

spiritual growth

How important is spiritual growth in Christian life?

Spiritual growth is the process of becoming more mature in one's relationship with Jesus Christ. Someone who is growing spiritually will become more and more like Christ. The spiritually mature will be able to "distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14). Spiritual growth begins the moment a person comes to faith in Christ and should continue until a person enters Christ's presence after this life.

Spiritual growth is expected of the believer. The author of Hebrews reprimands his readers for "no longer try[ing] to understand" (Hebrews 5:11 NIV) and "being still an infant" (Hebrews 5:13). The criticism leads to exhortation: "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity" (Hebrews 6:1). The apostle Peter says, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Scripture offers valuable insights into how a Christian can grow spiritually. It is Christ's power in the believer that gives us the ability to grow spiritually (2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 3:20). As we rely on His power and follow His teachings, we can develop greater maturity.

Peter provides a peek at the process: "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-8).

Involvement in a local church and the exercise of our spiritual gifts are invaluable to the development of maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16). Rather than be swayed by every errant doctrine that comes along, we can speak "the truth in love," with the result that "we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

To evaluate spiritual growth, we can measure our improvement in the "fruit of the Spirit." The Spirit desires to produce these qualities in us: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Are we increasing in love? in joy? in patience? If so, we are growing spiritually.

We should be aware that growth often comes through trials. Just as physical strength is built through exertion and straining against resistance, spiritual strength is developed in the hard times of life. "No pain, no gain," as they say. James encourages: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the

testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).

Because growth comes through trials, Scripture also teaches we are not to grow weary in the process. Much spiritual development is the result of persistence. "As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good" (2 Thessalonians 3:13). "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).

It is God's will that we grow to be more like Jesus. We also have the promise that the Lord Himself will oversee our growth and bring us to maturity. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6 NIV).

"Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11).