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"GROWING IN THE LORD"

Teachers and preachers frequently use the phrase, "Growing in the Lord." What does that mean? How can we know if we are? And how do we do it? You probably have your own ideas about this, but let me share some thoughts that come to me:

- Are you as faithful to God when He seems far away as when you sense His presence? God is everywhere. He is omnipresent. But most of the time we don't sense His presence. I think the biggest joy in life is to be aware of God's presence. It is pure ecstasy. But I don't think we grow as Christians in such moments. We grow in faith and obedience when God seems unreal or far away. Therefore, for our good, God withdraws from us most of the time. (Actually, He is always near, but we don't sense or feel His presence.) It is easy for a man to be faithful to his wife when she travels with him to a distant city, but how does he act when he travels alone?
- Are you growing in love for God? The Great Commandment, the most important one, the thing that God wants most of all from you and me, is that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. God showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, living in rebellion against Him, He sent His Son to die for us. Such amazing love! The only thing you and I can ever do to satisfy God is to love Him back with a "hot" love. We are warned about letting our love grow cold. We are warned that a love for God that is lukewarm makes him want to vomit! Yes, that is exactly what God says about the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3. I hope that when God looks at me, He doesn't get nauseous! And Paul warns us (2 Cor. 11:3), not to be "seduced (by the devil and the world) from a whole-hearted and sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Watch out! The devil is trying all sorts of tricks to get your mind focused on something other than Christ. Remember Jesus' parable about the seeds. (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8) Some of the seeds fell among thorns where the love of money, the cares of the world, the love of riches, and all sorts of pleasures, choke the seed and kill it.
- What are you thinking about most of the time? (This is the way Jesus' parable works out in our life.) What you are thinking about is what you are becoming. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." I read that during the

teen years, when hormones rage, the average teen thinks about sex every few seconds. Have your thoughts gotten past your teen years? In these trying times, a lot of people do a lot of worrying about their job, security, retirement. Again, some people spend a lot of time thinking about their wounds: what a terrible father they had; what a rotten person their husband or wife turned out to be, etc. They may even fantasize about revenge, or about what God is going to do to them. These are the thorns that choke the seed. They prevent us from growing in the Lord.

- Are you merciful in your thoughts and attitudes toward difficult people? The second part of the Great Commandment is that we love our neighbor as ourselves. The Bible says that the way we treat people demonstrates our love, or our lack of love, for God. Jesus said that the level of mercy and forgiveness we give to others is exactly the level God will give to us. Whoa! God just reminded me of my attitude toward a certain person. I think I need to repent and start extending mercy.
- Do you discipline yourself to read and study the Bible regularly, and to pray regularly? If you are not doing these basic things, then don't try to tell me that you really want to "grow in the Lord." You are lying to yourself and to God.
- Are you growing in giving (time, money, energy) to the Kingdom of God? I read that about one out of four Protestant Christians admit that they never give any money to the church or missions or the poor! That would be unbelievable to me except that I was a pastor for 30 years. There were members of our church who never gave a dime to anything. Do you realize that the Bible never tells us to give a tithe (10%) to the church? The Bible always tells us to "pay" our tithes, not to give them. This is the distinction: Every month you send the bank the mortgage payment on your home. The banker doesn't call you and say, "Oh, thank you so much for giving me that money! You are so kind and generous!" No, you didn't give him anything. You simply paid him back his own money, plus interest. You owe him that money, and if you don't pay it you are going to end up out on the street. God makes it clear that we owe Him ten percent of our income - the first ten percent, not whatever is left over. He also

promises to bless us if we will be faithful in this little matter. I have also read that the average Christian "gives" his church less than two percent of his wages. So the average Christian does not believe the Bible in this area at all. Possibly this indicates he doesn't believe the Bible in a lot of other areas either. If you aren't faithful in this "little thing" of giving (that is what the Bible calls it), you aren't really serious about growing in the Lord.

▪ Are you growing in inner peace? I love the way the Amplified Bible words the ending of the book of 1 Peter: *"To all of you that are in Christ Jesus, may there be peace (every kind of peace and blessing, especially peace with God, and freedom from fears, agitating passions, and moral conflicts.) Amen."* Isn't that beautiful? My ambition is to have peace with God and complete freedom from all fears, agitating passions, and moral conflicts. That is a part of the "true riches" that Christ offers to us.

▪ Are you growing in obedience to God? Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep (obey) my commandments." What are His commandments? Read the Bible and you will discover many. Listen to His voice, and He will speak some personal commandments to your heart. ("My sheep know my voice.") 1 Peter 4:17 indicates that we are not only to believe the gospel but obey the gospel. Romans says the way to salvation is to believe in your heart and confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord. That means we accept Jesus not only as Savior, but as Lord, Master, Boss, King. If He is not our Lord, He cannot be our Savior. You don't negotiate with a King, you obey him. The great thing is that our King is not a tyrant, He is a King of love who has our best interest at heart. The old song says, "Trust and obey, there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Trust is another word for faith. Although it is not commonly understood, obedience, too, is a crucial aspect of faith. Our obedience should be instant and total. Partial obedience is disobedience.

There is an old saying: "You have as much of God as you want." Look through the above list to see how much of God you really want.

AN EXCITING HEALING

The other day I was with a few others at the Healing Rooms in Grand Junction ministering to a lady in her 40's. She came in with much stiffness and pain in her back and told us she had been suffering for six years. I asked her what had happened six years ago, and she said her 12-year old daughter had died at that time. Her daughter had suffered with cancer and had undergone chemo-therapy. She was doing much better, but then she was with her father in a car that was struck by a drunk

driver. She seemed to recover from the accident but died within a short time. The mother's grief and pain were plain to be seen in her face and eyes. She said that the death of their daughter had changed her husband: he had turned away from God and the church and had become a bitter man. The lady brought a big book of photographs with her and showed us the record of her daughter's life. She also said that she had made a certain place in their home a shrine to her daughter's memory.

Grief, of course, is a normal human emotion, and it is a God-given way for people to work through the terrible pain of loss. But many people can become stuck in grief, and their normal emotion of grief can become a spirit, a "spirit of grief" that is from the enemy.

We led this dear lady through steps of forgiveness and repentance: to forgive -

- the drunk driver
- the doctors who she thought were irresponsible and were totally lacking in compassion and sensitivity,
- her husband, who had given up and left her isolated to deal with her loss
- God, whom she blamed for the death of her daughter (We led her to thank God for her daughter's life, for the reality that she was with God in a far better place, and we led her to release her daughter into God's loving hands.)
- Herself, for any mistakes and sins in connection with all of this
- We led her to repent of her self-pity and her blaming of God and others
- We led her to repent of building a shrine for her daughter which was a way to hold onto her grief and refuse to go on in life.
- We led her to renounce the spirit of grief and to command it to go.
- We led her to renounce the spirit of infirmity connected to her back pain.

When all of this was done, we prayed for her healing, had her stand and bend over and touch her toes. She did this and immediately burst into tears of gratitude to God. She was instantly and totally healed! Praise the Lord! We also prayed for her husband and asked her to encourage him to come for ministry. I love this job!

UNRIGHTEOUSNESS AND GODLESSNESS

The Bible warns us time and again about unrighteousness and godlessness, "anomia" and "asebia" in Greek. Unrighteousness is lawlessness, breaking God's commandments. Take one commandment, the 8th: "You shall not steal." Have you ever had something stolen from you? It made you

feel sick, angry, violated. Wouldn't it be great to live in a place where everyone was honest, where you didn't have to lock up your house, and your car, and your tool shed, and your locker, and pay for internet protection for your computer, and pay for police departments and justice departments and jails and prisons. God's commandments are good. And Romans 13 tells us that love is the fulfilling of the law. If you love someone you are not going to steal from them. The Bible tells us to work hard to provide for our own needs and so we will have something left over to help others.

Don't be unrighteous! "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these (other) things will be added to you."

"Asebia" is godlessness. This means to live as if there is no God, to dismiss God from your mind. Ooooooh, we can slip into this sin without even thinking about it!

The Bible tells us time and again to remember God. Remember what God did in the past in history and in your life. Remember God's kindness to you. Remember how He has helped you times without number. A Psalm tells us to "Set the Lord always before you." We have to choose every day, every moment, to remember God. If we set the TV before us for hours on end, it will help us to forget God if that is what we want to do. Years ago a commentator wrote that if mankind continued to watch TV, eventually a man's eyes would be as big as saucers and his brain would be the size of a pea. I think that time has arrived. Don't be godless! Remember the Lord. Set Him always before you.

GOD CAN USE ANYONE

Bayless Conley told about a man who used to be in his church who was mentally challenged. He would blurt out things during the sermon, and he would come to the office during the week and freak out the staff. One Sunday after the message Bayless was out on the steps shaking hands with folks as they left the church, and this man grabbed Bayless, whirled him around and said, "Look!" and pointed to the sky. Bayless looked up and said, "Yes, I see the clouds. They are beautiful." But the man said, "Don't you see the numbers in the clouds?" Bayless said he didn't see the numbers but that everything was all right. The man did things like that all the time.

Then one night at an evening service the man showed up with a gorgeous woman. At the end of the service, this woman came forward and gave her life to Christ. Later, Bayless was talking to her and found out that she was a beauty contest winner. He said to her, "I was just wondering how it was that you came to church with that fellow?" She told him her story: She said that her father was a university professor, and her mother was a professional woman, and that they were atheists. From the beginning of her life they told her again and again that there is no God. She said she believed her parents and never gave God a thought. But that morning she was with one of her girl friends, lying on the beach in a bikini,

reading a book, when a thought popped into her mind: "What if my parents were wrong? What if there is a God?" The thought startled and frightened her. She prayed for the first time in her life: "God, I don't know if you are real and if you are there, but if you are, please let me know in some way that you are real." She lay back on the sand and in less than a minute a strange little man dressed in a suit walked up to her, looked down into her eyes and said, "Did you know that there is a God, and He is real?" The man invited her to visit his church, and she came and gave her life to Christ.

If God can use that man, He can probably use you and me. Right?

THE GREATNESS OF GOD

Seven years ago I was driving down the street with Doris, my wife of 53 years, when she had a stroke and slumped forward. I called her name in alarm, but she was gone. Her body was still right next to me, but Doris, my wife, the person I had known, the mother of our four children, was gone, she was gone to God.

You and I are spirits. We have a body, but we not our body. God is a spirit. He doesn't have a body. He fills the universe the way we fill our body.

The earth is a big glob of molten iron, over 2,000 degrees, with a thin crust or mantle floating on top. The continents are like potato chips floating in a vat of boiling oil. Every once in a while, the molten iron spews out, and we call that a volcano. Every once in a while, the potato chips bump into each other, and we call that an earthquake.

The great, magnificent, incredible God who created all of this, has made Himself known - - through the history of the Jews, through the Bible, and through Jesus Christ. If you can't trust the God who created all of this and who revealed His great love and His great purpose through Jesus, what in the world are you trusting?

God Bless,

Glenn

Web-site: www.glennbrownministries.com

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