

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN GROWTH

KEY TEXT

2 PET. 3:18

The purpose, expectations, challenges, and goal of the Christian life

SALVATION IS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE

A person is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by spiritual progress. Yet salvation is not permission to remain unchanged. God gives the believer new life, then teaches him to walk, think, love, and serve as one who belongs to Christ. Growth is the fruit of salvation, never its price.

01

What does Christian growth mean?

Christian growth is the lifelong process by which a believer matures in grace, understands Scripture more clearly, turns from sin more readily, obeys Christ more faithfully, and increasingly reflects His character. It involves the whole person - not only what we know, but what we desire, choose, say, and do.

THE MIND

Truth replaces false thinking. The believer learns to judge ideas, feelings, and choices by the Word of God.

THE HEART

Love for Christ deepens. Sin becomes more grievous, grace more precious, and obedience more desirable.

THE LIFE

Character, speech, relationships, habits, service, and priorities increasingly come under Christ's rule.

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

2 PETER 3:18

02

Position and progress must not be confused

The believer's acceptance before God rests entirely upon Christ. That settled relationship does not rise and fall with daily performance. Spiritual progress concerns fellowship, maturity, usefulness, and obedience. We grow because we are God's children - not in order to become His children.

WHAT GROWTH IS NOT

It is not earning salvation, achieving instant perfection, copying another Christian's personality, collecting religious information, or appearing impressive before people.

WHAT GROWTH PRODUCES

It produces humility, repentance, discernment, steadiness, love, self-control, usefulness, and a growing desire for God's glory.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF GROWTH?

God is forming believers into the likeness of His Son.

03

The goal is Christlikeness

The Christian life is not ultimately about self-improvement, comfort, success, recognition, or religious activity. God's purpose is that believers know Jesus Christ and are conformed to His image. Growth therefore asks a deeper question than, "Am I doing more?" It asks, "Am I becoming more like Christ?"

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."

ROMANS 8:29

04

Maturity touches every part of life

Christlike maturity cannot be reduced to Bible knowledge, emotional experiences, public ministry, or visible discipline. Truth must shape the inner person and then appear in ordinary life. A growing believer becomes more faithful when unnoticed, more gracious when offended, more truthful when pressured, and more obedient when obedience is costly.

KNOW CHRIST

Desire His presence, treasure His gospel, understand His Word, and depend upon His grace.

REFLECT HIS CHARACTER

Grow in holiness, humility, compassion, courage, patience, purity, and truthfulness.

LOVE AND SERVE OTHERS

Move from self-centeredness toward sacrifice, forgiveness, encouragement, and burden-bearing.

LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY

Use time, abilities, possessions, relationships, and opportunities as a steward before God.

05

Fruit is a better measure than appearance

A person may become busier in church without becoming more loving, humble, or holy. The fruit of the Spirit reveals the kind of character God produces: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Gifts may attract attention; fruit displays maturity.

KNOWLEDGE WITH OBEDIENCE

Biblical knowledge is necessary, but knowledge that never leads to trust, repentance, love, and obedience has not reached its intended purpose.

SERVICE WITH CHARACTER

Ministry activity cannot replace private holiness. God cares not only about what a believer accomplishes, but also about what that believer is becoming.

WHAT SHOULD A BELIEVER EXPECT?

Growth is real, gradual, contested, and lifelong.

DO NOT EXPECT INSTANT PERFECTION

New life in Christ is immediate, but maturity develops over time. A believer may make genuine progress and still discover deeper weakness, remaining ignorance, and stubborn habits. The answer is not despair or excuse, but continued faith, repentance, obedience, and dependence upon God.

06

Growth is usually gradual and uneven

A tree does not become mature in one day. In the same way, spiritual growth often appears through repeated choices: reading Scripture, praying, resisting sin, receiving correction, serving others, and beginning again after failure. Some lessons are learned quickly; others require years of patient obedience.

JOY AND HUNGER

Expect new delight in Christ, growing interest in Scripture, and gratitude for grace.

CONVICTION AND CORRECTION

Expect God's Word to expose wrong thinking, sinful desires, and harmful habits.

TRIALS AND DISCIPLINE

Expect difficulties that test faith, reveal weakness, and train endurance.

DRY SEASONS AND DELAY

Expect times when feelings are weak and answers seem slow, yet obedience is still required.

07

Expect a battle with sin

Conversion does not remove the presence of the flesh. The believer now possesses new desires, but old patterns may still fight for control. Temptation is not proof that salvation is unreal. The important question is whether the believer makes peace with sin or continues to confess, resist, flee, and seek change.

WHEN YOU STUMBLE

A growing Christian may fall, but he does not want to remain down. He confesses sin, receives correction, repairs what was damaged, and returns to obedience.

WHEN FEELINGS CHANGE

Some days feel spiritually strong and others feel empty. Growth is measured by truth, direction, repentance, fruit, and faithfulness - not emotion alone.

“He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

WHAT CAN HINDER CHRISTIAN GROWTH?

Growth must be guarded because spiritual drift is easy.

08

The believer faces three continuing enemies

Scripture describes opposition from the flesh, the world, and the devil. The flesh pulls toward sinful desire, the world pressures the believer to adopt values opposed to God, and the devil works through deception, temptation, accusation, and division. These enemies are serious, but they are not stronger than Christ.

THE FLESH

Selfish desire, pride, laziness, lust, anger, fear, and the impulse to live independently of God.

THE WORLD

Ideas, values, pleasures, ambitions, and pressures that normalize sin and make obedience appear foolish.

THE DEVIL

Lies about God, distorted Scripture, temptation, accusation, discouragement, distraction, and division.

09

Common hindrances to growth

Spiritual decline rarely begins with a public collapse. It often begins quietly through neglected habits, tolerated sin, proud resistance, or divided affection. Small compromises become patterns when they are repeatedly defended rather than confessed.

NEGLECT OF SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER

The mind becomes spiritually underfed, distracted, and easily shaped by other voices.

KNOWN SIN AND DOUBLE LIVING

Hidden compromise dulls conviction, damages fellowship, and weakens spiritual strength.

PRIDE AND REFUSAL OF CORRECTION

The believer stops learning, blames others, and protects self-image instead of pursuing truth.

ISOLATION AND WRONG INFLUENCES

Distance from a sound church and closeness to ungodly influences make drifting easier.

COMPARISON

Looking sideways produces pride, envy, imitation, or discouragement instead of faithful obedience.

CONSTANT DISTRACTION

Noise, entertainment, hurry, and uncontrolled devices consume attention needed for truth and reflection.

FALSE TEACHING

Error can redefine grace, holiness, worship, success, identity, and the meaning of Christian maturity.

DISCOURAGEMENT AFTER FAILURE

Shame whispers that change is impossible, while grace calls the believer to confess and continue.

A vital distinction

Struggle is not the same as stagnation. A believer who is fighting, confessing, learning, and returning to obedience may be growing through the battle. The greater danger is becoming comfortable with sin, resistant to truth, and indifferent to change.

HOW DOES GROWTH HAPPEN - AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

God supplies the life; the believer responds in faith and obedience.

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God grows believers through appointed means

Spiritual growth is God's work, but it does not produce passivity. The Holy Spirit uses Scripture, prayer, the local church, obedience, fellowship, correction, service, witness, and trials to mature believers. We cannot transform ourselves by willpower, yet we are commanded to seek, resist, put off, put on, renew, obey, and persevere.

RECEIVE TRUTH

Read, hear, study, remember, and meditate upon Scripture with a teachable heart.

RESPOND IN OBEDIENCE

Act on what God has shown. Delayed obedience strengthens old patterns and weakens resolve.

REMAIN DEPENDENT

Pray, rely upon the Spirit, stay connected to God's people, and reject self-confidence.

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A simple pattern for continuing growth

Use this pattern regularly. It is not a formula that earns maturity, but a practical way to keep the whole life under the influence of God's truth and grace.

RECEIVE / RENEW / RESPOND

- Receive the Word with humility.
- Renew the mind with biblical truth.
- Respond through prompt obedience.

REPENT / REMAIN / RELY

- Repent quickly when sin is exposed.
- Remain with God's people and in faithful habits.
- Rely upon the Holy Spirit and Christ's grace.

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Why Christian growth matters

Growth matters because God is glorified when His children increasingly reflect His Son. Mature believers are better prepared to discern error, resist temptation, endure trials, strengthen the church, serve without seeking attention, share the gospel clearly, guide younger believers, and remain steady when circumstances change.

FOR HOLINESS

Growth produces a life increasingly separated from sin and devoted to God.

FOR DISCERNMENT

Maturity helps believers recognize truth, error, manipulation, and spiritual danger.

FOR ENDURANCE

Deep roots help faith remain steady through suffering, delay, loss, and opposition.

FOR MINISTRY

Growing believers become able to serve, teach, encourage, restore, and carry burdens wisely.

FINAL REFLECTION

Am I becoming more like Christ?

Look for a life increasingly ruled by Scripture, softened by grace, separated from sin, steady in trials, and useful to others.

BIBLICIST

Man's Questions. God's Answers.