



GROWING UP INTO CHRIST

Course 5, *Real Christian Living*, Lesson 8

The Problem: When someone first comes to Christ, a crucial question arises: How does a newborn Christian grow spiritually? Observation reveals a striking contrast—some new believers flourish, becoming strong, immovable disciples of Jesus, while others retain their faith for only a short time before slipping back into their former way of life. What causes this difference? Why do some experience dramatic transformation, so profound that they seem like entirely new people, while others struggle to grow?

Many who attempt to grow in faith find themselves weighed down by temptation, feeling distant from God, or caught in cycles of self-effort that lead to frustration. No matter how hard we try, we cannot produce true righteousness on our own. The key to true spiritual growth is not more effort but deeper connection—learning to abide in Christ, just as a branch must remain in the vine to bear fruit. When we rely fully on Christ, He works in and through us, transforming our hearts, empowering us to overcome sin, and filling us with His peace and joy. The Christian life is not simply about believing in Christ—it is about abiding in Him, growing daily in faith, surrender, and transformation.

This Bible study explores what it means to abide in Jesus—to rely entirely on His presence, His strength, and His righteousness. It is a study of spiritual maturity, helping believers understand that growth is not about self-effort, but about a daily, living connection with Christ.

As we dive into this study, we will see how abiding in Him:

- Produces lasting spiritual fruit
- Transforms our character to reflect His love
- Empowers us to overcome sin and trials
- Deepens our trust in His leading
- Brings peace and joy that the world cannot offer.

May this study encourage you to walk closer with Jesus, experiencing the fullness of life that comes through abiding in Him!

Objectives:

- I. We recognize that spiritual growth is God's will for every newborn Christian.
- II. We discover how true transformation comes from the life-giving power of God working within us.
- III. We learn that self-improvement effort is not enough—only a deepening friendship with Jesus shapes us into who He desires us to be.
- IV. We embrace the importance of daily devotions as essential for strengthening faith and spiritual maturity.
- V. We explore how Christ can progressively change our lives, molding our character to reflect Him, just as He did with the Apostle John.

I. GOD'S WILL IS FOR NEW-BORN CHRISTIANS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY

The Bible compares new believers to infants in Christ, who grow naturally when nurtured with proper spiritual care. Initially, they require simple, easily digestible teachings, but as they mature, they are ready for deeper, more substantial truths suited to their stage of spiritual development.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

The Word:

1. To what does Peter compare the spiritual growth of new believers? 1 Peter 2:2
2. What kind of spiritual food is necessary for those who are mature in the faith? Hebrews 5:12 – 6:1
3. Into what experience does the Christian grow? Ephesians 4:15-16; 2 Peter 3:18
4. To what may the mature Christian be likened? Isaiah 61:3

Explanation: Spiritual growth is God's design. It is no disgrace to be a babe in Christ. In fact, being newly born again is a truly beautiful state—a time of innocence, dependence, and eager learning. Just as a newborn baby is tenderly cared for, so God nurtures new believers, feeding them with simple spiritual truths that they can easily digest. However, no one expects a baby to stay an infant forever. Growth is essential, both physically and spiritually. Parents rejoice as a child grows stronger, learns to walk, and begins to understand the world around them.

In the same way, God desires every believer to mature in faith, not remaining in infancy but pressing on to deeper knowledge and experience of Christ. At first, new believers need the milk of the Word, foundational truths that strengthen their spiritual life without overwhelming them. If fed too much deep theological truth all at once, they may struggle to grasp it, much like an infant given solid food too soon. But over time, their appetite for God's Word deepens. They long to understand more of His wisdom and power, seeking Him through Scripture, prayer, and obedience.

As this process unfolds, the believer grows in love, in grace, and in knowledge, reflecting the very character of Jesus. They stand firm in faith, resilient against trials, like "*trees planted by streams of water*," flourishing and bearing fruit in its season (Psalm 1:3).

Relevance: If you are a newly born Christian, congratulations! You have entered into a beautiful, life-changing journey with Jesus, joining the fellowship of believers across the world. Now begins the thrill of growing stronger in faith—learning to pray, study God's Word, and share His love with others. As you move forward, remember this: spiritual growth comes from looking to Christ, not to yourself or others. People may fail, and human weaknesses may disappoint, but God remains faithful. He is not responsible for the faults of those who profess His name; rather, He calls us to keep our eyes fixed on Him, just as we did when we first encountered His saving grace.

No matter what challenges arise, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39). He will continue to guide, strengthen, and shape you, leading you into deeper faith and unshakable trust in Him.

II. TRUE TRANSFORMATION COMES FROM THE LIFE-GIVING POWER OF GOD

Throughout Scripture, the natural world serves as a powerful reflection of spiritual realities. Just as plants depend on sunshine and rain—abundant gifts from God—to grow and thrive, believers must rely entirely on the spiritual nourishment that flows from His heart of love.

The Word:

5. What lesson from the natural world explains our dependence on God for spiritual growth? Mark 4:26-29; compare Hosea 14:5-7.
6. Why is God likened to the sun? Psalm 84:11; 27:1; 36:9.
7. To what other natural resource may spiritual life from God be likened? Psalm 72:6.
8. Of what kind of bread must we partake to grow spiritually? John 6:33.

Explanation: Throughout Scripture, the natural world serves as a powerful reflection of spiritual realities. Just as plants depend on sunshine and rain—abundant gifts from God—to grow and thrive, believers must rely entirely on the spiritual nourishment that flows from His heart of love. Without light and water, a seed remains dormant, unable to reach its full potential. Likewise, without God's sustaining presence, a Christian remains stagnant, struggling to grow in faith and character. Jesus Himself emphasized this truth, saying, *"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me"* John 15:4.

True transformation is not achieved by human effort alone, but through a life deeply connected to God—drawing strength from His Word, His Spirit, and His grace. As we receive His divine nourishment, we flourish spiritually, reflecting His love and bearing fruit in every aspect of life (Psalm 1:3).

Relevance: Spiritual growth is essential for every believer, but it doesn't come from trying harder or relying on our own strength. Just as plants cannot control the sunlight or rain they receive, Christians must depend fully on God, allowing Him to provide what is needed for growth.

When we abide in Christ, we experience true transformation—our struggles no longer define us, and our faith deepens. We are no longer dry and lifeless, but rooted in Him, continually growing and producing lasting spiritual fruit. As the natural world thrives under God's care, so does the believer who trusts fully in His life-giving power.

Spiritual growth, much like growth in nature, takes time. When a seed is planted, it doesn't sprout instantly—it requires nourishment, patience, and the right conditions to develop. In the same way, abiding in Christ gradually transforms us, shaping our character and producing fruit in due season (Galatians 6:9). There may be times when progress seems slow or unseen, but God is always at work beneath the surface, refining us and strengthening our faith. Eventually, just as a tree bears fruit when the time is right, our lives will reflect His love, grace, and wisdom—sometimes in ways we don't immediately recognize.

III. HOW ONLY A DEEPENING FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS SHAPES US INTO WHO HE DESIRES US TO BE

Some new Christians believe that, since Christ has given them the gift of new life, it is now their responsibility to live righteously and overcome challenges through their own strength. However, relying solely on personal effort is a path destined for frustration and failure. True spiritual growth does not come from human striving, but from abiding in Christ, trusting in His power, and allowing Him to work within us (John 15:5).

The Word:

9. Why can't our own unaided efforts produce spiritual growth? John 15:4-7
10. How do we grow in our relationship with Christ? Colossians 2:6-7; Hebrews 10:38
11. How important is it that Christ should live within us? Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:16-19; Philippians 2:13

Explanation: The Life-Giving Presence of Christ is the key. Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation—paying the price for our sins, serving as our High Priest and Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 8:1-2), and dwelling within us through the Holy Spirit. Without His constant presence, we are powerless in the battle against sin. Just as we could not bring about our new birth by our own efforts, neither can we live a truly righteous life apart from Him.

Spiritual growth is not self-improvement but a process of drawing life from Christ, the true Vine. We flourish as we began—not by striving in our own strength, but by allowing His miraculous power to transform us. He convicts, we believe, and He empowers.

The mystery of Christ's indwelling presence is one of the most profound teachings in the New Testament. It cannot be fully explained biologically or psychologically—it is a divine reality. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mysteriously one

God, distinct in personality yet perfectly united in purpose. Jesus made this clear when He promised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: *"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them"* John 14:23.

Thus, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us is the presence of God Himself—Father, Son, and Spirit—all working to bring about transformation. Christ dwells in every true believer (Colossians 1:27), and as long as He remains in us, no power on earth or in hell can separate us from Him.

Maintaining our connection with Christ is not about striving for perfection but choosing surrender—daily, moment by moment. If a believer deliberately resists this union, even for a time, the Spirit respectfully withdraws, allowing space for sin's influence. Yet our consistency in the Christian life doesn't hinge on flawless focus, but on a continual, willing response to the Spirit's presence. The secret lies in a heart posture that remains open—abiding in Christ through faith, resetting our gaze when it drifts, and cultivating rhythms that keep His voice near.

Relevance: Our strength comes from Him. *"for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure"* Philippians 2:13. This simple yet profound truth sums up spiritual growth—it is God working within us, not us striving to be holy on our own. We cannot make ourselves righteous; holiness is always the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 15:16). While our faith is demonstrated through obedience (James 4:7-8), we must constantly remember that without Christ dwelling within us, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Yet, that humbling reality contains a glorious promise: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* Philippians 4:13. Christ is yours, and you are His—and as long as this divine union remains unbroken, you are spiritually invincible! Through Him, you will grow, overcome, and reflect His character in ways beyond what human effort alone could ever achieve.

IV. DAILY DEVOTIONS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR STRENGTHENING FAITH AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY

How do we maintain our relationship with Jesus? Scripture provides clear and practical guidance—so straightforward that some may overlook it, searching instead for complex solutions to their complicated struggles. Yet, the truth is profoundly simple: our role in staying connected to Christ is not burdensome or complicated, while His work in unraveling our problems is far beyond what we could accomplish on our own.

Maintaining our union with Christ is about daily, intentional connection—drawing near to Him through prayer, Scripture, and surrender. Though our challenges may seem overwhelming, for Him they are never too great, because He is all-knowing and all-powerful. As we faithfully abide in Him, He faithfully works within us, shaping our lives and guiding us through even the most difficult circumstances.

The Word:

12. Why is daily communion with Christ so vital for spiritual growth? Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2-3, Psalm 5:3, John 15:4-5, I Thessalonians 5:16-18
13. As we come to Christ daily, what two things does He give us by the Holy Spirit? Matthew 11:28-30
14. How does regular study of the Scriptures enable Christ to work more fully in your life? Psalm 119:9; John 15:3; compare John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26

Explanation: It is essential to recognize and partake of the power of prayer and spiritual nourishment. It is always Christ's will to impart the Holy Spirit to those who seek Him, but the key lies in asking. When we neglect prayer, we cannot expect to receive His blessings—though His power is infinite, He desires us to humbly approach Him in faith. Our act of asking is more than a request—it is an exercise in trust, demonstrating our reliance on His guidance and provision.

Jesus promised that when we come to Him, He will give us both rest and purpose—the peace of soul that frees us from fear, anxiety, and sin, and the yoke of service in His kingdom. He does not call us to passively receive while neglecting our responsibility to share His love with the world. Bearing this yoke, however, is impossible without His presence. If we attempt to carry the burdens of life without Christ living within us, they will surely crush us. But when Jesus works through us, the tasks He assigns become not only bearable but deeply fulfilling, giving us a greater purpose than self-interest or worldly success.

Just as physical life depends on air and nourishment, so spiritual life thrives through prayer and Scripture. Prayer is the breath of the soul, and Bible study is its food—through both, we receive divine strength, wisdom, and purification. The Word of God is not just knowledge; it transforms us, shaping our character as its principles take root in our hearts. While scholars may offer insights, true understanding comes through the Holy Spirit—*"He will guide you into all the truth"* John 16:13. Only when God Himself illuminates His Word does it bring life-changing power that deepens our spiritual growth.

Relevance: Spiritual growth hinges on daily prayer and Bible study. Without them, our connection to Christ weakens, and drifting away becomes inevitable. However, when we consistently seek Him, His presence strengthens us, enabling us to meet life's challenges with faith, wisdom, and resilience. A life rooted in devotion shapes our character, drawing us ever closer to Jesus. As we abide in Him, we become more like Him, reflecting His love, grace, and truth. Just as neglecting nourishment leads to physical weakness, neglecting time with God leads to spiritual decline. But the opposite is also true—when we devote ourselves to communion with Christ, we grow stronger and flourish in His presence, becoming unwavering disciples in the journey of faith.

V. HOW CHRIST CAN PROGRESSIVELY CHANGE OUR LIVES

To be like Christ in heart and in lifestyle is the aim of every surrendered Christian. That is why Jesus came to live here on our earth and to die for our sins, so that we might through His grace and by His indwelling, emulate His character.

The Word:

15. What made the prophets and apostles such spiritual giants? Acts 4:13; James 5:17

16. Into whose likeness are we progressively changed as we allow the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts? 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10-11

Explanation: When the Apostle John first became a follower of Jesus, he and his brother were known as “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). They were confident, loud, intolerant, ambitious young men who were very anxious to be important in the eyes of others. On one occasion, Jesus and the disciples were passing through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem. They wanted to find lodging in a Samaritan village, but the prejudice of the Samaritans against Jews led them to refuse accommodation. James and John were very angry. They said, *"Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"* Luke 9:54. Jesus rebuked them. He had come to save, not to destroy.

As John associated with Jesus, he became more gentle, more patient, a genuinely humble, loving Christian. In fact, he became known as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 21:7, 20, 24). Judas associated with the same Lord, but he became more selfish, more political, and more greedy. Yet John drew ever closer to Christ and became a genuinely sanctified man.

What produced the change? For the apostles, Christ was everything. He was not only their Teacher but the very source of their power and transformation. Likewise, He was the Master of the Old Testament prophets, guiding them to speak and act with divine authority. Those who encountered these faithful servants recognized a presence within them that could not be explained in human terms.

Spiritual growth in Christ is not a passive process; it is a continual transformation powered by the Holy Spirit. As believers, our lives are meant to reflect the character of Jesus more and more each day. 2 Corinthians 3:18 beautifully

captures this truth: "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."

When the veil of unbelief is lifted from our hearts, and we truly behold Christ's glory, we begin to mirror His character. This change is not achieved by human effort alone—it is the work of the Holy Spirit. By continually turning our eyes upon Jesus, He progressively transforms us, elevating us from one level of spiritual maturity to the next until His likeness is fully reflected in us.

Relevance: Despite our human weaknesses, you and I can reflect the love and purity of Jesus Christ. Spiritual maturity is not reserved for a select few—it is God's desire for every believer. We do not have to remain on the foothills of spiritual achievement, struggling to grow in faith. By the grace of our indwelling Lord, we can rise higher and higher, deepening our relationship with Him until, like Enoch, we are prepared for His eternal kingdom. This transformation does not happen by accident—it comes through daily prayer, intentional study of Scripture, and an unwavering commitment to Christ.

Are you embracing Christ as the source of your spiritual growth? Have you committed to daily seeking Him so His Spirit can continue its sanctifying work in your heart? May your walk with Christ be marked not by striving for perfection, but by steady renewal. As you abide in Him day by day, may His love shape your steps, His holiness inspire your heart, and His strength lift you when you're weary. Let your spiritual journey be one of gradual transformation—reflecting more and more of His love, holiness, and strength.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. We make ourselves grow spiritually by the work we do for Christ.
 - b. Mysteriously Christ dwells in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Bible study earns God's favor.
 - d. The Holy Spirit within our hearts makes us more like Jesus daily.
2. Discuss: Christ lived a life of absolute perfection, accomplishing the work of salvation in a way no human ever could. While we cannot attain His level of perfection, we are called to follow His example—reflecting His character, overcoming sin through His strength, and serving others with love and humility. How does relying on Christ enable us to grow spiritually and overcome struggles? In what ways can we actively imitate His love and service in our daily lives?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, Chapter 8.