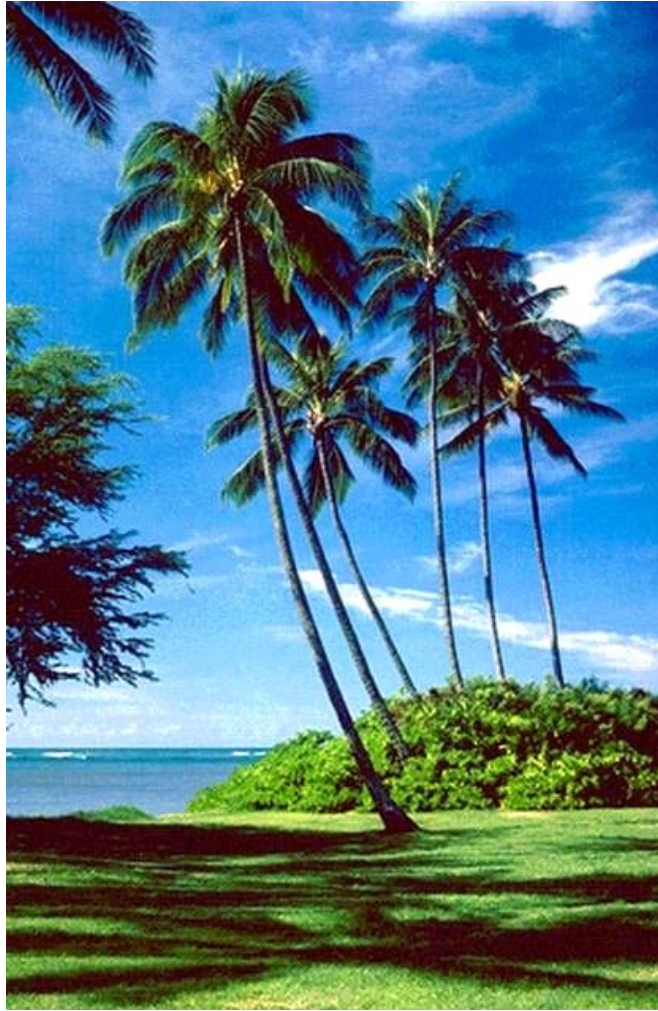


SPIRITUAL GROWTH

PART I



by
Evangelist Norman R. Stevens

SPIRITUAL GROWTH – Part I

Please open your Bibles to II Peter chapter three and verse eighteen. I would like to preach a message entitled "Spiritual Growth – Part 1."

Before I get into the message, let me ask you something: Are you truly saved? If you have never been cleansed by the shed blood of Christ, if you have never been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, you are not saved; and it would be absolutely impossible for you to grow spiritually apart from the new birth. In John 3:7, Jesus said, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

My dear friend, it is true. You must be born again in order to grasp, comprehend, and understand spiritual truth. The Bible is very clear on this. I Corinthians 2:14 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."

The natural man could be the neighbor next door. He could be the family member that you live with. He could be the friend that you spend time with. He could be the guy that you work with. He may be a person who is religious. He may be a person who is morally good. He may be a person in this room today; but he does not grasp, comprehend, or understand spiritual truth. It would be absolutely impossible for him to do that because the Bible says, the natural man (that is the unsaved 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.

So 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.

This is man's condition: Every human being in the world is born spiritually dead. He is born that way—separated from God because of his sin. He is cut off completely from a personal relationship with God Almighty. That is man's condition.

Every single person in the world from Adam unto this very hour stands before Almighty God guilty; and all the world must say, "I am guilty, for I am a sinner." I have by my nature and by my choice offended a holy God, and so have you. God looks at the human race and judges us guilty, for all of us have offended God in one way or another. It makes no difference the magnitude, the capacity, or the length of your sin. 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..." Romans 6:23 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.

Hell is an awful place, my friend! Hell is described in the Bible as a place of unquenchable fire. Mark 9:43-48 says, "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

What is the Bible saying? It is simply saying this. It is a fire whose flames never go out. A hundred thousand years from today, the fires of hell shall burn as they burn now. A hundred million years, a hundred billion years, throughout the endless eons of eternity, the fires of hell shall burn as they burn now. They shall never be quenched. No relief from the flames of hell, no quenching the flames of hell, hell shall burn forever and ever and all those in that awful place shall endure hell forever.

You say, Preacher! I don't want to go to that awful place called hell. So I am going to work my way to heaven. Listen! You will never be able to work your way into God's heaven. God does not have a scale in heaven whereby he weighs good and bad works. That is a lie of the devil so don't believe that lie.

Salvation is not to be found in church membership. You can join every church in your state and it will never get you into heaven. Salvation is not to be found in baptism. You can be baptized every day of the year for the rest of your life and it will never get you into heaven. Salvation is not to be found in morality. There is absolutely nothing in all the world you could ever do to earn your salvation.

Listen folks! Forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and a home in heaven only come through personal faith in Jesus Christ. 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." In Titus 3:5, the Bible says it this way, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us..."

God loved you so much that He gave His only begotten Son, the Lord 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 Acts 16:31, the Apostle Paul said, "...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." In John 6:47, Jesus said it this way, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

In Romans 10:9-10, the Bible 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." Romans 10:13 says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

If you have never been saved. If you have never been born again, you need to be saved 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 dear 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."

Are you growing as a child of God? As a child of God, you ought to be growing every day. You ought to be further along in your spiritual growth than you were a year ago. You ought to be further along in your spiritual growth than you were a month ago, than you were a week ago. As a matter of fact, you ought to be further along in your spiritual growth than you were just yesterday. Are you living in the reality that one day you will stand before Christ and given Him an account of how you lived your life? You will give account of how you have lived from the very moment you embraced Him as your Personal Savior and Friend until the day you die. The Bible is very clear on this. In Hebrews 9:27, it says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." In Romans 14:10, the Bible says, "...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." In Romans 14:12, it says, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

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!

But you say, Preacher! How can I, a child of God, grow as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? It is very simple! You must 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.

We are going to look at two things that will help you with your spiritual growth. Number one, go to church every day the doors are open; and then number two, read the Bible every day.

Please notice number one: the best way to grow in Christ and live a balanced Christian life for the Lord is to develop a good habit of going to the ministry of the local church every day the doors are open.

Spiritual growth comes through the ministry of the local church. So let me ask you something: How important in your life today is going to the ministry of the local church?

I have found that going to church needs to be more than a sporadic thing for the child of God. It needs to become a way of life for God's children.

You say, Preacher! What must I do? It is very simple! You need to develop a good habit of going to the ministry of the local church every day that the doors are open.

You can grow some by going to church occasionally but only the Christian who is willing to discipline himself and go to church on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday night and every day that the doors are open will ever grow to spiritual maturity.

Why is it so important that you go to church? It is commanded in the Word of God that you go to church. 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."

What day is that? Jesus Christ God's Son is coming again, and you ought to be living in light of His coming. In Titus 2:12-13, the Bible says, "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

My dear Christian friends! Jesus Christ, God's Son, is coming again and there is no other place that I would rather be than in church when He returns if that is where I am commanded to be.

Listen! We are to gather together so that we can worship and adore God Almighty. We are to gather together so that we can fellowship and encourage other believers. We are to gather together so that we can learn spiritual truth to apply to our lives through obedience to His Word.

Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to take the time and go to the ministry of the local church so that you can worship and adore God Almighty?

Not enough is said about worship today. Worship is the very act of recognizing that high place which God deserves. Worship is the very act of giving unto God the glory, the honor, the worship, and the praise that is due unto His holy name. It is not enough merely to think about God. It is not enough merely to talk about God. You must worship God and you must render to God the glory, the honor, the worship, and the praise that is due unto His holy name.

Why, preacher? Why must I render to God glory, honor, worship, and praise? I will give you two reasons: First, God deserves it! God deserves the worship and the praise of His children. And second, God desires it! God desires the worship and the praise of His children. In Psalms 95:6, the Bible says, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker."

Are you going to discipline yourself to be in church so that you can worship and adore God Almighty?

Are you willing to make the sacrifice, in this life, and go to church so that you can fellowship and encourage other believers?

Are you willing to pay the price and discipline yourself and go to church so that you can learn spiritual truth to apply to your life through obedience?

Let me give you an example. Please use your sanctified imagination. I have a charcoal grill up here. I am now opening a bag of charcoal to place on the grill. I put the bag down and pick up some fluid to place on the charcoal. Now I am going to take a match and light the fluid on the charcoal. We have a fire up here. Do you see it? Now I am going to place some hamburgers on the grill.

So let me ask you something. Can we cook these hamburgers on this grill? Yes! So let me ask you something else. If I were to take one of the charcoals from off the grill and place it in the church parking lot, what is going to happen to that piece of charcoal? It is going to go out, right! It is going to go out. It will become withered, dry, and absolutely useless to cook on. Can we all agree on that?

Listen folks! The same thing is true for the child of God that forsakes the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is. He is going to be just like that piece of charcoal in the church parking lot. He is going to live a withered, dry, useless life for the cause of Christ because he is not doing what he is commanded to do in Scripture.

However, if you will discipline yourself to be in church every day the doors are open, you are going to be like these charcoals on this grill. You are going to be on fire for God. You will be used of God. You will be able to worship and adore God Almighty. You will be able to fellowship and encourage other believers as well as learn spiritual truth to apply to your life through obedience.

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.

But notice number two: the best way to grow in Christ is to develop a good habit of reading the Word of God every day.

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 I Peter 2:2, it says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." 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."

II Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (the Bible tells you what to believe. It is profitable) for reproof (the Bible tells you when you are wrong. It is profitable) for correction (it tells you how to get right. It is profitable) for instruction in righteousness: (it tells the child of God how to stay right so) that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

In Psalm 119:9, the Bible says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." In Psalms 119:11, it says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." In Psalms 119:105, it says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." In Psalms 119:165, the Bible says, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

In Joshua 1:8, the Word of God 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 Hebrews 4:12, it says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

In II Peter 1:19-21, the Bible says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

In Psalm 1:1-6, the Scripture saith, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the

judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

In Psalm 19:7-10, it says, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold...”

Is the Word of God desired more than gold in your life today? Do you know something that is sad? If I told you that there was a million dollars hidden in one of these pews and the first child of God who found it could keep it, you would tear this place apart to find it. It may take you several hours to find it, but you won't spend thirty minutes a day in the Word of God. That doesn't make much sense, does it?

So let me ask you something. Are you willing to make the sacrifice in this life and turn off the television set in order to spend quality time in the Bible? Are you willing to make the sacrifice in this life and set aside you hobby or hobbies for a season in order to memorize the Bible? Are you willing to make the sacrifice in this life and stop overtime at work in order to study the Word of God? Are you willing to pay the price and discipline yourself to read and to meditate on the Word of God every day?

In Psalm 19:10-14, the Bible goes on to say, “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

How important is the Word of God in your life today? The Bible needs to be more than a devotional textbook. The Bible needs to be more than a sermon textbook for any fundamental, independent Baptist preacher. The Bible needs to fill your mind if you're going to grow spiritually.

If your relationship to this book is only something you are doing on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, or fifteen minutes a day, it will never fill your mind.

You say, Preacher! What must I do? It is very simple. You need to read the Word of God every day. It is not the time of day in which you read and study the Word of God that is important. The most important thing is that you spend quality time every day in the Word of God feeding the new nature that you have.

Now! You can grow some by little reading of the Word of God and by going to

the ministry of the local church occasionally. But only the Christian who is willing to spend quality time in the Bible every day and discipline himself to go to church every day the doors are open will ever grow to spiritual maturity.

Did you know that reading just four chapters a day will take you through the Bible in one year? Read the Bible every day. Do you know what will happen if you do? You will begin to understand the Word of God.

Listen! The first time through the Word of God, the Spirit of God will have given you a kindergarten education. And by the tenth time through, the Spirit of God will have only given you a fifth grade education.

I have met Christians who have been saved for ten years and they have never read the Bible through one time. They don't know what they believe or why they believe it. What a shame that is.

Brethren! You need to read the Bible every day.

You say, Preacher! I don't have the time to read the Bible every day. Surely you do and here is how you can do it. Do you have a small pocket Bible? If not, you need to go out and buy one and develop a good habit of carrying the Bible with you every where you go.

When you are waiting in line at the post office, you can take the Bible out and read it. When you are waiting at doctor's office, you can take the Bible out and read it. You see, folks, you will make an appointment for 1:00 o'clock and the doctor won't see you until 3:45. You have plenty of time to read the Bible if you have it with you.

Let me ask you this! Do you have coffee breaks at work? What do you do? You say, Preacher! I drink coffee. I listen to gossip and dirty jokes. What a waste of time that is for the child of God! Drink your coffee and read the Bible.

So let me ask you something else. What do you do during your lunch break? You say, Preacher! I eat!

Listen! The child of God in the 21st century can eat and read the Bible at the same time. It takes a little work. It takes a little discipline but you can do it. Take your Bible out and read it again.

Take your Bible with you to work. The greatest mission field for most of you is going to be the place in which you live and work.

Brethren! Fill your mind with the Word of God or fill it with trash—the choice is yours.

Going to the ministry of the local church every day the doors are open and

spending quality time in the Word of God every day feeding the new nature that you have are two of the hardest things you will ever do for Christ. Why is that? It goes against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world, the flesh, and the devil will do every thing they can to keep you out of the ministry of the local church and the Word of God.

If any one of these three succeed—that is the world, the flesh, or the devil—they will mess you up in your spiritual growth, in your daily walk with Jesus Christ.

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 two things?

You say, Preacher! What must I do to grow spiritually? It is very simple. You need to develop good daily habits. Two 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 and reading the Word of God and applying it to your life through obedience.

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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