

# A Journey Worth Taking

(Lesson by Nicky Sisco)

“But we Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. *And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him*”  
(2 Corinthians 3:18, TLB).

## Spiritual growth is a continuous process of becoming like Christ.

**H**ave you ever stood beside an athlete and thought, “Wow, he is strong! He looks fit! I wish I could be like him. What does he eat?” It’s not just the diet that makes him strong. It’s what he does after he has eaten that really determines his level of strength and performance.

Strength comes through training. The more you use your muscles the stronger they become. If you want to run a ten kilometer race you would start by learning how to run one kilometer. Once you built enough strength and endurance for one kilometer you would keep adding until you reached your goal. As you consistently exercise, your muscles develop and physical transformation takes place. In time, this change is noticed by everyone. Those who have not seen you for awhile will quickly notice the change while those who are with you often will not observe an immediate transformation but rather see continuous improvement in your build, endurance and overall health.

That’s how it is with our spiritual lives. We are in a long distance race from earth to glory and none of us become fit overnight. Paul said, “You also must run in such a way that you will win. All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, NLT).

None of us are at the same place in our spiritual journey, yet all of us should be following a spiritual compass that is pointing to Christ. When we follow the directional indicator of spiritual growth, we begin a lifelong journey of drawing closer to God and reflecting His glory through our lives. James A. Berkeley said, “My life was given to me to spend for God. I have no intention of hoarding it or wasting it, but I intend to spend this one life wisely.”

In this lesson we are going to look at five components of spiritual growth. These components are necessary to start, continue, and finish the journey.

1. Desire Growth
2. Set Realistic Goals
3. Commitment to the Process
4. Honest Assessment

## 5. Good Role Models

### **COMPONENT #1: DESIRE GROWTH**

Spiritual growth is positive change that begins with desire and is God's way of causing us to mature on a continual basis so we reach our full potential in Christ. Unless we have the will to change, nothing will happen.

In the same way an athlete desires to improve through training, Christians must desire to grow in spiritual matters. This is natural for most believers as they begin their new life in Christ. However, as time moves on some reach a certain level of maturity and lose their desire for growth. Thinking they are strong enough, fit enough, and fast enough, they feel no need to continue the process of development. They become satisfied. This is a very dangerous place to stay because after a while we stagnate and in the end live far below the level God intended.

***God's Word teaches the necessity of growth for spiritual transformation.***

- ❖ As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2, *NKJV*).
- ❖ "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18, *NKJV*).
- ❖ "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:5-10).
- ❖ The mature, productive, powerful Paul never thought himself to have reached perfection. He was always growing – forgetting past successes and failures – pressing on to greater accomplishments.

"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven" (Philippians 3:12-14, *NLT*). Christ must be our first and foremost desire, our ultimate prize.

**COMPONENT #2: SET REALISTIC GOALS**

James Allen said, "You are today where your thoughts have brought you. You will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you."

"Just as we cannot come back from a place we have never been to, we cannot reach a goal we do not have. Setting realistic goals can help you take charge of the direction of your spiritual life and shows that you are serious about improving your spirituality." (www.iwhome.com/spiritualquest)

Sunday morning preaching alone will not get the job done. We must have spiritual developmental goals. "Writing down concrete goals crystallizes your thinking. It shows you are serious about improving your spirituality. Otherwise, your good intentions are just wishful thinking. Too many Christians spend more time and effort planning their vacation than they do the development and direction of their spiritual life." (www.iwhome.com/spiritualquest)

The goals you set serve as guideposts directing you towards maturity in Christ so you can grow up in Him (Ephesians 4:15). In setting your goals, try not to set them so high that they become difficult to reach. For example, if you are struggling with prayer don't begin with a one hour prayer session. Start with ten to fifteen minutes. It sounds small, but when practiced yields wonderful results. After a while you will be easily running one kilometer of prayer each day.

There are many valuable goals worth establishing. Let me mention four spiritual goals that I believe need to be at the top of anyone's list.

❖ Plan a regular time and place for prayer.

"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:6, *NKJV*).

The obvious open reward is answered prayer but there is another reward that we sometimes miss – the evident spiritual growth that we experience as a result of consistent prayer. Some of these discernible signs would be an increased sensitivity to the Master's voice, greater insight into the challenges of life, and a stronger relationship with God.

If we do not plan to pray everyday it simply will not happen. Over time our spiritual man will become weak and when we try to minister in the spiritual, we may be shocked to find we are endeavoring to accomplish this through the flesh.

❖ Set a regular time for Bible study and reading.

Jesus answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4, *NKJV*).

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6, *NKJV*).

Just as proper nutrition is necessary for physical growth. A consistent diet of God’s Word is vital to our spiritual growth. Jeremiah said, “Your words are what sustain me; they are food to my hungry soul” (Jeremiah 15:16a, *TLB*).

When it comes to regular Bible study, lay out a systematic plan that allows you to gain more and more knowledge of God’s Word. You may choose to study the Bible book by book or you could study different themes or topics in the Bible such as repentance, water baptism in Jesus name, Holy Ghost, faithfulness, prayer, fruit of the Spirit, stewardship, and love. You could also choose to study certain words or verses in the Bible. As you continue your journey of spiritual growth you will use many different methods, the important thing is to be consistent with your Bible studies. In the end, consistent effort produces consistent results. Success in God’s Kingdom comes through submission to His Word (1 Thessalonians 2:13) so “**Study** to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Bible is the greatest book you will ever read. In fact, there are sixty-six remarkable books that come together to make one life-changing Book whose words will last forever (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35). Yet, during your time of Bible study do not overlook the value of reading great books in addition to the Bible.

“Great books will broaden your world, sharpen your mind, inspire your heart, and develop your skills.” (Adapted from *Good to Great in God’s Eyes*, Chip Ingram) Great books allow you to see how relevant God’s Word is to your life and ministry, leaving you equipped and empowered.

❖ Be consistent with church attendance.

“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” (Hebrews 10:25, *NIV*).

True spiritual growth cannot be achieved independent of the Body. There is a certain aspect of personal growth that can only take place when we are properly connected to the body of Christ.

If we try to develop spiritually without the supply and strength of the Body, in the end we will be deficient and our growth will be hindered.

❖ Live a lifestyle of evangelism.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He said, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at

liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18-19, *NKJV*).

Then Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21, *NKJV*). It is God's plan to use those reached to reach others.

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:15-18).

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We are instructed and empowered to evangelize! If we fail in our goal of lifestyle evangelism then our spiritual growth will be underdeveloped and incomplete.

### **COMPONENT #3: COMMITMENT TO THE PROCESS**

For many of us, setting goals is not difficult. Out of our desire to know and please God more we set goals. But then we struggle to follow through, even to the point of discouragement, because we do not see the visible changes in our lives. "Sometimes when we read the words of those who have been more than conquerors, we feel almost despondent. I feel that I shall never be like that. But they won through step by step, by little bits of wills, little denials of self, little inward victories by faithfulness in very little things. They became what they are. No one sees these hidden steps. They only see the accomplishment, but even so, those small steps were taken. There is no sudden triumph, no spiritual maturity. That is the work of the moment." (Amy Carmichael as quoted in *Holy Sweat*, Tim Hansel)

Spiritual growth is a deliberate act of obeying God's Word. It's faithfully taking those little steps that transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Regardless of where we are in our journey, there is always the need to mature in Him. It is not a one day, one week, or even one month workout. It is a lifelong journey of becoming more and more like Jesus. Men and women of character are not born, they are developed. So "let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

### **COMPONENT #4: HONEST ASSESSMENT**

Throughout the journey remember to "Check up on yourselves.... Do you feel Christ's presence and power more and more within you?" (2 Corinthians 13:5, *TLB*).

Spiritual growth requires an honest assessment of self. The best way to accomplish this is through personal interrogation. How am I doing in this growth process? Is my knowledge of

God’s Word better than it was a year ago? Am I achieving my goals? Do I set a good example for others to follow? Am I truly becoming like Christ? What are the detectable spiritual traits being produced as a result of my development?

The apostle Paul shows us the traits or actions that should become visible in our lives as we progress on our spiritual growth journey. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old habits and personality traits that marked your life before Christ are passing away and you are being transformed into a new creation as a result of submitting to God’s Word and Spirit.

<b>THE TRAITS OF NEW CREATIONS IN CHRIST – REMEMBER IT’S A JOURNEY...</b> (Taken from <i>The Word in Life Study Bible</i> ~ NKJV, p. 2119)	
1 Corinthians 13:3-8 <b>Love...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Suffers long</li> <li>▪ Is kind</li> <li>▪ Does not envy</li> <li>▪ Does not parade itself</li> <li>▪ Is not puffed up</li> <li>▪ Does not seek its own</li> <li>▪ Is not provoked</li> <li>▪ Thinks no evil</li> <li>▪ Does not rejoice in iniquity</li> <li>▪ Rejoices in the truth</li> <li>▪ Bears all things</li> <li>▪ Believes all things</li> <li>▪ Hopes all things</li> <li>▪ Endures all things</li> </ul>	Galatians 5:22-23 <b>The fruit of the Spirit is...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Love</li> <li>▪ Joy</li> <li>▪ Peace</li> <li>▪ Longsuffering (patience)</li> <li>▪ Kindness</li> <li>▪ Goodness</li> <li>▪ Faithfulness</li> <li>▪ Gentleness</li> <li>▪ Self-control</li> </ul>
Philippians 4:8 <b>Meditate on whatever things are...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ True</li> <li>▪ Noble</li> <li>▪ Just</li> <li>▪ Pure</li> <li>▪ Lovely</li> <li>▪ Of good report</li> <li>▪ Of any virtue</li> <li>▪ Praiseworthy</li> </ul>	Colossians 3:12-16 <b>Put on these things...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tender mercies</li> <li>▪ Kindness</li> <li>▪ Humility</li> <li>▪ Meekness</li> <li>▪ Longsuffering (patience)</li> <li>▪ Bear with one another</li> <li>▪ Forgive one another</li> <li>▪ Above all, put on love</li> <li>▪ Let the peace of God rule in your hearts</li> <li>▪ Be thankful</li> <li>▪ Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly</li> </ul>

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teach and admonish one another</li> <li>▪ Sing with grace in your hearts</li> </ul> |
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Spiritual growth is a continual process of reducing the actions of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and increasing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Applying God's Word to our lives is important! Remember, it's not just your diet but what you do after you have eaten that makes all the difference.

You can faithfully study the Bible but not apply it. This becomes dangerous because knowledge increases responsibility. James wrote, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17, *NIV*). During our time of honest assessment we need to ask ourselves a tough question, "Am I applying what I am learning?" There should be visible growth for all to see. The fruit of the Spirit speaks about the nine attributes that should characterize the life of a true Christian who walks in the Spirit. One man suggests that "these are not individual 'fruits' from which we pick and choose. Rather, the fruit of the Spirit is one nine-fold 'fruit' that characterizes all who truly walk in the Holy Spirit. Collectively, this is the outgrowth all Christians should be producing in their new lives with Jesus Christ." ([www.allaboutgod.com](http://www.allaboutgod.com)) The fruit of the Spirit is a physical manifestation of a believer's transformed life and pours forth from a lifestyle of submission.

We must apply what the Spirit and Word teaches. "Application is hard work because it requires serious thinking. Application is hard work because Satan fights us viciously. Application is hard work because we naturally resist change." (*Bible Study Methods*, Rick Warren, p.37)

John Milton once said, "The end of all learning is to know God, and out of that knowledge to love and imitate Him." The whole purpose and reason for wanting to take this journey is so we can know God better, love Him more, and be like Him in all areas of life. If this is not happening, we must identify the hindrances and remove them.

#### **COMPONENT #5: GOOD ROLE MODELS**

All of us imitate others. It's just natural. Imitation, some say, is the highest form of flattery. The only problem with imitation is that we must be careful who we imitate – make sure they are good role models that inspire. The apostle Paul said, "Keep on imitating me, my brothers. Pay attention to those who follow the right example that we have set for you" (Philippians 3:17, *TEV*). He admonished the believers at Philippi to, "Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9, *TEV*).

Paul did not settle down in a comfort zone nor did he allow past mistakes to discourage him from pressing on. He continually referred to the compass and found direction for spiritual growth that guided his life and ministry. He was committed to the process and left us an example to follow. "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, *NKJV*).

***Following a good role model does two things...***

1. Shows us what is possible.
  - ❖ A good role model shows us different aspects of spiritual growth that can and should be evident in our lives.
  - ❖ The following scriptures show us how one of the “sons of thunder” can become the apostle of love: Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54; 1 John 4:7-8.
  - ❖ Another example is seen in Acts 4:13 where “unlearned and ignorant men” boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  
2. Teaches us how to reach the same goals.
  - ❖ Experience a productive ministry and relationship with God (Philippians 4:9).
  - ❖ Endure hardships with purpose (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Since we are natural imitators we need to find and also be good role models. “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God” (3 John 11, *NKJV*).

Every believer needs to continually grow throughout their journey from earth to glory. Ascending into the presence of God is a progressive climb. Spiritual transformation does not take place overnight. It is a process of becoming that involves spiritual planning and persistent follow through. Yet, as long as you desire growth, pursue lifestyle changes, honestly evaluate your progress and apply God’s Word to all areas of your life, you will become more and more like Jesus.

Some tourists, looking to the top of a very high mountain, thought it would be easier to climb a smaller one. Their reasoning? With a lot less effort they could still improve their view. However, their guide encouraged them to make the challenging climb. On the way they passed a group coming down, and asked, “Is it worthwhile?” Someone replied, “Anything above the ordinary level is always worthwhile.” Your view of God and life will keep getting better as you stay committed to the process of spiritual growth. Every step you take in obedience to God’s Word and leading of His Spirit will draw you closer to Him. It is truly a journey worth taking.

### Study Questions

1. List the five (5) components of spiritual growth mentioned in this lesson, and briefly explain each.

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2. List and briefly explain four (4) spiritual goals recommended by the author. Support your answer with Scripture.

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3. List the fourteen (14) traits of new creations in Christ as found in 1 Corinthians 13:3-8.

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| 1) _____ | 8) _____  |
| 2) _____ | 9) _____  |
| 3) _____ | 10) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 11) _____ |
| 5) _____ | 12) _____ |
| 6) _____ | 13) _____ |
| 7) _____ | 14) _____ |

4. List the thirteen (13) traits of new creations in Christ that we are commanded to put on in Colossians 3:12-16.

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5. List and briefly explain the two (2) things a good role model does for you.

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- 2) \_\_\_\_\_

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