



## LIVING IS GROWING

Course 2, *In the Beginning*, Lesson 11

The Problem: *When the Joy Fades: Rediscovering First Love*. When someone first receives Christ, they often experience a profound sense of joy—deeper and more exhilarating than anything they’ve ever known. Their love for Jesus and the truths of His Word feels fresh, vibrant, and life-changing. A heart once weighed down by defeat and disappointment now overflows with victory and hope. They speak freely and passionately about their faith, eager to share the wonderful things Christ has done. But over time, a shift may occur. The initial excitement begins to fade, and the newness wears off. Scripture no longer seems as alive, and the desire for prayer and Bible study wanes. Spiritual dryness sets in, and the believer may begin to feel distant from God. Old habits from their pre-Christian life start to resurface. Familiar places, people, and patterns begin to look appealing again. This struggle often leads to guilt, confusion, and shame. The believer may ask, “*What happened to the joy I once had?*”

The tragic reality is that they may feel they’ve “*abandoned the love [they] had at first*” (Revelation 2:4). The beauty of their early walk with Christ seems lost. Victory over sin feels elusive. Holiness in Christ appears unattainable. The Lord seems far away, and temptations grow stronger. The believer may even begin to question their sincerity, wondering if they’ve failed or fallen beyond recovery. Why does this happen? Why does the most beautiful experience in life sometimes lose its luster? Why do old temptations return with such force? Is there any hope? Can the joy, love, and victory they once knew be restored?

Yes—there is hope. Scripture speaks directly to this struggle. The Lord has not abandoned us. He understands our weakness, and He offers renewal. Through His Word, we will discover the path back to joy, intimacy, and spiritual vitality.

Objectives:

- I. Exploring Sanctification as a Lifelong Process – Study what the Bible teaches about holiness as an ongoing journey of spiritual growth.
- II. Understanding the Necessity of Growth – Answer the question: If holiness is a gift received through faith, why is continuous spiritual growth still essential?
- III. Recognizing Prayer as a Key to Growth – Examine how prayer strengthens the believer and deepens their relationship with God.
- IV. Emphasizing Bible Study for Spiritual Development – Discover why studying Scripture is an indispensable part of growing in faith and holiness.
- V. Sharing the Blessing of Growth – Understand how failing to share God’s truth can lead to a loss of spiritual vitality.
- VI. Overcoming Temptation Through Biblical Guidance – Learn how the Bible instructs believers to face and handle temptation effectively.

### I. SANCTIFICATION AS A LIFELONG PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The new Christian we spoke of had a thrilling experience with Christ—but then he stopped growing. Scripture reminds us that we cannot depend today on yesterday’s experience. Our relationship with Jesus must be renewed and vital each day. Just as a marriage deepens through daily communication and meaningful expressions of love, so our walk with the Lord grows stronger only as we respond to His presence and cooperate with His work in us.

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

The Word:

1. How did the Apostle Paul express the Lord's desire for our spiritual growth? 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 4:3
2. What progressive work does the Lord do for the church—and for each of us individually? Ephesians 5:26-27
3. How did Peter express the need for spiritual growth? 2 Peter 3:18; compare 2 Peter 1:5; Hebrews 6:1; Ephesians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 9:10

Explanation: The message is clear: we are invited to continually experience more of Christ's love, more of His holiness, and more of His transforming power. In the Christian life, there is no standing still—we are either growing closer to Christ and becoming more like Him, or we are drifting backward spiritually. Growing in grace is the process through which the imperfections in our character are being removed, as God works in us to *“present [us] to himself without spot or wrinkle”* (Ephesians 5:27). This is not a work we accomplish alone—it is the Spirit's work within us, shaping us to reflect the untarnished holiness of Christ. Sanctification is not a one-time event, but a lifelong journey. It is the daily unfolding of Christ's presence in our thoughts, desires, and actions. And it is always rooted in relationship—not performance.

Relevance: Spiritual stagnation does not have to be part of our experience. Christ's plan is for us to grow stronger and deeper in Him each day, empowered by His grace and sustained by His Spirit. Even when we feel stuck or weary, He is faithful to continue the work He began. Will you renew your walk with Him today? Not by striving harder, but by opening your heart to His presence. He is ready to lead you forward—one step, one prayer, one moment of grace at a time.

## II. UNDERSTANDING THE NECESSITY OF GROWTH

Although the Christian believer receives the gift of Christ's righteousness—His holiness—through faith, they still retain their fallen human nature. This fallen self, influenced by the work of Satan, continues to pull the heart away from God. The only way to subdue this tendency is through a daily renewal of the Holy Spirit's presence. Moment by moment dependence on the Spirit's power enables the believer to overcome the pull of the flesh and remain aligned with God's will.

The Word:

4. What constant struggle with his fallen humanity did Paul experience? 1 Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 5: 6-17
5. What counsel are we given in regard to subduing the desires of our fallen humanity? Colossians 3:5-10
6. How can impulses driven by the sinful nature be subjugated? Romans 8:11-14

Explanation: When someone first believes in Jesus, they are clothed in His righteousness—His holiness—through the Holy Spirit. In that transformative moment, eternal life begins (John 3:36), and they are made fully qualified for heaven. The thief on the cross beautifully illustrates this truth. The instant he believed, he received the blessings of sanctification. Though his journey as a believer was brief, he died with the assurance of salvation. Had he lived longer, he would have faced the same daily struggles with fallen humanity that all believers experience. He would have needed to grow spiritually—learning to rely not on his own strength, but on Christ's power to overcome temptation and live in holiness.

Sanctification as growth is a lifelong journey of dependence on Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is not about battling sin in our own strength, but about inviting Christ to work His strength within us. As we place our trust in Him each day, we grow spiritually stronger. His presence becomes the foundation of victory over our fallen nature and the tendencies that once held us captive.

Relevance: Sanctification is both a gift and a journey. It is the gift of present holiness in Christ, received the moment we invite Him into our hearts. At the same time, it is an ongoing process of growth, sustained by daily outpourings of His

Spirit. Scripture presents a profound truth: in Christ, we are already holy—and yet we are also becoming holy. If, like the thief on the cross, you were to pass away shortly after receiving this gift, you would have the assurance of salvation. But if you continue to live, God graciously provides the power needed for ongoing transformation.

Living as a Christian means growing in grace, deepening your relationship with Jesus, and allowing His Spirit to renew your mind day by day. When growth ceases, spiritual decline often begins—and old patterns can resurface. But with the daily presence of Christ, you are equipped to move forward, strengthened by His grace and sustained by His power.

### III. RECOGNIZING PRAYER AS A KEY TO GROWTH

The Bible repeatedly highlights the significance of maintaining a close and intimate relationship with the Lord through frequent and consistent communication with Him. Prayer is not merely a spiritual discipline—it is the lifeline of our relationship with Christ. Through prayer, we receive strength, guidance, renewal, and the joy of His presence.

The Word:

7. What instruction are we given on the importance of much prayer? 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Luke 18:15; Matthew 26:41; 1 Chronicles 16:11; Romans 12:12; Colossians 4:2; 1 Peter 4:7
8. What did Jesus say about the importance of praying in private? Matthew 6:5-6; compare Mark 1:35, 6:46; Luke 6:12
9. Under what conditions will the Lord always answer our prayers? John 15:7; 1 John 5:14-15
10. How important is it that we exercise faith as we approach the Lord in prayer? Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5-7; Mark 11:24

Explanation: It is always the Lord's will to renew our spiritual strength, and we can approach Him with confidence, knowing that He hears and answers our prayers. While selfish or misguided requests may not be granted, God's loving response reflects His perfect wisdom and care for us. When we surrender to His will, we can echo Jesus' prayer: "Not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36).

Sometimes we ask for material blessings and find our requests go unanswered. This does not mean the Lord is absent or unwilling to help. Often, He withholds what we desire because He knows it is not truly for our good. Yet there is one area where His answer is always "Yes"—prayers for spiritual life and strength. When we come before Him humbly and with genuine trust, He graciously provides what we need to grow. Through His holy presence, we receive the gift of present holiness and the power for ongoing transformation.

Prayer is not a ritual—it is a relationship. It is the daily invitation to commune with the One who loves us, strengthens us, and shapes us into His likeness.

Relevance: Do you take time daily to commune with the Lord in prayer? Jesus longs to meet with you—not just to hear your requests, but to share His heart with you. He desires to strengthen and guide you, to renew your mind, and to deepen your relationship with Him. As you come to Him consistently, you open your heart to the blessings of His Spirit and the joy of His presence. Prayer is the pathway to growth, the anchor in temptation, and the source of peace in every season. He is waiting—and He will meet you there.

### IV. BIBLE STUDY AS A MEANS OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

God speaks to us through His Word, offering guidance, comfort, and strength. Imagine writing a heartfelt letter to a dear friend, only for them to ignore it—you would feel hurt and disappointed. In a similar way, consider how the Lord feels when we neglect the precious and encouraging messages He has shared through His inspired prophets in Scripture. These words are His personal communication to us, meant to uplift and sustain us in our daily walk with Him.

The Word:

11. How did Jesus say we would be sanctified? John 17:17-19; 15:3
12. How did the Psalmist indicate that spiritual cleansing takes place? Psalm 119:9-11
13. What does attention to the entire Scriptures do for our spiritual life? 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:2

Explanation: Sanctification, purification, growth in good works, and progress toward victory over sin are all profoundly nurtured by a committed, daily engagement with Scripture. While we cannot earn Christ's gift of holiness through Bible study—His righteousness is freely given to all who believe—the Word of God is an essential instrument used by the Holy Spirit to renew our minds, strengthen us against evil, and guide us in living a life of purity and grace.

Approaching the Word with faith empowers us. It drives back spiritual darkness and equips us to stand firm when temptation arises. Just as Jesus responded to Satan in the wilderness with the authority of Scripture (Matthew 4), we too are called to wield the Word with confidence, declaring, *"Thus says the Lord."*

Daily immersion in Scripture deepens our understanding, making truths that once felt distant become clear and personal. This growing knowledge ignites a deeper love for the Lord and a stronger desire to walk in His ways. The more we know Him through His Word, the more we are transformed by His presence.

Relevance: Have you cultivated the habit of daily Bible study? Setting aside time each day for Scripture and prayer builds consistency—and opens the door to immeasurable spiritual blessings. God's Word is not just information; it is nourishment, strength, and light for the journey. As you open the pages of Scripture, you open your heart to the voice of God. He speaks through His Word to guide, comfort, convict, and renew. The more you engage with Him in this way, the more your life will reflect His holiness and peace.

#### V. SHARING OUR FAITH AS A MEANS OF GROWTH

It has been wisely said, "A witnessing Christian is a growing Christian." The opposite is just as true—when we keep the truths of God's Word to ourselves and fail to share them with others, we risk becoming as stagnant as the Dead Sea. Just as the water of life flows into our hearts, it must also flow out through our words and actions. Only then can we become vibrant and radiant Christians, reflecting the love and truth of Christ to the world around us.

The Word:

14. If we speak to others on Christ's behalf, what will He do for us? Matthew 10:27, 32-33
15. What is Jesus' great commission for every believer? Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8
16. What invitation are we to give as we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit? Revelation 22:17

Explanation: If Jesus was willing to leave the splendor of heaven to enter our world and minister to us, how much more should we devote time and effort to help others experience the gift of salvation we have received. His love is not meant to be hoarded—it is meant to be shared. Jesus Himself assured us that those who truly know Him will naturally become a blessing to others: *"Let anyone who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'"* (John 7:38; see also Isaiah 12:3). This is not a command to perform—it is a promise of overflow.

To truly experience the love of Christ is to be compelled to share it. Yet witnessing takes many forms, shaped by the unique personality and strengths of each believer. For those who are more introverted, sharing Christ's love may happen through quiet acts of kindness, thoughtful writing, deep one-on-one conversations, or simply living as a consistent

testimony of grace. Scripture affirms that we glorify God not only through words, but through actions and the quiet reflection of His character (Matthew 5:16).

The heart of witnessing is not about meeting a specific outward standard—it is about allowing the love of Christ to flow through us in ways that feel authentic. And as we share His love in the manner that best suits us, something extraordinary happens: our own souls are enriched. Drawing others to Jesus draws us closer to Him. By joining Him in His mission to invite others, we experience His strength, His joy, and His presence—regardless of the method we use.

Relevance: Are you growing spiritually as you share your faith with others? Whether through words or quiet service, the world desperately needs the hope and truth you've found in Christ. You don't need to be loud or polished—just willing. Be the channel through which His living water flows. Let your life become a testimony of grace, offering blessings and transformation to those around you in your own unique way. As you do, you'll find that the more you give, the more you receive—and the closer you walk with Him.

## VI. RESISTING SIN AND SUBMITTING TO GOD

A vital component of spiritual growth is learning how to overcome temptation. Even the most committed Christian—someone who prays with fervor, immerses themselves in Scripture, and actively shares their faith—will face intense temptations from Satan. In fact, the more faithful a believer becomes, the harder the devil works to derail them, knowing their faithfulness poses a significant threat to his dark domain.

But how can we overcome temptation? How do we resist what we know is wrong, especially when it aligns with the desires of our fallen nature? These profound questions lie at the very core of our daily spiritual battle, reminding us of the necessity of relying on God's power and grace for victory.

The Word:

17. What are two steps we must immediately take in overcoming temptation? James 4:7-8
18. What power does the Lord promise to give enabling us to overcome? 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 2:18; Jude 14
19. When we have asked for power to overcome a temptation, what is the very next thing we should do? Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 5:20; Hebrews 13:18

Explanation: When faced with the temptation to sin, we should follow three essential steps:

1. Pray for help: Bring your struggle to the Lord, saying, "Dear Lord, I am helpless! I find this tempting, but I don't want to give in. Without Your help, I will fall."
2. Ask for strength: Humbly ask God for victory over the temptation, saying, "Lord, please give me the power to resist. I will do my part to stand against this, but only You can overcome Satan for me. You have promised, and I trust Your Word. I claim Your promise now."
3. Give thanks: Express gratitude and faith by saying, "Thank You, Lord! I believe You have given me the power to overcome this. I praise You and thank You for Your strength!"

These prayers can be offered silently in the moment you are tempted. The third step—giving thanks—is particularly important because praise demonstrates faith. Continually asking without also thanking implies doubt, but when we thank God for answering even before we see the result, we are exercising genuine faith. As Scripture says, "*This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith*" 1 John 5:4.

Human willpower alone is insufficient to overcome the evil one. Paul acknowledged this when he said, "*I can will what is right, but I cannot do it*" (Romans 7:18, RSV). What, then, is the solution? He declares, "*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" (Romans 7:25). Resistance is necessary—God expects us to use our will to stand against sin (James 4:7-

8; Hebrews 12:4)—but resistance by itself cannot defeat Satan. Deliverance comes only when we pray and submit to Christ by faith. In His power, the devil is driven away, and victory is secured.

Relevance: We grow in holiness by experiencing daily victories over sin, empowered by God’s boundless grace. Scripture assures us that no sin is too great to be overcome. Jude 24 proclaims, “*He is able to keep you from falling,*” and 1 Corinthians 10:13 promises that no temptation is beyond the Lord’s power to conquer for you. By relying daily on the gift of the Holy Spirit, we receive both the present reality of holiness in Christ and the ongoing strength for spiritual growth.

Jesus encouraged His followers, “*Abide in Me... for without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:4-5). Sanctification is both a divine gift that we experience now and a lifelong journey of growing in His grace. Praise the Lord for His steadfast faithfulness—He holds us securely in His hands and continually leads us closer to Him. One day, when He comes again, we will dwell with Him and with one another for eternity, united in perfect holiness.

Have you experienced the sanctifying presence of Jesus in your heart?

Are you prepared to surrender your life entirely to Him and embrace the joy of growing spiritually stronger every day?

### *Review Questions*

1. True or False
  - a. The thief on the cross was a sanctified Christian.
  - b. We enjoy the blessings of sanctification even while we are growing.
  - c. Bible study earns the blessing of God.
  - d. Our wills are strong enough to overcome Satan.
  
2. The Bible assures us that no temptation is too strong for the Christian who fully trusts in and depends on Christ. With His power, victory over sin is not only possible but promised. 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us that God provides a way to stand against temptation. Reflect on this truth: If every trusting, dependent believer can overcome through Christ, how can we follow Jesus’ example as an overcomer in our daily lives? What practical steps can we take to rely on His strength and experience consistent victory?