is that role? Your role is more indirect than direct. Again, it's like farming. A farmer cannot cause the growth, but he can create the conditions for spiritual growth. That's your role – to create the conditions for spiritual growth.
2. The conditions for spiritual growth have traditionally been called the ordinary means of grace. More recently they have been called spiritual disciplines. I like to call them growth habits, or growth exercises. If you want to build your physical muscles, you must practice certain exercises. If you want to grow spiritually, you must practice the spiritual growth exercises.
3. Over the next two weeks I'm going to teach you the five most important spiritual growth habits. We'll look at two today, and three next Sunday. What are they?
 - i. The habit of corporate worship.
 - ii. The habit of Home Group.
 - iii. The habit of service.
 - iv. The habit of tithing.
 - v. The habit of a daily quiet time.
4. These are habits that you need to implement in your life. If you are discipling someone and want to help them grow, then these are the habits that you need to help them develop.

IV. THE FIVE GROWTH HABITS

1. The habit of corporate worship.

- i. Make it a habit to attend corporate worship every Sunday morning.
- ii. What is corporate worship? Corporate worship is the gathering of the church to express love for God through celebration and dedication. It includes preaching, singing, giving, and the Lord's Supper.
- iii. **Why is corporate worship important?**

1. The Bible commands it.

- a. **Hebrews 10:25 (TLB)** Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.
 - b. “If absence makes the heart grow fonder,” said a minister, “a lot of folks must love our church.”
2. The early church exemplified it.
- a. **Acts 2:46** Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts
3. Your heart needs it.
- a. Several powerful things happen to you when you go to church.
 - b. First, you are reconnected with God. It’s difficult to sing worship songs if you have sin in your heart. When you go to church and start singing, you will be convicted to confess your sins and start over with God. It’s hard to backslide if you go to church every week.
 - c. Second, you are encouraged as you are reminded of God’s promises to you. Life is hard. We all need encouragement. When you go to church, you will be reminded that God loves you unconditionally, that He is bigger than your problems, that He will take care of you, and that He will work all things together for your good.
 - d. Third, you are instructed in God’s word. When you go to church and sit under solid biblical preaching, you will learn more about God, you’ll be equipped to serve God, and you will be challenged to take your next steps in Christ.
4. Your life benefits from it.
- a. So many studies have been done that show the powerful benefits of weekly church attendance.

- b. If you are a parent, listen to this. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam published a study called “Bowling Alone” in which he found the following: Churchgoing kids “are less prone to substance abuse (drugs, alcohol, and smoking), risky behavior (like not wearing seat belts), and delinquency (shoplifting, misbehaving in school, and being suspended or expelled).” But the benefits of regular church attendance do not stop there. As Putnam tells us, “Compared to their unchurched peers, youth who are involved in a religious organization take tougher courses, get higher grades and test scores, and are less likely to drop out of high school.” They also “have better relations with their parents and other adults, have more friendships with high-performing peers, are more involved in sports and other extracurricular activities.” In fact, churchgoing is so beneficial to academic performance that “a child whose parents attend church regularly is 40 to 50 percent more likely to go on to college than a matched child of nonattenders.”
- c. Another study by the Heritage Foundation (1996) found that regularly attending worship services reduces suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, out-of-wedlock births, and divorce. The study found that people who regularly attend church far happier and healthier, have a lower rate of depression, higher self-esteem, longer, happier marriages, and better sex. The study also reported that the family income of those who regularly attend worship services is almost \$15,000 higher than those who do not attend.
- iv. Three things happened to me when I was a child that forever impressed upon me the importance of corporate worship:
 - 1. When I was growing up, my family never missed church. We never stayed home to sleep in, or do yard work, or to

play spots, or to do school work. I don't remember anyone ever missing church because they were sick or felt bad. And I wasn't allowed to spend the night with friends on Saturday night because we had church. It never crossed my mind to complain about going to church, or to ask if we could stay home from church. From the time that I was born and brought home from the hospital, I went to church every Sunday.

2. Every Sunday morning as we got ready for church, my dad would sing, "This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." He loved going to church so much that Sunday was his favorite day of the week. Being raised by a father like that made a big impact on me.
 3. I grew up going to church at FBC Lafayette, under the leadership of Pastor Perry Sanders. My family always sat on the second row, where Brother Perry (as I called him) could see me. When I was little, in first or second grade, during the sermon I would sometimes put my head on my mother's lap and go to sleep. One Sunday after church as I passed Brother Perry in the hallways he said, "Mr. Manning, how'd you like my sermon?" I said, "It was great!" He said, "What was it about?" He knew I slept through the sermon. I was caught! I said, "I don't know." He said, "I know it. I don't want you to sleep in church anymore." Now, you may think that is harsh, but I didn't see it that way at all. He was right. And the fact that he would say that to me impressed on me the importance of Sunday worship. The sermon is important, and I needed to pay close attention.
- v. **How can you get the most out of corporate worship?** (1) Bring your Bible. If you use a Bible app, you will be tempted to mess with your phone. (2) Put your phone away. (3) Take notes. (4) Participate in the singing, and sing with passion. (5) Arrive early so that you are ready when church begins. This will give you time to go to the bathroom, get some coffee, find your seat, and prepare your heart. (6) Go to bed on early the night before. (7)

Don't distract others. Get your refreshments and go to the bathroom before church. If you have little ones or will need to leave early, sit in the back.

- vi. **R.C. Sproul** "Church attendance is vital for Christians to grow in their sanctification. Again, just because you faithfully go to church doesn't necessarily mean you are a strong Christian. But one way to guarantee stunted growth is to forsake assembling with other believers." (Sproul, *Growing in Holiness*, 23.)
- vii. If you want to grow, commit to the habit of corporate worship.

2. The habit of Home Group.

- i. Make it a habit to attend Home Group every week.
- ii. What is Home Group? Home Group is a small group of people who meet weekly for fellowship, prayer, and Bible study.
- iii. Why is Home Group important? Spiritual growth happens best in the context of relationships.
- iv. When I was growing up my best friend and I were both Christians, but I was on fire for Christ, and he was more of a casual Christian, still riding the fence. But the summer after high school graduation we went to work together at a Christian camp. For the entire summer it was a group of Christian students spending all day, every day together. By the end of the summer, Jonathan was on fire for Christ and he decided to pursue pastoral ministry. After college he went to seminary and then became a pastor. What changed him? It wasn't a sermon he heard, or a book he read. It was relationships. It was rubbing shoulders with committed Christians for two months. Spiritual growth happens best in the context of relationships.
- v. **Proverbs 27:17** Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another.
- vi. This verse says four things about spiritual growth:
 - 1. If you want to grow, you need to be in relationships. "One person sharpens another."
 - 2. You need to be in relationships with other believers. "As iron sharpens iron." Wood doesn't sharpen iron, and

nonbelievers don't sharpen believers. If you want to grow, you need to be in relationships with other believers.

3. You need close relationships. For iron to sharpen iron, the two have to touch. If you want to grow, Christian acquaintances won't help; surface-level relationships won't help; just seeing people on Sundays and saying hello/goodbye won't help. You need close, intimate relationships.
 4. You need to spend a lot of time together. Rubbing two pieces of iron together just once will not make a difference. It's the repeated rubbing that leads to sharpening. To grow, you need some Christian friends that you are meeting with on a regular basis.
- vii. And that's the benefit of Home Group. Home Group fosters the relationships you need for spiritual growth. It gives you (1) relationships and friendships; (2) with other believers; (2) close relationships; (4) that meet weekly.
 - viii. Let me tell you how much I believe in the importance of Home Group. When Lydia and I started church Acadiana, I was twenty-five years old, and we had two infants. Carter was one, and Mari was two. But that didn't stop us from starting Church Acadiana's Home Group. The first Home Group was at Carol and Melissa Mitchell's house in Broussard. It started at 6:30 PM. We would set up two portable cribs (called a Pack 'n Play) in the back bedroom, put the babies down to sleep, lead Home Group for an hour and a half, and then wake up the babies, go home, and put them to bed again. It wasn't the easiest thing to do, but it was worth, because we believe in Home Group.
 - ix. **Home Group gives you seven things that are necessary for spiritual growth:**
 1. Home Group provides examples (1 Timothy 4:12). Christianity is more caught than taught. You will learn more by watching mature Christians live than you will from a sermon. In Home Group you get to rub shoulders with seasoned Christ-followers.

2. Home Group provides accountability (Gal 6:1). We all live better when people are watching us. When you join a Home Group, you have a small group of people who are watching. They aren't trying to catch you in the wrong, but because you are close friends and meeting weekly, they will be watching you. They will see your church involvement, your speech, your actions, your habits, your marriage, your children, your attitude. This accountability is a strong incentive to do what is right.
3. Home Group provides biblical instruction (2 Tim 3:16-17). In Home Group we take the Sunday sermon deeper. On Sundays you get biblical instruction, but it's just a lecture. In Home Group you ask questions, you discuss it, and you talk about how to apply it to your life.
4. Home Group provides encouragement (1 Thess 5:11). Life is hard. It's easy to get discouraged. And when you get discouraged you give up; you stop trying; you stop fighting. That's why you need encouragement. Encouragement literally means coming alongside someone and giving them strength and courage to cope with their affliction. In Home Group you get a group of people who will do that for you.
5. Home Group provides prayer (James 5:16). To grow you need people to pray for you, and that's what happens in Home Group – you pray for each other.
6. Home Group provides caregiving (Gal 6:2). There's an old saying that says that God will never give you more than you can handle. But God will give you burdens that are too big for you to carry alone, because you're not meant to do life alone. You are meant to do life in the context of a church family. Home Group provides you with a group of people who will walk with you and help you during your darkest days.
7. Home Group provides ministry opportunities (Gal 5:13). You won't grow unless you are ministering to others. You can't just be a sponge; you also need to be pouring into

others. In Home Group you will have opportunities to pray for people, to teach, to counsel, to encourage, and to serve them.

- x. A few years ago Lydia and I took a trip to Branson for our twentieth wedding anniversary. Our Home Group decided to give us some cash as a gift. On the way we broke down, and had to pull into a small town in Arkansas. Because of an ice storm, the only place that was open was a little time auto shop. They said they could fix the truck, but they only took cash. Normally I don't carry cash, but because of my Home Group I happened to have cash, and enough cash to pay for the repair, and in just a couple of hours we were on our way. Being a part of Home Group will bless you in many ways.
- xi. How can you get the most out of Home Group? (1) Listen to the sermon. The discussion is based on the Sunday sermon, so take good notes, and write down any questions that you have. (2) Fill out the Discussion Guide before group. It only takes a few minutes. (3) Bring your Bible. You will be reading the Bible together. (4) Engage in the discussion. The more you participate, the more you will get out of Home Group.

V. CONCLUSION

1. God commands you to grow. And if you want to grow, you must practice the spiritual growth habits.
2. Before we close, let me give you a few **warnings about the spiritual growth habits**:
3. First, don't confuse spiritual growth habits with spiritual maturity. Just because you go to the gym and work out five days a week doesn't mean you're physically healthy. Health is determined by your body temperature, your heart rate, your breathing rate, your blood pressure, your blood oxygen saturation, your weight, your blood glucose level, your cholesterol, etc. In the same way, just because you practice the five growth habits that doesn't mean you are a mature Christian. If you're not careful, you can go to corporate worship and Home Group consistently for a year and start to be impressed with yourself. "I'm a good Christian." Spiritual growth habits are not the same as spiritual

health and maturity. They are designed to help you grow in maturity, but they are not the same as maturity. Spiritual maturity is measured by Christlike character, biblical understanding, and intimacy with Jesus.

4. Second, be careful not to practice the growth habits for the wrong reasons. What are the wrong reasons to practice the growth habits? (1) To fit in at church, since everyone else is doing it, and you're being pressured to do it. (2) To impress others. (3) To earn your way to heaven. You cannot earn heaven. If God gave you what you deserve, it would be hell. We practice growth habits because we want to grow, and we want to grow because we want to glorify God, and we want to glorify God because of the gratitude that we feel toward Him for His many mercies toward us.
5. Third, don't underestimate the importance of consistency and persistence. The spiritual growth habits work just like diet and exercise. For diet and exercise to work, you must be consistent. You can't just diet and exercise once a week. It needs to be every day. And you can't just diet and exercise for one week, or even one month. It takes a long time, and to sustain your gains, you have to change your lifestyle. For the spiritual habits to work, you need to be consistent and persistent. Don't expect to see radical spiritual growth just because you went to Home Group or corporate worship a couple of times. You need to go consistently over a long period of time to see significant gains. The reason many people grow is simply that: they lack consistency and persistence. They are hit and miss. They are sporadic. You can't achieve anything in life that way. Be consistent, and be persistent. Go to corporate worship and Home group every week, week after week, over time the growth will happen.