

Principle #5

How Do I Grow? *developing a healthy diet*



Principles of Discipleship

Part of the process of sanctification is growth toward maturity. Just as a child grows with nourishment and communion, so a Christian matures as he communicates with God and other Christians. The second section of this manual, (“Our Relationship with One Another”), will address an important part of Christian growth: fellowship in the church. So in this lesson, we will concentrate on the aspects of Christian growth centered around our relationship with God. Prayer and Bible study form an important two-way communication link between God and the believer. If this interaction is neglected, the relationship will suffer drastically. When you finish this lesson, you will be able to explain the importance of prayer and the Scriptures to a believer’s growth.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Main Passage: Acts 2:42-47

Read this passage and write out at least four distinct aspects of the experience of the early church:

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆

If these are the signs of a healthy church, then they are probably also the signs of a healthy Christian. Put these characteristics into your own words:

What makes you grow? When were you in a spiritual “growth spurt”? What contributed to that?

On the other hand, when have you been “spiritually dry? What contributed to that? What helped you get back on track?

Other Passages on Scripture:

Read the following passages and summarize what they teach regarding the role of the Bible in a believer's life:

- ◆ *2 Timothy 3:14-4:4*
- ◆ *Hebrews 4:12*
- ◆ *Psalms 1:1-3*
- ◆ *James 1:21-25*

Other Passages on Prayer

Do the same (read & summarize) with the following passages:

- ◆ *Matthew 6:5-15*
- ◆ *Luke 18:1-8*
- ◆ *James 5:13-18*
- ◆ *Ephesians 6:18-20*

APPLICATION: Now what?

Sometimes in a study like this it's easy to fall into the "guilt trap" of setting up unreasonable, and even unbiblical goals for ourselves in regards to reading the Bible and praying. We must keep in mind that we are in a relationship with a loving Father who wants to spend time with us: we aren't performing for Him or trying to win His favor by reading a certain number of verses per day or praying for a world-record time!

The question is—what works for you? With your schedule, your personality, your abilities—what is a healthy diet of talking to God and interacting with His Word?

Resources on Bible Study:

- ◆ *Living by the Book*, by Howard Hendricks
- ◆ *The Joy of Discovery*, by Oletta Wald

Resources on Prayer —

- ◆ *Too Busy Not to Pray*, by Bill Hybels
- ◆ *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, by Richard Foster



The concept of spirituality varies among different Christian groups. In some circles the highly vocal person who talks religion continually is thought to be very spiritual; others accept noisy exuberance as a mark of spirituality, and in some churches the man who prays first, longest and loudest gets a reputation for being the most spiritual man in the assembly.

Now a vigorous testimony, frequent prayers and loud praise may be entirely consistent with spirituality, but is important that we understand that they do not in themselves constitute it nor prove that it is present.

True spirituality manifests itself in certain dominant desires. These are ever-present, deep-settled wants sufficiently powerful to motivate and control the life.

First is the desire to be holy rather than happy. The yearning after happiness found so widely among Christians professing a superior degree of sanctity is sufficient proof that such sanctity is not indeed present. The truly spiritual man knows that God will give abundance of joy after we have become able to receive it without injury to our souls, but he does not demand it at once. John Wesley said of the members of one of the early Methodist societies that he doubted that they had been made perfect in love because they came to enjoy religion instead of to learn how they could become holy.

A man may be considered spiritual when he wants to see the honor of God advanced through his life even if it means that he himself must suffer temporary dishonor or loss. Such a man prays "Hallowed be Thy name," and silently adds, "at any cost to me, Lord." He lives for God's honor by a kind of spiritually reflex. Every choice involving the glory of God is for him already made before it presents itself. He does not need to debate the matter with his own heart; there is nothing to debate. The glory of God is necessary to him; he gasps for it as a suffocating man gasps for air.

The spiritual man wants to carry his cross. Many Christians accept adversity or tribulation with a sigh and call it their cross, forgetting that such things come alike to saint and sinner. The cross is that extra adversity that comes to us as a result of our obedience to Christ. This cross is not forced upon us; we voluntarily take it up with full knowledge of the consequences. We choose to obey Christ and by so doing choose to carry the cross.

Carrying a cross means to be attached to the Person of Christ, committed to the Lordship of Christ and obedient to the commandments of Christ. The man who is so attached, so committed, so obedient is a spiritual man.

Again, a Christian is spiritual when he sees

everything from God's viewpoint. The ability to weigh all things in divine scale and place the same value upon them as God does is the mark of a Spirit-filled life.

God looks at and through at the same time. His gaze does not rest on the surface but penetrates to the true meaning of things. The carnal Christian looks at an object or a situation, but because he does not see through it he is elated or cast down by what he sees. The spiritual man is able to look through things as God looks and think of them as God thinks. He insists on seeing all things as God sees them even if it humbles him and exposes his ignorance to the point of real pain.

Another desire of the spiritual man is to die right rather than to live wrong. A sure mark of the mature man of God is his nonchalance about living. The earth-loving, body-conscious Christian looks upon death with numb terror in his heart; but as he goes on to live in the Spirit he becomes increasingly indifferent to the number of his years here below, and at the same time increasingly careful of the kind of life he lives while he is here. He will not purchase a few extra days of life at the cost of compromise or failure. He wants most of all to be right, and he is happy to let God decide how long he shall live. He knows that he can afford to die now that he is in Christ, but he knows that he cannot afford to do wrong, and this knowledge becomes a gyroscope to stabilize his thinking and his acting.

The desire to see others advance at his expense is another mark of the spiritual man. He wants to see other Christians above him and is happy when they are promoted and he is overlooked. There is no envy in his heart; when his brethren are honored he is pleased because such is the will of God and that will is his earthly heaven. If God is pleased, he is pleased for that reason, and if it pleases God to exalt another above him he is content to have it so.

The spiritual man habitually makes eternity-judgments instead of time-judgments. By faith he rises above the tug of earth and the flow of time and learns to think and feel as one who has already left the world and gone to join the innumerable company of angels and the general assembly and church of the First-born which are written in heaven. Such a man would rather be useful than famous and would rather serve than be served.

And all this must be by the operation of the Holy Spirit within him. No man can become spiritual by himself. Only the free Spirit can make a man spiritual.

SCRIPTURE

Which verses significantly impacted you and why?



ARTICLE

What did you personally glean from this article?



PRINCIPLE

Summarize the truth you've learned in a concise statement:



LIFE APPLICATION

1. *What have been your times of greatest spiritual progress? Why was that—what circumstances or people contributed to it?*

2. *What do you see as some of your major hindrances to spiritual growth? How could your fellow disciples best encourage you in these areas?*

