



A True Way for This Modern Day

Five Steps to Christian Growth

By Jim Wilsford

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1. Christians Grow by Attending the Worship Services

William Wordsworth—one of the great romantic poets of the 19th century—said:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

In the 21st century, we are still getting and spending in the most materialistic world ever. As we seek material things—homes, clothes, cars, entertainments, and stock portfolios—we often forget Jesus' admonition in Matt 6:31-33:

31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Being Where the Lord Is

The urgency of being with the Lord demands that we not only be where he is; but if we truly love them, tell others so they may be there too. Andrew felt this urgency in John 1:40-42:

40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus.

If one were to say, "Come to this place and see the Lord, for he is there." We would all drop everything and go. Yet, we are so busy with our lives that we cannot go where the Lord has said that he will surely be. In Matt 18:20, he told us where he would always be, "20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." We all have responsibilities before our Lord. Will we let getting and spending get in the way of our spiritual service? The Lord has promised that where two or more come together, there He will be. Should we not come and bring our children to be there with him? Should we not urgently invite others? The best way to secure Christian growth is to be where the Lord is.

Attending Services—a Command of God

We should desire to be at the meetings of the church because the Lord is there. However, we should also attend these meetings because it is a command of God that we attend. In the middle of all our "getting and spending," we often put our spiritual service on the back burner—letting everything else come first. We hustle here and there; meet all our appointments for recreation, entertainment, and work. Yet, we often neglect the most important meetings of our life—those at church with our fellow Christians and our Lord Jesus Christ. God commanded in Heb 10:25:

25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Actually, this command is two-fold: do not give up meeting together, and encourage one another. It would be difficult, indeed, to forsake the assembly after we have encouraged others to attend. If we forsake the assembly, we miss those aspects of study and worship that see us through the trouble, strife, and heartache of life; and we are less for it; the church is less

for it; our weaker brethren and children are less for it. However, if we attend faithfully, we surely will grow spiritually.

The Lord's Supper—a Communion with the Lord

When we miss the worship service, we miss participating in those activities that refine and define our spiritual existence. One of these activities is the Lord's Supper. The Lord promised to be with us to take his supper in his kingdom. In Matt 26:27-29, the Lord instituted the Lord's Supper:

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

It is in this supper in his kingdom that we participate and fellowship with the Lord. Paul taught in 1 Cor 10:15-17:

15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

During the Lord's Supper, we declare the Lord's death until he comes, and we examine ourselves. In 1 Cor 11:26-28, Paul taught:

26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

To miss the services of the church is to miss the Lord's Supper. To miss the Lord's Supper is to miss communing with the body and blood of Jesus, to miss proclaiming his death until he comes again, and to fail to examine ourselves. A failure to participate with the Lord in his supper weakens us, making it impossible to grow as a Christian.

The Breaking of the Bread of Life—the Word of God

When we miss the meetings of the church, we miss the "breaking of the bread of life," which is the word of God. John recorded the teaching of the Lord in John 6:44-48:

44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life.

The early Christians came together to break bread as in the Lord's Supper, but they also shared the word of God. The very first Christians immediately began and continued in this practice. Acts 2:42 recorded this practice: "42 They devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and to the fellowship, to **the breaking of bread** and to prayer." Acts 20:7 records how those at Troas heard Paul preach when they came together for the Lord's Supper:

7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight."

It is at these meetings of the church where we are to teach and admonish one another. Paul instructed us in Eph 5:19-20:

“19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He repeated this teaching in Col 3:16:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Without your presence at the meetings of the church, can you teach and admonish your fellow Christians? Can they teach and admonish you? Surely Christian growth begins and ends with the nourishment that comes from “breaking the bread of life.”

Hurting Ourselves, Our Children, and Our Friends

The first step to growing as a Christian is to attend the services of the church. When we fail to attend, we hurt ourselves; and we hurt the church. However, beyond this hurt, we must think of the damage we cause to our children, our neighbors, and our friends. It is sad to see the lives of our young people fly fleetingly by with parents who are not bringing them to the services and to Bible study. We should remind ourselves repeatedly of Paul’s teaching in Eph 6:4: “4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” As for our friends and neighbors, the Lord’s own teaching in Matt 5:14-16 charged us to be an example:

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Matt 6:31-33: What are Christians to seek first? What else will be given to us?
2. John 1:40-42: What was the first thing Andrew did after leaving the Lord?
3. Matt 18:20: Where can you always find the Lord?
4. Heb 10:25: What is a bad habit? What are we to do as we see the day approaching?
5. Matt 26:27-29: When would Jesus drink the fruit of the vine anew?
6. 1 Cor 10:15-17: In what do we participate when we take the cup? The bread?
7. 1 Cor 11:26-28: What do we proclaim? Of what are we guilty when we abuse the Lord’s Supper? What should we do before we eat of the bread and drink of the cup?
8. John 6:44-48: Who comes to the Lord? Who is the bread of life?
9. Acts 2:42: To what did the early Christians devote themselves?
10. Acts 20:7: When did the early Christians break bread? What else happened then?
11. Eph 5:19-20: What is one way for Christians to speak to one another?
12. Col 3:16: How do we teach and admonish one another?
13. Eph 6:4: How should fathers bring up their children?
14. Matt 5:14-16: What are Christians to the world?

2. Christians Grow by Edifying and Building Up One Another

Our first step for Christian growth showed that by attending the services of the church and encouraging others to attend, we grow as Christians. The key passage to that lesson was Heb 10:25, where the writer eloquently stated:

25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

When people attend the services, they mutually build one another up in the faith. When they stay home, nothing happens.

Paul expressed the purpose and meaning of the mutual edification of the church in Eph 4:14-16:

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

When we speak the truth in love to one another, the body, the church, grows and builds itself up, as each part does its work. Every part of our worship contributes to this end, which is our second step to Christian growth.

Teaching and Admonishing One Another

The singing that the church does in worship is not to entertainment. Entertainment in music is what performers do to audiences who are mere spectators. Singing in worship is to God since the music is to the Lord, giving thanks to God, and in the name of Jesus. We all must mutually participate in the singing, offering it as a sacrifice to Lord. Eph 5:19-20 summarizes this concept:

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 3:16 declares the mutual edification of singing when we teach and admonish one another:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Our singing magnifies our power to grow spiritually, as we teach and admonish one another, and as we offer praise to God with our lips and from our hearts. Heb 13:15 teaches:

15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name.

Bearing One Another's Failings and Building Up Each Other

Christians, as frail human beings, are all subject to sin and weakness. Speaking of all people, Paul wrote in Rom 3:22-24:

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Of Christians, John wrote in 1 John 1:8-9:

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Consistently seeking and giving mutual support against weakness and sin is a fundamental step toward Christian growth. No Christian can do it alone: we need the Lord and we need one another

The power of this Christian support system is advanced by Paul in Rom 15:1-2:

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

And again, he taught in 1 Thess 5: 11: " 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

The burdens of sin and struggle, borne by us all for us all, fulfill the law of Christ in Gal 6:1-2:"

1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Allowing the Word of His Grace to Build Us Up

No matter how eloquent the words or dynamic the presentation of men, the power of the grace of God's word is what builds us up. Paul taught in Acts 20:32: "32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Each one of us should bring something of the word of God to one another.

In speaking of spiritual gifts, Paul addressed the idea for each bringing something to the other in 1 Cor 14:26:

26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

The passage is limited in context to spiritual gifts, however the scriptures cited in this study expressly teaches the general principal of a mutually edifying membership. To be built up, we must all bring to the worship and take away from the worship.

Building Yourselves Up by Prayer and the Fellowship in the Table of the Lord

Other mutually edifying activities of the worship are Prayer and the Lord's Supper. Jude put prayer in the context of growth in the Lord in Jude 20-21:

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. 21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Paul described the Lord's Table as a participation in the body and blood of the Lord in 1 Cor 10:16-17:

16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Through this participation with the Lord and one another, we become one body. Thus, the lesson ends where it began in Eph 4:16: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Heb 10:25: What are we not to give up? What should we do for one another?
2. Eph 4:14-16: How does the body grow? What do we speak?
3. Eph 5:19-20: How do we speak to one another? Where do we make music?
4. Col 3:16: How should the word of Christ dwell in us?
5. Heb 13:15: What is the fruit of our lips?
6. Rom 3:22-24: Who has sinned?
7. 1 John 1:8-9: What if we say that we have no sin? What should we do about our sins?
8. Rom 15:1-2: What are the strong to do?
9. 1 Thess 5: 11: What are we to do for one another?
10. Gal 6:1-2: What should happen when someone is caught in a sin? How do we fulfill the law of Christ?
11. Acts 20:32: What can build us up?
12. 1 Cor 14:26: Should we all contribute to the worship?
13. Jude 20-21: In what are we to build ourselves up?
13. 1 Cor 10:16-17: When we take the Lord's Supper, in what do we participate?
14. Eph 4:16: How is the church held together?

3. Christians Grow by Visiting

Step 1 of these lessons on Christian growth presented the case for attending the services of the church and admonishing one another to do likewise. Step 2 showed that for Christian growth to happen, each one of us must edify and build up the other. That lesson showed how the acts of worship build up individual Christians and the church.

Now this 3rd lesson shows how visiting fosters Christian growth. Multiple good happens when Christians visit. Common sense says that the visitor is helping the one visited, but just the opposite occurs also as the visitor benefits hugely. Certainly, the sick receive needed care; widows and orphans cheer up; and strangers find a friend. However, the overwhelming good is to the visitor and not to the visited. This contrary to what is ordinarily expected creates an exponential growth for both the visited and the visitors. For the visitors, this comes from empathy—a word that means “understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another” (Webster’s Online Dictionary). Concerning visiting, Jesus defined the path of Christian growth and salvation for visitors, providing the case for the double good of visiting.

Salvation Depends on Double Good of Visiting

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus established the connection between visiting and salvation. In Matt 25:34-40, Jesus described those who receive the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven as those who visit with strangers, the sick, and those in prison:

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

As one might expect, the righteous disciples were somewhat bewildered for they had not visited the Lord in any of these circumstances; and so they responded:

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

Then the Lord declared the great truth of double good:

40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Visiting others is visiting the Lord. Our salvation depends on it.

In Matt 25:41-46, the Lord pronounced the curse of eternal fire on those who do not visit and take care of those in need:

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

Those on the left, the condemned, were just as mystified as the righteous were and responded:

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

To which the Lord replied:

45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

The good of visiting to feed the hungry, to cloth the naked, and to visit the sick and imprisoned comes with the territory of Christian living. The responsibility never goes away, yet with it comes the greatest Christian growth and service to the Lord and Saviour.

As We Have the Opportunity, Let Us Seek the Double Good

As the days of our Christian life come and go, we may lose the urgency to visit those in need, made a clear necessity in the Lord's parable. Paul warned us to not grow weary in doing good in Gal 6:9-10:

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Each and every opportunity to do good to all people makes the obligation to grow through visiting a daily event in our lives. The power to visit and give becomes the power to grow as Christians.

The Hebrew writer expressed this need in regards to brothers, strangers, and prisoners, in Heb 13:1-3:

13 Keep on loving each other as brothers. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

In the close of this passage, the writer included empathy as a condition for us all: "As if you yourselves were suffering," he said.

James 1:27 includes this requirement of empathy as we visit the orphans and widows:

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

The New King James Version translated the Greek word for *look after* as *visit* in James 1:27:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

The visitor is to feel the distress of widows and orphans and to take care of their needs. Christian growth requires the development that comes from visiting where we empathize with those in need and do something to relieve that need.

The Christian's Reward Comes from Visiting and Taking Care of the Needy

Faith depends on the good works that come from visiting. Christians cannot see human need and look the other way. James made the connection in James 2:14-17:

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Christ spoke with all authority when he said in Matt 25:34:

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Study Questions Taken from the Scriptures

Empathy is a word that means "understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another" (Webster's Online Dictionary).

1. Matt 25:34-40: What will the Lord say to those on the right? What had they done?
2. Matt 25:37: When had they done it?
3. Matt 25:40: What did the King say?
4. Matt 25:41-46: What did the King say to those on the left?
5. Matt 25:44 How did they answer?
6. Matt 25:45: How did the Lord reply?
7. Matt 25:46: Where will those on the left go? Where will the righteous go?
8. Gal 6:9-10: What will happen at the proper time? When are we to do good? To whom?
9. Heb 13:1-3: How are we to act toward strangers? How does this passage address empathy?
10. James 1:27: What is pure and faultless religion?
11. James 2:14-17: When is faith dead?
12. Matt 25:34: What is the Christian's inheritance?

4. Christians Grow by Seeking Every Opportunity

These lessons on *Five Steps to Christian Growth* have covered three steps. In Step 1, Christian growth came from *attending services and admonishing one another to do likewise*. Step 2 illustrated Christians grow when *each one edifies and builds up the other*. In Step 3, *visiting fostered Christian growth*. Now in Step 4, *Christians grow by seeking every opportunity*. As was the case with visiting, so it is the case with seeking opportunity, Christians must look outside themselves to those in need of the gospel and good works. Christianity is not an egocentric experience.

The Father and the Lord Jesus Seek Us

Without any doing on our part, the Father and the Lord Jesus seized an opportunity to extend their grace to us. They are our example of how we are to seek every opportunity to do good to others and share the gospel with them. God's gift came through the offering of his only begotten son. John 3:16-17 teaches: "16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Rom 6:23 adds, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

For Jesus' part, he gave his life as a sacrifice for us. Peter teaches in 1 Peter 1:18-20:

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

As recipients of the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus, we now must seek every opportunity to share and to help others. Christians grow by giving to and doing for others. Jesus put the idea in perspective, as accounted by Paul in Acts 20:35:

35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

One might say, to give is to grow.

Seek Always to Give Ourselves Fully to the Work of the Lord

Christian growth depends on our emulating the Father and the Lord Jesus, seeking to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, as Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:58:

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Many so-called Christians fit the description that Thomas Paine gave to those who shrank back from their obligations as America struggled for independence. In his *Crisis* series, Paine wrote of the shirking citizens:

These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

Shirking Christians should follow Paul's direction as they seek every opportunity for Christian growth through the work of the Lord. This work is characterized in the words *stand*

firm, let nothing move you, always give, and fully to the work of the Lord. The opportunity is always before us, nothing should interfere, and our effort should be one that abounds.

The reward for this unqualified commitment to the work of the Lord is that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Therefore, steadfastly, unwaveringly, we must always abound in the Lord's work.

Seek Always to Study the Scriptures and Work to be Approved

Christian growth comes by seeking every opportunity to study God's word. According to Paul in 2 Tim 2:15, we must do our best as workmen for the Lord, "15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Further, Paul instructed, in 2 Tim 3:15, that these opportunities for study allow us to be wise, "15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Peter stated that this is how Christians grow spiritually in 1 Peter 2:2-3, "2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

The relationship between growth in the scriptures and Christian growth is undeniable in passages like 2 Tim 3:16-17:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In order to grow spiritually, Christians must take every opportunity to make their intellects one with the word of God. According to Ps 1:2, the opportunity is always – day and night:

2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

Ps 119:97-104, expresses power coming to Christians from their opportunities to grow by the word of the Lord:

97 Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.
99 I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
100 I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
101 I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
102 I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
103 How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
104 I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.

Seek Always to Do Good to All Men

Doing good to others gives occasion for Christian growth. It is as if the more good Christians do, the more they grow. Paul set the standard for good works in Gal 6:10: "10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." The Christian obligation is to the brothers and sisters and to all people. According to Paul in Col 4:5-6, the situation with outsiders requires wisdom and diligence: "5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity."

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. John 3:16-17: What did God give the world? Why?
2. Rom 6:23: What are the wages of sin? What is the gift of God?
3. 1 Peter 1:18-20: What did Christ give us?
4. Acts 20:35: What should we do to help the weak? What is more blessed?
5. 1 Cor 15:58: How should we work to the Lord?
6. 2 Tim 2:15: How should we handle the word of truth? Who is approved by God?
7. 2 Tim 3:15: What makes Christians wise unto salvation?
8. 1 Peter 2:2-3: What should Christians crave?
9. 2 Tim 3:16-17: What scriptures are God breathed? What are the scriptures good for?
10. Ps 1:2: When should a Christian meditate on the law of the Lord?
11. Ps 119:97-104: How do the scriptures make us grow?
12. Gal 6:10: To whom are we to do good? How often?

5. Christians Grow by Participating in the Divine Nature

This lesson is the fifth and final lesson in this series on Christian growth: *Christians Grow by Participating in the Divine Nature*.

The first four steps showed how Christians grow stronger spiritually by following the steps given to them in the scriptures:

1. *Christians Grow by Attending the Worship Services*
2. *Christians Grow by Edifying and Building Up One Another*
3. *Christians Grow by Visiting*
4. *Christians Grow by Seeking Every Opportunity*

It is through God's promises that we attain to the divine nature and escape the corruption of the world: according to 2 Peter 1:4:

4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Participating in the Divine Nature Comes Only with Effort

Peter follows the above statement on the divine nature by asserting that we must make every effort in 2 Peter 1:5-9:

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

One cannot expect to grow spiritually and attain the divine nature without making every effort. The elements of the divine nature are attainable by all Christians, beginning with faith and obedience to the gospel. Christians can strive to be good, to achieve knowledge through the scriptures, to control themselves, to persevere, to act godly, to be kind to one another, and to love. Since we can do all these, as the commercial says: "just do it."

The end makes the effort worthwhile: "8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Participating in the Divine Nature Comes with Exercise

In order to participate in the divine nature, Christians must exercise in order to be godly, according to 1 Tim 4:7-8:

7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Godliness has value now on earth and in the life to come. Christians hear many theories about religion – godless myths and old wives' tales – as men make up and speculate about religious

matters and doctrine. Have nothing to do with these, but seek the divine nature with godly exercise.

Participating in the Divine Nature Comes through Faith and Knowledge

In order to attain the divine nature, Christians must seek knowledge through the word of God as Paul wrote in Tit 1:1-3:

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – 2 a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, 3 and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

Not just any knowledge will do; this knowledge depends on the word that God brought to light. This knowledge leads to godliness and a participation in the divine nature.

Participating in the Divine Nature Brings Benefits in This Present Life

As amply illustrated, participation in the divine nature secures heaven according to the text in 1 Tim 4:7-8, and it also holds promise for the present life:

7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the **present life and the life to come**. [Emphasis added.]

Christians by attaining the divine nature receive promises for the present life.

Contentment

The first present day promise is contentment. Paul wrote 1 Tim 6:6-10:

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

In godliness (the divine nature) is contentment. Those who refuse this contentment for transient earthly gain pierce themselves with attendant griefs.

Peaceful and Quiet Lives

Godliness and holiness (the divine nature) allow Christians to lead peaceful and tranquil lives, according to 1 Tim 2:2:

2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Spirituality

The qualities of the divine nature are invisible, yet clearly seen, understood through his creation. Paul writes in Rom 1:20:

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Christians have character and power endowed upon them with the divine nature. Their weapons are not weapons of the world, but spiritual weapons. They actually have divine power, according to 2 Cor 10:3-5:

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

The spirituality of Christian brings with it everything that we need. 2 Peter 1:3, "3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

Present day ideas of spirituality lean upon mechanisms other than the knowledge of God: some look to secular writings and pronouncements of modern-day gurus; others look inward to one's own perceptions of truth. However, divine power comes only from the knowledge of God.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. 2 Peter 1:4: What has God given us? In what do we participate?
2. 2 Peter 1:5-9: What are we to add to our faith? What do these things make us?
3. 1 Tim 4:7-8: With what are we to have nothing to do? What must we train ourselves to be?
4. Tit 1:3: What leads to godliness? How did God bring his truth to light?
5. 1 Tim 4:7-8: With what are Christians to have nothing to do? In what two lives do we have promise?
6. 1 Tim 6:6: What brings great gain? With what do wandering Christians pierce themselves?
7. Tim 2:2: Why must we pray for the kings and rulers? What characterizes the Christian life?
8. 1:20: What do we see through the things that are made?
9. 2 Cor 10:3-5: With what weapons do we fight? What power do they have?
10. 2 Peter 1:3: What does God's power give us?