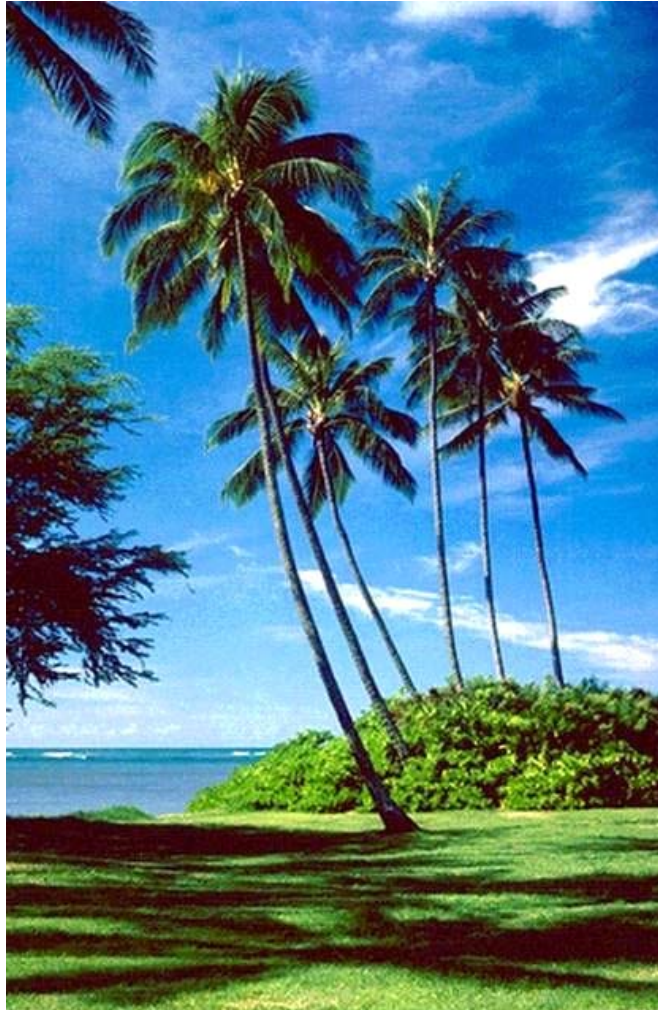


SPIRITUAL GROWTH

PART III



by
Evangelist Norman R. Stevens

SPIRITURAL GROWTH – Part 3

Please open your Bibles to II Peter chapter three and verse eighteen. I would like to preach a message entitled "Spiritual Growth – Part 3."

We are going to look at one more things that will help you grow in Christ and live a balanced Christian life for the Lord. However, before we do that we must first look at one prerequisite. What is a prerequisite? A prerequisite is something that is needed beforehand. Before you can ever begin to grow in Christ, you must first meet the following prerequisite: you must be born again. In John 3:7, Jesus said, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

My friend! You must be born again if you are going to grow spiritually. Why is that? It would be absolutely impossible for you to understand spiritual truth apart from the new birth, apart from being saved. In I Corinthians 2:14, the Bible says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

What is the Bible saying? It is simply saying this. The natural man does not grasp, comprehend, or understand spiritual truth because spiritual truth is spiritually discerned.

That's the natural man. He needs to be saved. He needs to be born again in order to grasp, comprehend, and understand spiritual truth.

What are you trying to say, preacher? It would be absolutely impossible for you to understand spiritual truth apart from the new birth. This is man's condition. Every human being in the world is born spiritually dead. He is born that way, spiritually dead. He is separated from God because of his sin. He is cut off completely, completely from a personal relationship with God Almighty. That is man's condition.

So let me ask you something. Are you saved? Are you born again? You must be born again in order to grasp, comprehend, and understand spiritual truth.

You say, Preacher! What must I do to be saved? The very first thing you must do is realize the fact that you are a sinner and in need of a Saviour. In Romans 3:23, the Bible says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Because you are a sinner you are condemned to die. In Hebrews 9:27, the Bible says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die..." In Romans 6:23, it says, "For the wages of sin is death." That includes eternal separation from God and the people of God in an awful place called hell. And you will never be able to work your way into heaven. In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Bible says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of

works, lest any man should boast.”

God loved you so much that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to bear your sin and die in your place on the cross. He became your substitute. In II Corinthians 5:21, the Bible says, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” And if man would simply believe on Christ he could be saved. In John 6:47, the Bible says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” In Romans 10:9-10, it says, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” In Romans 10:13, the Bible says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Jesus did something great for you some 2,000 years ago outside the city of Jerusalem on an old rugged tree. He died in your place on the cross of Calvary that you might be born again.

Listen! You need to admit that you are a sinner. You need to believe on Christ as your crucified, buried, and risen Savior; and, if you will do that, you will receive forgiveness for all of your sins. You will receive His free gift of eternal life by faith; and then, and only then, will you ever begin to grow spiritually.

Salvation is all of God. God does the saving. Just take God at His Word and claim His salvation by faith.

Jesus did a wonderful thing for you. He died for you. He was buried for you. He rose again the third day for you, and nothing would thrill Him any more than to save you today so that you can begin to grasp, comprehend, and understand spiritual truth so you can grow spiritual thereby. And with that you will receive forgiveness of all your sins, eternal life, and a home in heaven when you die.

My friend! If you are going to begin to grow spiritually today you need to be saved. It is that simple.

Brethren! Please notice II Peter 3:18, the Bible says, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”

Let me ask you something. Are you growing spiritually today? As a child of God you ought to be. You ought to be moving forward in your spiritual growth. You ought to be further along in your spiritual growth than you were when you first got saved. Are you living in the reality that one day you are going to stand before Jesus Christ and give Him an account of how you lived your life? You will give account of how you lived your life from the very moment you embraced Him as your own personal Savior and Friend until the day you die. Listen to the Bible. In Hebrews 9:27, it says, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” In Romans 14:10, the Bible says, “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of

Christ." Why? The Bible tells you why in Romans 14:12, which says, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

Listen folks! The best way to grow in Christ and live a balanced Christian life for the Lord is to develop good daily habits. The problem with most Christians today is that they have bad habits. They have bad reading habits. They have bad study habits. They have bad writing habits. They have bad eating habits.

Another problem with most Christians today is that they don't want it to cost them anything to grow spiritually. They don't want to pay the price to grow. They don't want to make the sacrifice in this life to grow to spiritual maturity. They don't want to discipline themselves so that they might grow spiritually.

With that in mind, don't you want to grow in Christ and live a consistent Christian life for the Lord? Don't you want to hear Christ say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant?" Surely you do!

We have already looked at four good habits that will help you grow spiritually if you will do them consistently. What were they? First, you are to go to the ministry of the local church every day the doors are open that you might grow in Christ. Going to church needs to become a way of life for God's children. In Hebrews 10:24-25, the Bible says, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Second, you need to read, meditate, memorize, study, and apply God's Word to your life through obedience. You see spiritual growth comes through all these things. Listen to the Bible! In Joshua 1:8, it says, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." In II Timothy 2:15, the Bible says, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Only the Christian who is willing to spend quality time in the Word of God every day feeding the new nature that he has will ever grow to spiritual maturity.

Third, you need to pray every day. Don't you see? Prayer is how you get things from God. That's why, in Matthew 7:7, Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." He did not say, "it shall be given you." He did not say that. He said, "**Ask**, and it shall be given you."

There are a lot of things that you need that will not be given you, things that God wants to give you but that will not come because you did not ask. "Ask, and it shall be given you" the Bible says.

In John 14:14, Jesus said it this way, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I

will do it." Jesus said He would do the very thing that you asked for. My dear Christian friends, that is a promise; that is something that the Son of God said He would do for you if you would ask. God said He would give you the petitions.

Have you ever wondered what God thinks of your prayer life? If God were to write something down about your prayer life what would He write? Have you ever thought about that before?

Pray and spend time in prayer. Make a prayer list. It will help you to be faithful.

Fourth, you need to be a witness for Christ every day. In Mark 16:15, Jesus said it this way, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." That's not just good advice. That's not just a strong suggestion. That's a command.

You are to reproduce yourselves in the lives of others. Just as grapes bear grapes, and oranges bear oranges, you are to reproduce yourselves in the lives of others. That is, you are to go out and win men to Christ. You are to disciple those converts that they may go out and win men to Christ and disciple those men. It is the job of every Christian today to reproduce himself in the lives of others. It is not just the pastor's responsibility. It is not just the evangelist's responsibility. It is not just the missionary's responsibility. It is not just the deacon's responsibility. It is not just the Sunday school teacher's responsibility.

If you have been cleansed by the shed blood of Christ, if you have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, you have an awesome responsibility to reproduce yourselves in the lives of others. You have the highest calling of God on your lives. You are His ambassadors. In II Corinthians 5:20, the Bible says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ." You are the very representatives of Jesus Christ, God's Son, the King of kings. And you must, with every opportunity, warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come and point them to Christ who is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

So if you want to grow in Christ and live a consistent Christian life for the Lord, you need to discipline yourself to be in church every day the doors are open, read the Word of God and apply it to your life through obedience, pray every day, and be a witness for Jesus Christ.

But notice number five: the best way to grow in Christ is to develop a good habit of praising the Lord every day no matter what might take place in your life.

You can't beat a praising Christian. As a child of God, you must not allow circumstances of life dictate how you are going to act. You must not allow situations rule and reign your life.

Let me ask you something. Are you a feeling oriented person? Do you allow your feelings to tell you what to do or what not to do? Do you feed on how you are feeling? If the sun is shining outside you say, "Praise the Lord." If it is raining

outside you say, "Oh me what a lousy day."

Do you allow circumstances of life dictate how you are going to act? If you do, you are no different than the world. The world acts the very same way. And you ought not to be acting like world.

As a child of God, I have decided to praise the Lord no matter what might take place in my life.

Let me give you an example. I was saved in 1987, at the age of 30, and for 3 years I witnessed to my mom about Jesus Christ. I told her about the death of Christ. How He died in the place of sinners. How He died for her and He died for me. In Rom. 5:8, the Bible says, "But God commandeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In John 3:16-17, it says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Don't you see? He was the perfect substitute for our sins.

I told her about His resurrection. How He rose from the dead to die no more and that He conquered death and the grave for her justification.

I told my mother about His ascension. How He ascended into heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father, where He reigns in glory as the Creator of the universe, where He is making intercession for me.

And all she had to do is receive Christ as her own personal Saviour and Friend. She told me that she was not interested in receiving Christ and not to mention it again.

I began to pray that my mom would get saved before it became eternally too late. Finally, a year later my mom called me on the telephone and asked me to come and spend some time with her at her home in Sarasota, Florida. At that moment, I began to pray that God would give me an opportunity to share the gospel with her one more time.

God is so good. That same day I had the privilege of spending quality time with my mother. I had breakfast with her. I did some repair work around the house and then later that evening we went out for supper. After supper, I was able to share the gospel with my mom. I took the Bible and showed her I John 5:11-13, which says, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

To make a long story short, my mother received Jesus Christ as her own personal Saviour. She got saved. I went home and three days later my mother was

murdered. I know that is an awful thing. But praise the Lord my mother is in heaven today and not in an awful place called hell. In II Corinthians 5:8, the Bible says, "...to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

Just think! Three days earlier, if she would have died without Christ she would be in hell today.

Preacher! How did it happen? Two men came in upon my mother one night to physically abuse her. She was beaten and after she was dead they placed her on the couch for someone to find.

I was asked to identify my mother's body in the morgue. The corner looked at me and wanted to know how I could possibly do such a thing. He said, Let me tell you what I think happened and what you are about to see. Those two men took their fists and beat your mother's body so badly she has bruises all over her body as well as some of her teeth has been knocked out.

Finally, they picked her body up and threw it down on a hard wood floor and when her head hit the floor her brain hemorrhaged and she died.

I am going to take you down there and pull out a stainless steel tray with your mother laying on it. I will then pull back a white sheet and you will see what I have just described to you. How can you possibly go down there and identify your mother's body in the morgue? How can you do that? I don't understand?

I simply said, In Philippians 4:13, the Bible says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." In Joshua 1:9, it says, "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." And in Hebrews 13:5-6, Jesus said it this way, "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

He simply looked at me and after a few minutes he took me to identify my mother's body. As he pulled back the sheet that I might see my mother's lifeless body I was able to tell him that she was truly my mom. She looked just the way the corner had described that she would. She had bruises about her body and some of her teeth missing. But she was my mom.

You say, Preacher! What happened to the two men? After a while in jail they let them both go. What did you do about that? I simply went to the Lord and asked Him for a Bible verse to hold on to that would help me through this crisis. He gave me this verse in Romans 12:19, which says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord."

Listen folks! God Almighty can do a far better job with those two men than I can ever do. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

I am simply saying this. You must not allow the circumstances and situations of life dictate how you are going to act. If you do you are know different than the word and you ought not to be acting like the world acts.

You ought to have faith in God. You ought to have faith in the Word of God. You ought to have faith in God Almighty that He knows what He is doing in your life. Simply trust God to know.

Listen to the Bible. In Hebrews 11:6, the Bible says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." In Romans 1:17, the Apostle Paul said, "The just shall live by faith." In II Corinthians 5:7, the Bible says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." And in Mark 11:22, Jesus said, "Have faith in God." That's good advice. You ought to have faith in God. He knows what He is doing.

In Hebrews 4:15-16, the Bible says, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." In I Thessalonians 5:18, it says, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." In I Corinthians 10:13, the Bible says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." In Romans 8:28, the Bible simply says, "And we know that all things work together for God to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Brethren, we are to rejoice in the Lord. In Philippians 4:4, the Bible says, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. In Philippians 4:5, it says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

In Luke 18:1, Jesus said, "...men ought always to pray, and not to faint." In Proverbs 24:10, the Bible says, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." In Nehemiah 8:10, it says, "...the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Are you a praising Christian today or do you allow circumstances and situations of life dictate how you are going to act? If you allow circumstances and situations dictate how you are going to act you are no different than the world because the world acts the very same way and you ought not to be doing that.

So if you want to grow in Christ and live a consistent Christian life for the Lord, you need to discipline yourself to be in church every day the doors are open, read the Word of God and apply it to your life through obedience, pray every day, tell others about Jesus Christ, and praise the Lord every day no matter what might take place in your life.

Do you truly want to grow in Christ? Are you willing to pay the price? Are you

willing to make the sacrifice in this life to grow to spiritual maturity? Are you willing to discipline yourself to do these five things?

You say, Preacher! What must I do to grow spiritually? It is very simple. You need to develop good daily habits. Five good habits that will help you grow spiritually if you will do them consistently are going to the ministry of the local church every day the doors are open, reading the Word of God and applying it to your life through obedience, pray every day, tell others about Jesus Christ, and praise the Lord every day no matter what might take place in your life.

How is a Person Saved?

Salvation is all of God. God does the saving. Just take God at His Word and claim His salvation by faith. You will never be able to work your way into heaven. God does not have a scale in heaven whereby He weighs your good and bad works. That is a lie of the Devil – Romans 3:24; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:18; Romans 5:8.

Salvation is as simple as believing on Christ as the one who bore your sin, who died in your place, who was buried, and whom God resurrected from the dead – John 1:12, 3:16, 6:47; Acts 16:31; II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:9-10; Romans 10:13.

Simply admit that you are a sinner and believe on Christ as your crucified, buried, and risen Saviour. You will receive forgiveness for all of your sins. You will receive His free gift of eternal life by faith – Romans 3:10, 23; I Corinthians 15:3-4.

Jesus did a wonderful thing for you some 2,000 years ago on Calvary's cross. He died for you. He was buried for you. He rose again the third day for you, and nothing would thrill Him more than to save you today.

Won't you go to Him right now in prayer and tell Him in your own words that you will trust Him as your Saviour? Or pray this simple prayer: Dear Lord, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died for me and that He arose from the grave. Here and now I ask You to forgive me of my sin and save me. In Jesus's name. Amen.

If you prayed that simple prayer, I would like to hear from you. Please contact me by e-mail or phone (813) 760-4028.

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