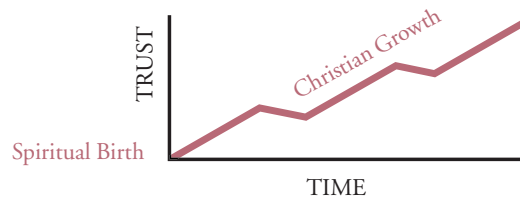


DEVELOPMENT

Previously we learned that the Holy Spirit desires to empower you to live a Christ-directed life. As you continue to breathe spiritually — exhale (confess your sin) and inhale (claim the empowering of the Spirit) — you will experience a deepening fellowship with God. This process will enable you to develop in Christian maturity.

Growth takes time —there are no shortcuts. Becoming mature is a life-long process.



Trusting God + Time = Spiritual Maturity

While spiritual maturity takes years of development in Christ, you can experience God's power and joy in your life even as a young, growing Christian.

1 What does it mean to grow in Christ?

It means to increase in your knowledge of Christ, your love for Him and your obedience to Him.

Read John 17:3. *What does Jesus say is the essence of eternal life?*

Read Matthew 22:37,38. There are more than 600 commands in the Old Testament. *Why do you think Jesus singled out this one?*

Jesus' command to love God with all your being means to put God first in every area of your life. Amazingly, your deepening love for God will enable you to give greater love to your family and friends. Also you'll be better able to prioritize the demands on your life and experience a deeper purpose for living.



KEY QUESTION

What could keep you from putting God first in your life?

Read John 14:21. *What will be a result of your growing love for Him?*

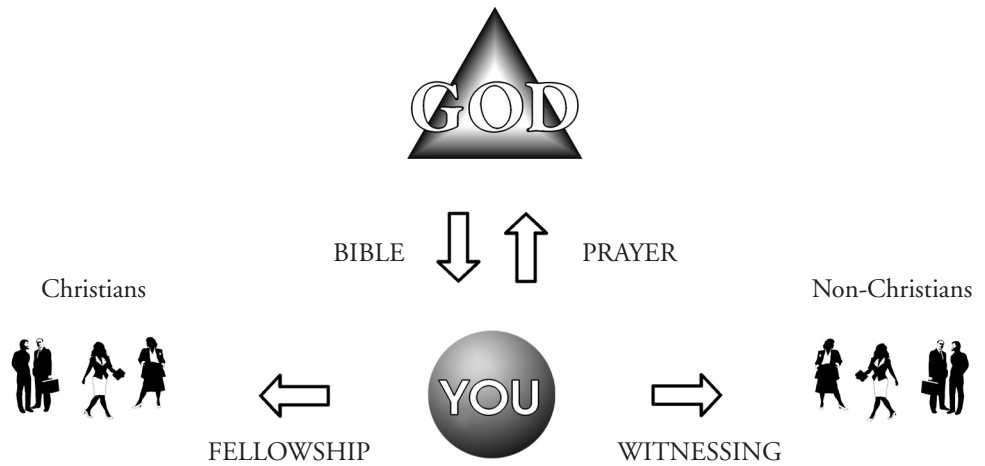


SUMMARY

Growing in Christ means building a loving relationship with Him. As in any relationship, we must take time to get to know Him.

2 How can you grow in Christ?

Growth in Christ depends on developing both your vertical relationship with God and your horizontal relationship with people.



Vertical relationship

Let's look first at how you can develop your relationship with God.

Communication is vital to any relationship, including your relationship with God. God communicates with you through the Bible, and you communicate with God through prayer.

Bible

You can get to know God better by learning what He tells you in the Bible about Himself and how He relates to you.

Read Psalm 145:8,9. *What does God tell you about Himself in this passage?*

Read Psalm 25:8-11. *What does God tell you about how He relates to you?*

Prayer

You can talk with God through prayer — sharing your thoughts, your needs and your desires.

Read Philippians 4:6,7. *What is God's solution to worry?*

What are some things that you can be praying about?

Read Psalm 28:6,7. *What should be the natural response of a person when God answers his prayers?*

Prayer helps you to grow in your relationship with Christ. As you express your appreciation to Him, share your heart with Him, and see His answers to your prayers, your faith and love will grow.

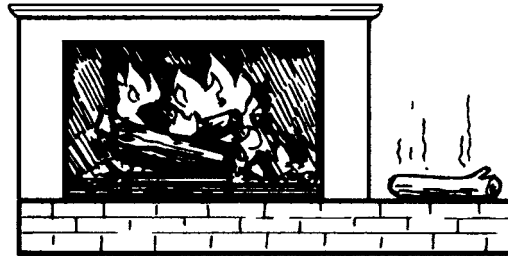
Horizontal relationship

Growth in Christ also depends on developing your relationship with people.

As with your vertical relationship with God, developing your horizontal relationship with people involves communication. You communicate with Christians in “fellowship.” You communicate your faith in Christ with non-Christians through “witnessing.”

Fellowship

You will greatly benefit by spending time with other Christians in fellowship — encouraging and building up one another.



Several logs burn brightly together; but put one aside, and the flame will die out. So it is with your relationship to other Christians.

Read Hebrews 10:24,25. *Why is it important for you to spend time with other Christians?*

Read Acts 2:46,47. *Where can you find supportive Christian fellowship on a consistent basis?*

God created us so that apart from Christian fellowship, we cannot grow to Christian maturity. We need to share our Christian experience with others who love God and walk with Him, and likewise allow them to share with us.

God has designed the local church to be the principal means of providing Christian fellowship and teaching from God's Word. Bible studies and other Christian meetings are also extremely helpful.

Witnessing

You will grow in Christ as you tell others about Him. The term “witnessing” can have a negative meaning to some. It simply means sharing with someone about your relationship with Christ and how he or she can also know Him.

Read Acts 4:12. *What would motivate you to share with another person about Christ?*

Who would you like to tell about what Christ has done in your life?

**SUMMARY**

God wants you to grow in your love relationship with Him. These four avenues of communication will enable you to build both your relationship with God and Christ-centered relationships with people. The result will be growth toward spiritual maturity.

3 Who is responsible for your growth in Christ?

Some people think that they are totally responsible for their spiritual growth. Others believe that God causes them to grow no matter what they do. Let's see what the Bible says.

“For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” — Philippians 2:13

“... Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. ... Godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” — 1 Timothy 4:7,8

So, according to these verses, who is responsible for your spiritual growth?



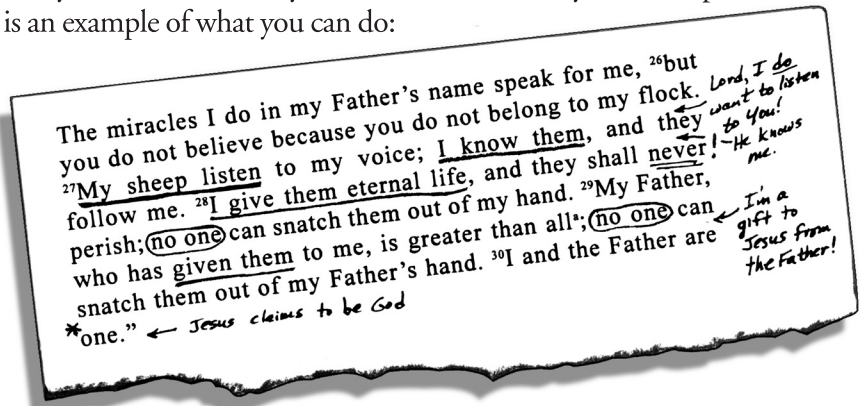
KEY QUESTIONS

What will it take for you to grow in this partnership with God? Is it worth it? (See John 15:10,11.)

Remember, God loves you unconditionally — just the way you are. His boundless love toward you is not dependent upon the amount of your growth.

4 What can you do now?

- Set aside time and a place for daily personal Bible study. You may want to begin your study in the Gospel of John. As you read, underline particularly meaningful verses. Pray. Ask God to show you who He is and how you can respond to Him. Here is an example of what you can do:



Some additional suggested passages for study are the ones in this lesson. Other passages are: Colossians 1:9-12; Matthew 7:7-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Psalm 1; Psalm 34; Psalm 103; Psalm 145; John 15:1-7; and Luke 9:23-26.

- Spend a few minutes each day in prayer. Tell God your concerns, confess any sins, ask Him to direct you and thank Him for His blessings.
- If you are not already attending a church where Christ is honored and the Bible is taught, begin as soon as possible.
- Become involved in a Bible study or discipleship group where you can enjoy the encouragement of others who also are learning more about their life in Christ.
- Remember to talk to someone about Christ (Psalm 73:28).

