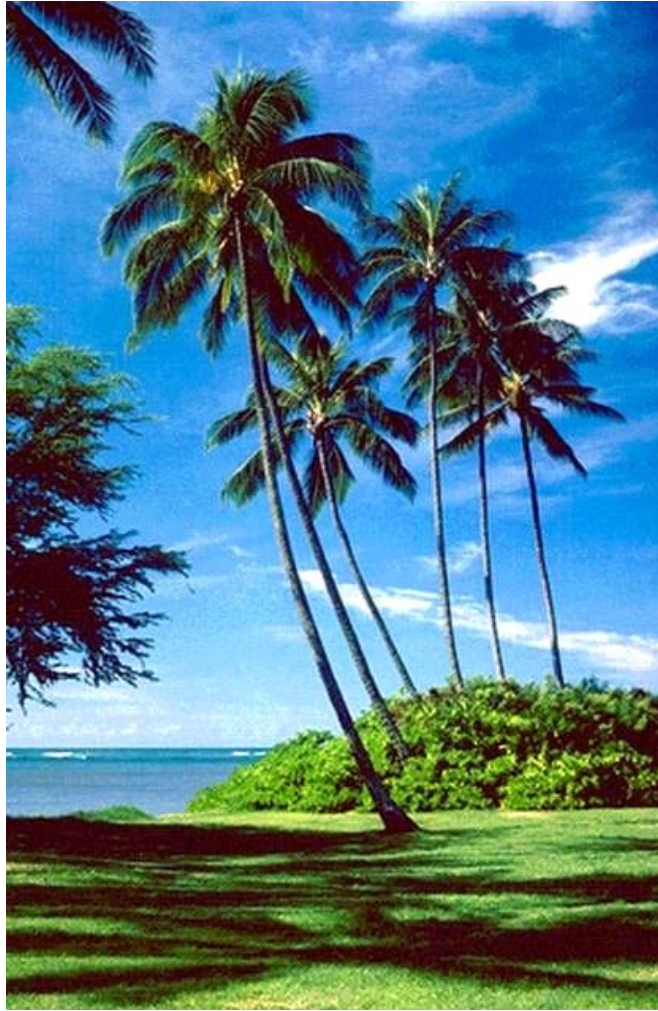


SPIRITUAL GROWTH

PART II



by
Evangelist Norman R. Stevens

SPIRITUAL GROWTH – Part 2

Please open your Bibles to I Corinthians chapter two and verse fourteen. I would like to preach a message entitled "Spiritual Growth – Part 2."

We noticed in the sermon "Spiritual Growth – Part 1 that you needed to be saved before you could ever begin to grow spiritually.

In I Corinthians 2:14, the Bible says, "But the natural man..." (You could say "the unsaved man" here and do no harm to Scripture because the natural man is an unsaved man.) And the Bible goes on to say that he "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."

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.

How does a person get saved? How does a person get right with God Almighty? That is the question! Did you know that all religions have some sort of salvation plan to offer you? However, all false religions have some sort of works tied to their salvation plan. They say you must do something in order to get saved, in order to get right with God Almighty. That is not right. Salvation is not by your own works of righteousness.

Listen to the Bible! In Titus 3:5, the Bible says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." In Isaiah 64:6, the Bible says, "....all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...."

Salvation is not to be found in church membership. You can join every church in the state and it will never earn you a home in heaven. Salvation is not to be found in baptism. You can be baptized three hundred and sixty-five (sixty-six) days in a year (a leap year), and it will never earn you a home in 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. 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."

Salvation finds its basis in the shed blood of Christ apart from any human merit. In I Peter 1:18-19, the Bible says, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Do you know the problem with all false religions? They miss the Person of

Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, the Bible says, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And that is why the religions of the world are not going to save mankind—they miss the Person of Jesus Christ.

You ought to believe that salvation exists only in Jesus Christ. Only in the Christian faith is there a salvation that is secure. In Acts 4:12, the Bible says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Listen! I am convinced that, if I were to die today and stand before God, and God were to say, "Norman, what makes you think I should allow you into My heaven?" I would simply say something like this, "God there is absolutely nothing in all the world that I have to offer you that would justify my going to your heaven; but Jesus Christ, your Son, died for me." I am also convinced, without a shadow of a doubt, that God would allow me into His heaven because Jesus Christ, God's Son, did everything that was necessary to provide my salvation. My salvation is secure in Jesus Christ. Jesus paid it all.

You say, Preacher! What must I do to be saved? You need to exercise faith in the gospel message. In I Corinthians 15:3-4, the Apostle Paul said, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scripture."

When a man hears the gospel (and that is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ) and with a repentant heart receives that gospel as the only hope of his salvation, that man is saved. Acts 3:19 says, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." In Acts 17:30, the Bible says, "...God commandeth all men every where to repent." This repentance is a change of mind that agrees with God that one is a sinner. In Romans 5:12, the Bible says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." And also agrees with what Christ did for us on Calvary's cross. He became our substitute. In other words, He paid the price of man's sin. In II Corinthians 5:21, the Bible says, "For he (that's God) hath made him (that Jesus Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Salvation is as simple as believing on Christ. In Acts 16:31, the Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." In John 1:12, the Bible says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Simply believe on Christ as the one who bore your sin, who died in your place, who was buried, and whom God resurrected from the dead.

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; 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 maturing? Are you growing? Are you moving forward in your spiritual growth? As a child of God you ought to be. You ought to be maturing. You ought to be growing. 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. You ought to be further along in your spiritual growth than you were a year ago, a month ago, 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 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 two good habits that will help you grow spiritually if you will do them consistently. What were they? You are to go to the ministry of the local church every day the doors are open and reading the Word of God and applying it to you life through obedience. Remember!

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.”

Reading the Word of God every day needs to become a way of life for God’s children. 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.”

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.

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 are read the Word of God and apply it to your life through obedience.

But notice number three: the best way to grow in Christ is to develop a good habit of praying every day.

A sad commentary on God’s children today is that they take very little time or no time at all with God in prayer. Did you know that the average Christian prays less than three minutes a day? That’s hardly enough time to bless the food. Did you know that the average preacher (I am talking about the evangelist, the missionary, and the pastor of the 21st century) prays less than seven minutes a day? No wonder there is no blessing or power of God on the lives of God’s children today. They have lost the art of praying. That’s not right. That is the sin of prayerlessness. One great sin among God’s people today is the sin of prayerlessness. We who embrace God as our Father; Jesus Christ, God’s Son, as our Savior and Friend; and the blessed Holy Spirit as our indwelling Comforter, do not take the time or make the time for prayer. It is a great sin among God’s people.

One concern of the Devil, our Adversary, Satan, is to keep Christians off their knees. He fears nothing from the prayerless Christians. He fears nothing from the prayerless preachers of the 21st century. He laughs at all of their toils, and he mocks at all of their wisdom.

Why then don’t you pray? It must be that you really do not believe that God Almighty is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. I beg to differ with you. It is the very nature of God to hear and answer prayer. It is the norm for God to hear and answer prayer. In Psalm 65:2, the Bible says, “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.” In Mark 11:17, the Bible says, “Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?” Think with me. Why would Jesus say in Luke 18:1, “That men ought always to pray, and not to faint” if He were not a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God? Why would the Apostle Paul command us to pray in I Thessalonians 5:17, which says, “Pray without ceasing,” if God were not by nature a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God? I submit to

you folks that God Almighty is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God, and it ought to be the norm for the child of God to get his prayers answered. If you can go day after day, week after week, and month after month without getting your prayers answered, there is a serious spiritual problem in your life.

Listen to the Bible. In Matthew 7:7-8, the Bible says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Did you notice the power of that? The power of prayer! "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

In Matthew 18:19, Jesus said, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." In Matthew 21:22, the Bible says, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." In John 15:7, the Bible says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." In John 16:24, the Bible says, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." In Philippians 4:6, the Bible says, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." In Psalms 50:15, the Bible says, "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

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.

Why then don't you pray? You are the very objects of God's grace! If you are born again; 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 found grace in God's sight; and God has given you a mighty promise in Jeremiah chapter thirty-three and verse three, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee."

Have you presumed that God would do absolutely nothing about your sin of prayerlessness? He already has done something. In James 4:2, the Bible says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

Listen folks! There are things that God wants to do for you today. He wills to do it. He wants to do it. He would do it. He would love to do it. He would delight in doing it for you today, but He won't do it because you do not take the time to pray. How foolish you are! How you must anger the God of heaven when He has opened the door of promise (Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not) and you won't spend ten minutes a day in prayer. That doesn't make much sense, does it?

Why then don't you pray? It must be that you really do not believe that God Almighty is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. You see, if you were sold on prayer, you would rarely stop the act of praying. If you truly believe that God Almighty would give you every thing that you asked for, you would rarely stop the act of praying. Why then don't you pray? It must be that you don't really believe it will matter if you do.

My Christian friends, it matters when you pray. Listen to the Bible. Joshua prayed. Joshua prayed, "Sun and moon, stand thou still," so the sun stood still and the moon stayed in the midst of heaven and did not go down for the space of a whole day. Jacob prayed. We find Jacob wrestling with a man, as the Bible says in Genesis chapter 32. The man who wrestled Jacob is called an Angel in Hosea chapter twelve verse four, and was evidently the pre-incarnate Christ. The pre-incarnate Christ said, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." Jacob said, "I'll not let you go, except you bless me." The Bible says that Jacob wept. That Jacob wept sore. That Jacob made supplication. You can read this in Hosea chapter twelve and verse four. The Angel said unto him, "What is thy name?" And he said, "Jacob." The Angel said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel. Thou hast power with God. Thou hast power with men. Thou hast prevailed."

It matters when you pray. Hezekiah prayed. It was the prophet Isaiah who told Hezekiah to set his house in order because he was about to die. The Bible says that Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord, and he wept sore. Before Isaiah could leave the middle court, the Lord told Isaiah to go back and tell Hezekiah "I have heard thy prayer. I have seen thy tears. I will heal thee. I will add fifteen years unto thy days, and I will deliver thee out of the hand of the king of Assyria."

Elijah prayed. In James 5:17-18, the Bible says, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Why then don't you pray? It must be that you don't really believe it will matter if you do. Perhaps there is another reason you don't pray. It must be that you don't really believe that God Almighty will hear you. Sure, He will hear Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sure, He will hear Jeremiah, Joshua, and Moses. Of course, He will hear Peter and Paul. Sure, He heard those guys; but, you say, I am just an ordinary Christian.

Listen folks! You don't have to be an Apostle Paul. You need to be right with God. You need to be in fellowship with the Lord. In Psalm 66:18, the Bible says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." What is the Bible saying? It is simply saying this: If there is a sin in your life and you know it, and you are not willing to confess or forsake it, you can pray until you are blue in the face, and God Almighty is not obligated to hear or answer your prayer.

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. Make a list with certain folks to pray for on Monday, on Tuesday, on Wednesday, on Thursday, on Friday, on Saturday, and on Sunday. It will help you to be faithful because it is not right to pray for your Monday people and not pray for your Tuesday people. After a while it becomes a habit and you will learn to love it.

God is a real person. You can honestly talk to God. It matters when you pray. God Almighty is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.

So if you want to grow in Christ and live a consistent Christian life for the Lord, you need to discipline yourself to pray every day.

But notice number four: the best way to grow in Christ is to develop a good habit of being a witness for Christ every day.

Brethren! It is not right that you go to heaven and not take others with you. Today you are living in an area where there are thousands of people on their way to an awful place called hell. The vast majority of your family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers with whom you live and work are going to hell. We all deserve to go to hell. But we have been saved. We have been cleansed by the shed blood of Christ; but they are on their way to hell, and it is not well that we keep the gospel among us.

Question! How were you saved? You say, Preacher! I was saved by faith. I know that, but someone probably told you about Christ. What if that someone had kept Christ to himself? Just think! You might not have been saved.

Do you truly believe that we are commissioned by the living Christ to spread the gospel to all mankind? 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; 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," as the Bible says in John 1:29.

Listen to the Bible. In Matthew 28:18-20, the Bible says, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." In Acts 1:8, the Bible says, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." 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 say, Preacher! What's the big deal? It is three-fold. The Devil is laughing at the vast majority of God’s children today because they are not doing what they are commanded to do in the Word of God. The souls of human beings are perishing by the millions today in an awful place called hell, and the heart of Jesus Christ is broken today. That's the big deal.

You say, preacher! Why do you say that? Why do you believe that the heart of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, is broken today? The heart of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, is broken today because the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel are no longer glorious to the vast majority of God’s children today. You say, preacher! I don’t believe that. I don’t believe that the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel are no longer glorious to the vast majority of God’s children today.

Let me ask you something. If Jesus is so glorious to you, when was the last time you went out on church visitation to tell someone about your glorious Saviour and Friend? If Jesus is so glorious to you, how much time do you set aside each week to do nothing else but point men to Christ? If Jesus is so glorious to you, when was the last time you personally led a soul to Christ? If I were to ask you to write down on a piece of paper how many souls have you won to Christ in the last six months, what would you write? If the gospel is so glorious to you today, when was the last time you shared the gospel with a friend? When was the last time you shared the gospel with a family member? When was the last time you shared the gospel with a neighbor or the guy you work with? When was the last time you shared the gospel with a complete stranger?

A vast majority of God’s children today are so caught up in their own dreams, in their own plans, in their own ambitions, that they take no time, or very little time, to tell others about Jesus Christ. The vast majority of God’s children today are so caught up in their own problems, in their own careers, that they take no time, or very little time, to share the gospel with anybody.

I submit to you folks that Jesus Christ and the gospel are no longer glorious to a vast majority of God’s children. That is a sad commentary on God’s children today. A vast majority of God’s children are no longer concerned for those who are perishing around them. That’s not right. It is simply not right that you go to heaven and not take others with you. Today you are living in an area where there are thousands of people on their way to an awful place called hell. The vast majority of your family and friends with whom you live and work are going to hell. We all deserve to go to hell, but we have been saved; and they are on their way to hell, and it is not well that you keep the gospel among yourselves.

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, praying every day and being a witness for Jesus Christ every day are four 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, keep you out of the Word of God, keep you off your knees, and keep you from being a witness for Jesus Christ.

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 four things?

You say, Preacher! What must I do to grow spiritually? It is very simple. You need to develop good daily habits. Four 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. Read the Word of God every day and apply it to your life through obedience. Pray every day and be a witness for Jesus Christ every day.

I wonder, how many of God's people are going to discipline themselves to do these four things consistently in their life? Do you know something that is sad? Very few of God's people will ever discipline themselves to do these four things consistently.

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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