

Spiritual Growth

What Makes Life Worth Living?

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The Nature of Spiritual Growth

God desires the spiritual growth of his people:

- Matthew 5:48
- Hebrews 6:1
- 2 Corinthians 13:9-11
- Ephesians 1:4
- Ephesians 2:10
- Ephesians 3:17-19
- Philippians 3:12
- 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 7
- 2 Timothy 1:9

The Nature of Spiritual Growth

Christlikeness is the goal of spiritual growth:

- Romans 8:29
- Ephesians 4:13-15
- Philippians 2:5
- 1 John 3:2-3

Aspects of Spiritual Growth

- Growth in Grace (2 Pet. 3:18; Proverbs 4:18; 1 Pet. 2:1-3)
- Growth in Faith (2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 10:15)
- Growth in Love (1 Thessalonians 3:12; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 14:1; Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; Hebrews 10:24; 1 John 4:7-21; 1 John 5:1-3)

The Nature of Spiritual Growth

Growth in Understanding:

- Psalm 119:27
- 1 Corinthians 14:20
- Psalm 119:97-99
- Romans 12:2
- Romans 16:19
- 1 Corinthians 13:11
- Ephesians 1:17-19
- Philippians 1:9-10
- Colossians 1:9
- Hebrews 5:14

The Nature of Spiritual Growth

Growth in Holiness:

- 2 Corinthians 7:1
- Ephesians 5:25-26
- Hebrews 2:11
- Hebrews 10:10-14
- Hebrews 12:14
- Hebrews 13:12
- 1 Peter 1:15-16

The Nature of Spiritual Growth

Growth in Fruitfulness:

- John 15:16
- Matthew 13:23
- Mark 4:20
- Luke 8:15
- John 15: 2,8
- Philippians 1:11
- Colossians 1:10

Growth in Contentment

- Philippians 4:11-12
- 1 Timothy 6:6
- Hebrews 13:5

Means of Spiritual Growth

God Supplies the Resources for Spiritual Growth:

- Philippians 2:13
- 2 Peter 1:3
- John 1:16
- John 15: 2,5
- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 2 Corinthians 3:18
- 2 Corinthians 9:10
- Galatians 5:22-23
- Philippians 1:6
- Colossians 2:19
- James 1:17
- James 4:6
- Jude 24

Means of Spiritual Growth

God's People must Make Efforts to Grow Spiritually :

- Philippians 2:12
- 2 Peter 1:5-9
- Romans 6:19
- 2 Corinthians 7:1
- Galatians 5:16, 25
- Ephesians 5:15-16
- Ephesians 6:11-13
- 1 Timothy 4:7
- 1 Timothy 6:11-12
- 2 Timothy 1:6
- 2 Peter 3:14
- 1 John 3:3
- Jude 20

Specific Means of Spiritual Growth

Death to Self-Interest:

- Colossians 3:5
- Matthew 16:24
- Mark 8:34
- Luke 9:23
- Romans 6:6, 12
- Romans 8:13
- Ephesians 4:22
- Colossians 3:9
- 1 Peter 1:14
- 1 Peter 2:11

Specific Means of Spiritual Growth

Prayer:

- Matthew 6:13
- Luke 11:4, 13
- Colossians 4:2
- 1 Chronicles 16:11
- Matthew 7:11
- Matthew 26:41
- Mark 14:38
- Luke 22:46
- John 16:24
- Acts 4:29-31
- Ephesians 6:18
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- James 1:5

Specific Means of Spiritual Growth

Focusing on Jesus Christ:

- Hebrews 3:1
- Matthew 11:29
- John 13:15
- Romans 15:5
- Philippians 2:5
- Hebrews 12:2-3
- 1 Peter 2:21
- 1 John 2:6

Specific Means of Spiritual Growth

The Scriptures:

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Joshua 1:8
- Psalm 19:7-8
- Psalm 119:9-11
- John 17:17
- Ephesians 6:17
- Colossians 3:16
- 1 Peter 2:2
- 1 John 2:14

What Makes Life Worth Living

Scripture Text: Hebrews 4:12 *“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

God’s truth is effective:

All of us travel through life with blind spots. That’s why we need rearview mirrors that enable us to see passing traffic and other dangers as we would not see otherwise. Scripture functions a lot like those mirrors. It provides a clear picture of what’s going on in our lives. (Heb. 4:12)

This one verse tells us volumes about the Word of God – about its identity, its characteristics, and its abilities.

Word of God - Identity

Its identity. The phrase “the word of God” refers specifically to the Bible. But in a broader, nontechnical sense, the Word of God includes anything that God utters and anything or anyone through whom He speaks. So when a counselor gives biblically based advice and God uses that to lance a festering emotional wound, the Word of God has done its work. When a song sung to biblical lyrics echoes through an auditorium, it is the Word of God that is being heard. Regardless of the vessel it is poured from, the water is the same refreshing, life-giving Word of God. See how Paul concurs in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 regarding his own preaching.

“His preaching was not the outgrowth of personal philosophical meanderings, but was deeply rooted in a message given by God himself...Once received, this Word of God becomes an active power operating continually in the believer’s life.

Word of God - Identity

First: It is living: The Word is alive. Like an acorn that has within it a thousand forests, so the Word of God lies in the pages of Scripture like dormant seed within a silo, waiting only a diligent sower to spread it and a fertile heart to receive it (Matt. 13:1-23; Rom. 10:8-15).

Second: It is active: The Greek word translated “active” is *energes*, from which we get the word energy. The Word of God is dynamic. It has energy. It does things nothing else can do. It touches us where nothing else can reach. News articles may inform us. Novels may inspire us. Poetry may enrapture us. But only the living, active Word of God can transform us.

Third: It is sharp: How sharp? “*Sharper than any two-edged sword.*” The Word of God has an edge to it. It’s not a blunt instrument with which we bludgeon our opposition; rather, it has a keen edge that knifes its way into the innermost recesses, where no surgeon’s scalpel can go.

Word of God - Identity

Its abilities. Two abilities of the Word of God are mentioned in Hebrews 4:12:

First: It has the ability to pierce. The word means “to go through something.” Unfortunately, even the most eminent of medical surgeons can’t operate on the soul. No surgical technique can correct a bad attitude, a closed mind, a rebellious spirit, a lustful heart, hypocrisy, greed, hatred, or an unforgiving spirit. These are all spiritual problems and must be dealt with by spiritual means. That’s where the Word of God comes in and does its work. One of the things that sets Jesus apart from other religious teachers is that He spoke the Word of God. Not the words of rabbinic tradition. Not the words of contemporary philosophy. But the incisive Word of God that cuts deep into the marrow of the soul (Matt. 7:28-29; John 8:45-46).

The essential character of the Word of God in its inexhaustible vitality and dynamic efficacy is clearly defined in Isa. 55:11. The vigor and the potency of his word are seen in its operation as his creating word (Gen. 1:3; Heb. 11:3), his sustaining word (Heb. 1:3), and his regenerating word (2. Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:23)

Word of God - Identity

Second: It has the ability to judge. The Greek word is kritikos. It literally means “to sift out, analyze, scrutinize.” We get our words critical and critic from it. The Word functions like an X-ray that enables a doctor to see beyond what any picture could ever show. It is through the deep, penetrating ability of the Word of God that our innermost thoughts and intentions are revealed – as was the case with the woman Jesus met at the well: *“Come, see a man who told me all things that I have done.” (John 4:29).*

Some of us today have a great deal of troubles resting in the Lord. Often we don’t even know why. But there is a desire within our souls that says, “I want that rest. I need it. I must find relief to this churning and stress. But I just can’t seem to enter into it.” One of the reasons we can’t experience that rest is that we have a tendency to hide from the truth. That’s where the Word of God comes into the picture – to pen our hearts to the truth by its piercing revelations.

Word of God - Identity

Our Hiding is Futile.

When we fear that things are not quite right with us physically, an interesting phenomenon often occurs: we put off going to the doctor, the very one who could help us. Mainly because we don't want to hear bad news. We won't want to face the truth about ourselves because it's painful, and because we fear surgery and shots. The same is true spiritually, which is precisely why the writer wrote Hebrews 4:13

Verse 13 is an encapsulation of Psalm 139:1-13, where we see God producing His *magnum opus* in the cramped workshop of a pitch-black womb. From such an almighty God, nothing can be hidden – not even the dark secrets of our heart.

Two thoughts emerge from our understanding of Hebrews 4:13. One, God's word has a universal scope. No creature is hidden from His sight, not one. Not even so much as a sparrow (Matt. 10:29). Second, to God's eyes, there is unlimited exposure. Notice the key terms "open" and "laid bare" in Hebrews 4:13.

Word of God - Identity

Our Hiding is Futile.

Second, to God's eyes, there is unlimited exposure. Notice the key terms "open" and "laid bare" in Hebrews 4:13.

The first term means "uncovered" and is used in 1 Corinthians 15:37 for a bare kernel of grain. In Acts 19:16 the same word is used to describe people who are naked. Before God we all stand naked and exposed. We have no cloak for our souls.

The second term, "laid bare," is from the Greek word *trachelos*, from which we get our word trachea, which means "throat." Wrestlers in biblical times had a certain hold that involved seizing an opponent and twisting the neck so as to render him powerless, and the term *trachelos* was used to describe it. The term was also used to describe the pulling back of the head of a sacrificial animal before slitting its throat, and of a criminal's throat with the point touching his chin; that way he was forced to hold his head up, instead of bowing to conceal it in shame. The picture is of a criminal having to face God in heaven without being able to look away from His presence. So the word connotes not only exposure, but also accountability.

Word of God - Identity

God's Word discerns the heart. God's Word promises rest to those who believe.

His Word of promise is not a lifeless letter; it is not paper and ink. God's Word and His promise are living – they are a living reality. Four things are said about the Word of God and His promises.

- A. The Word of God is “quick”: alive and living. The idea is that the Word of God is always alive and active; it is always working and quickening its message to the human heart. Therefore God's word of rest is not a dead and meaningless promise; it is living and full of life to the heart of the believer.
- B. The Word of God is “powerful”: active, working, energizing. God's word of promise, His rest of salvation, is powerful. It is not dormant and inactive. It is actually active and working, energizing the heart of the believer.
- C. The Word of God is “sharper than any two edged sword.” The word “sharper” means to cut. It is penetrating and convicting. It does not leave a soul alone. The Word of God will not let a soul who hears it ignore God's promise of rest.

Word of God - Identity

God's Word discerns the heart. God's Word promises rest to those who believe.

D. The Word of God is “piercing” to go through. It goes right through the soul and spirit of man. It is the Word of God that takes man’s earthly, soulish nature and separates it from the spiritual call and promise of God. It pierces and separates a man’s soul and spirit just as a sword pierces a man’s joints and marrow.

- It separates a proud soul from a humble spirit.
- It separates a sinful soul from a righteous spirit.
- It separates a rebellious soul from an obedient spirit
- It separates a unbelieving soul from a believing spirit

God’s Word sees whether a person believes or does not believe His promise of rest.

God’s Word actually sees through the thoughts and purposes of a person. (Rom. 1:16; Jer. 5:14; Jer. 23:29).

God sees all things. He knows if we believe in Him and His promise of eternal rest or not. He knows if we are making a false profession or if we are truly following Christ. (Job 10:14; Jer. 2:22; Jer. 16:17; Ezk. 11:5; Hos. 7:2, Amos 5:12, Lk. 12:2; 1 Cor. 4:5; Num. 32:23, Eccl. 12:14

Word of God - Identity

God's Word discerns the heart. God's Word promises rest to those who believe.

1. The Word of God is the reflecting mirror of life. It reflects and exposes the kind of person one is. (Jas. 1:22-25; Rom. 3:9-27)
2. The Word of God is the burning fire of conviction. It burns and consumes the heart, the conscience of men. (Jer. 23:29; Jer. 5:14; Lk. 24:32)
3. The Word of God is the pounding hammer which crushes the hardness of man's heart.
4. The word of God is the reproducing seed of new birth. Man is spiritually born again by hearing and believing the Word (1 Pet. 2:23; Rom. 10:17)
5. The Word of God is the nourishing food of the believer. The believer grows and lives and is built up through the study of the Word (Mt. 4:4; Acts 20:32; Heb. 5:12-14).
6. The Word of God is the guiding light of the believer (Ps. 119:105)
7. The Word of God is the cleansing water of sanctification. God washes and cleanses His own, the church, through the use of the Word. (Jn. 15:3; 17:17; Eph. 5:25-26)
8. The Word of God is the measuring instrument by which one receives the approval of God (2 Tim. 2:15)

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Spiritual Growth – Ephesians 3:16-18; Ephesians 1:13-14, 17; Ephesians 2:19-22

Christian Leadership:

- Ephesians 4:11-13
- 1 Corinthians 4:16
- 1 Corinthians 11:1
- Philippians 1:25
- Philippians 3:17
- Hebrews 13:7, 17
- 1 Peter 5:2-3

Faith in God

- Ephesians 6:16
- Hebrews 11:6
- 1 John 5:4

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Spiritual Growth – Ephesians 3:16-18; Ephesians 1:13-14, 17; Ephesians 2:19-22

Suffering and Testing:

- Romans 5:3-4
- Job 23:10
- Psalm 119:67
- Zechariah 13:9
- Hebrews 12:10-11
- 1 Peter 1:6-7
- James 1:2-4

Perseverance

- Hebrews 12:1
- Philippians 3:12-14
- 1 Timothy 4:15

Cultivating Wholesome Thinking

Philippians 4:8