



GROWING IN GOD

“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... For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 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.” [2 Peter 1:3, 5-8 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

As we have seen, God has graciously given us new life and has, by His Holy Spirit, equipped and empowered us with everything we need to live it to the full for His glory. However, just as children start off doing nothing for themselves, but gradually play an increasing role in their own development, so God intends that we should be active participants in our growth as Christians.

GROWING IN KNOWING THE LORD

When the Scripture quoted above refers to our “**knowledge**” of Jesus, it is not referring merely to “head” knowledge, but rather to experiential knowledge—actually knowing God, not just knowing about Him. This is what our life is all about:

“...this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” [John 17:3](#)

It is our privilege and responsibility to give ourselves to growing in our knowledge of God, and it is to be a life-long pursuit. Catch the heart of these two great examples:

David: “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. You have said, ‘Seek my face.’ My heart says to you, ‘Your face, Lord, do I seek.’” [Psalm 27:4, 8](#)

Paul: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” [Philippians 3:10-12 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

The type of passionate desire seen in David and Paul isn’t outworked through unfocused “yearnings,” but rather in an intentional lifestyle. God has given us specific means through which we can grow in our knowledge of Him, and we are going to look at some key ones in this session: **bible study, worship, prayer, and fasting.**

GROWING THROUGH DISCIPLINE

These activities, when approached deliberately and consistently, have often been referred to as “spiritual disciplines.” This term isn’t actually found in the Bible, and for many it doesn’t evoke a positive reaction. *Discipline* can be associated with punishment, hardship, and self-deprivation. It is, therefore, not surprising that some have preferred to use other terms, such as *devotions*. There is certainly a biblical connection here, recalling the attitude of the early Church to their growth:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” [Acts 2:42 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Nevertheless, the term *discipline* is a good one to use when we understand it and consider our goal. The word comes from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means “instruction” or “tuition.” It is connected, of course, to the word *disciple*, which conveys the idea of one who follows, is trained by, or is being shaped into the likeness of another. As disciples of Jesus, we commit ourselves to following His example in, among other things, our devotion to the Word, worship, prayer, and fasting. Furthermore, we are transformed into His likeness as we engage in these activities.

THE CHALLENGE OF DISCIPLINE

In [Hebrews 12:11](#), we read that, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Although this Scripture is primarily addressing the type of discipline that is brought to us, the principle is the same for disciplines to which we voluntarily give ourselves. Disciplines require application even when we don’t feel like it, and they often involve some degree of self-denial.

For this reason, it is not surprising that little attention is given in the Western Church to self-discipline, which has been referred to as the “forgotten fruit of the Spirit.” Our consumer-driven culture has produced Christians who expect to be spoon-fed by their spiritual leaders, rather than taking responsibility for their own spiritual growth. This mindset is extremely detrimental to the maturing of the Church.

The emphasis nowadays on diet and exercise is good, but we should bear in mind Paul’s exhortation regarding what is more important: “train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” ([1 Timothy 4:7-8](#)).



A PROPER FOUNDATION

It is all too easy to approach the spiritual disciplines with wrong motivations and expectations. As with everything in our walk with God, we need a proper foundation in place in order to build and grow. This will include an ongoing revelation of grace, love, and faith:

GRACE — “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” [Ephesians 2:8-9](#)

Without a revelation of grace, we can find ourselves engaging in spiritual disciplines to win God’s favor, resulting in self-righteousness if we “succeed” and (more often) self-condemnation if we “fail.” Let’s remember that our right standing before God is not dependent on our performance in this or any area, but on Christ’s perfect sacrifice on the cross. Furthermore, any attempt to grow in godliness will only bear fruit if we recognize that His grace is leading us into it and enabling us to meet Him in it.

LOVE — “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” [Mark 12:30](#)

True love motivates us to act and to make sacrifices in the use of our time, money, and energy. Actions that otherwise would seem arduous are undertaken with joy for the sake of the one we love. Similarly, our engagement in spiritual disciplines should come from a desire to know and please God. When this is the case, the things He calls us to do will not seem burdensome ([1 John 5:3-4](#)).

FAITH — “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” [Hebrews 11:6](#)

Spiritual disciplines are not ends in themselves and will be fruitless if not approached rightly, as Jesus pointed out regarding praying and studying the Scriptures ([Matthew 6:7](#) and [John 5:39-40](#)). The right approach is one of faith. Faith is taking God at His word—hearing what He says, believing it, and acting accordingly. We do not undertake the disciplines out of duty or dull routine, but because we trust God’s promise that He will encounter us in them and transform us through them. Therefore, faith leads us to engage in spiritual disciplines, which in turn build up our faith (see [James 2:17-18, 22](#)).

THE BIBLE—GOD’S WORD TO MAN

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” [Psalm 119:105](#)

The Bible is amazing! It was written in three different languages by some 40 Holy Spirit-inspired writers in three continents over a period of about 1600 years. It records events from creation to the late 1st century AD, and speaks prophetically of events beyond that time and still to occur. Yet there is such a striking unity of theme and purpose that only God could be its author. It is the primary means through which He reveals Himself and His purposes to us, and is vital for us if we are to grow in godliness. The Word of God not only feeds and guides us, but it also convicts, equips, and protects us (see [Hebrews 4:12](#), [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#), [Ephesians 6:17](#)).

We benefit in all these ways and more as we receive and apply God’s Word by:

HEARING — “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” [Romans 10:17](#)

READING — “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy...” [Revelation 1:3](#)

STUDYING — “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” [2 Timothy 2:15](#)

MEMORIZING — “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

Psalm 119:11

MEDITATING — “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:8 (see also Psalm 1:2, 119:97)

SPEAKING/CONFESSING — “With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.” Psalm 119:13

A commitment to grow in God will require a commitment to be in His Word. Just as we need regular meals to remain physically healthy, we need to feed regularly on God’s Word to remain spiritually healthy. The occasional “snack” is not enough. And we need a balanced diet from the Bible as well, not just the parts we like most and find easy. While not essential, it is a good discipline to have a daily reading plan, for example one that takes you through the Bible in a year.

“The great need of the hour among persons spiritually hungry is twofold: first, to know the Scriptures, the second, to be enlightened by the Spirit, apart from whom the Scriptures will not be understood.” – A.W. Tozer

WORSHIP

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23-24

For many Christians today, “worship” is primarily thought of as the singing part of a church service. In fact, the Bible teaches that our worship is to be the laying down of our whole life for God’s glory. We are to dedicate everything we are and everything we do to Him, and consequently, every thought, word, and action can become a means of honoring and glorifying Him.

The Greek word *proskyneō*, often translated as “worship” in the Bible, conveys the idea of coming and bowing down before a superior out of respect, submission, awe, and adoration. The English word actually derives from “worth.” We worship because we recognize God as worthy, and our worship should reflect what we consider He is worth.

Another important concept to have in mind when we consider worship is that of sacrifice. The first time the word *worship* appears in Scripture is where Abraham is called to sacrifice his son, Isaac (Genesis 22:1-5), and the connection between worship and sacrifice is throughout the Scriptures, for example in Romans 12:1: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

These concepts should be borne in mind even when we return to the idea of worship that is expressed vocally, for example in song. Scripture does place a particular emphasis on the vocal expression of our worship, whether it be on our own (see Psalm 57:7-8 and 119:172) or with others (see 1 Corinthians 14:26 and Ephesians 5:19-20).

Our worship to God will include thanksgiving and praise for who He is, what he has done, and what He has promised to do. God gives us clear examples, and even commands in Scripture regarding how our worship should be expressed. As true worshipers, we should not allow our personality or background to determine our obedience. Let’s consider some of the main biblical expressions of worship:

SPEAKING — “Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long.”

Psalm 35:28 (see also Psalm 34:1, 40:5 & 10, 145:21)



SINGING — “Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.”

Psalm 30:4 (see also Psalm 32:11, 47:6, 95:1; Isaiah 12:5-6; Colossians 3:16)

SHOUTING — “Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!”

Psalm 66:1-2 (see also Psalm 27:6, 35:27, 47:1, 98:4; 2 Samuel 6:15)

PLAYING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS — “Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!” Psalm 150:3-5 (see also Psalm 33:2-3, 71:22, 144:9; 2 Samuel 6:5)

KNEELING — “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!”

Psalm 95:6 (see also 2 Chronicles 6:13, Luke 22:41)

LIFTING UP HANDS — “So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.”

Psalm 63:4 (see also Psalm 134:2, 141:2; 1 Timothy 2:8)

CLAPPING — “Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!”

Psalm 47:1 (see also Psalm 98:8, Isaiah 55:12)

DANCING — “Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!”

Psalm 149:2-3 (see also 2 Samuel 6:14-16; Psalm 30:11, 150:4; Jeremiah 31:4, 13)

You may not feel particularly comfortable with expressing your praise, thanksgiving, and adoration in some of the above ways. Good! It’s an opportunity for you to really worship—to do something for God that costs you something, dying to yourself in a wholehearted, obedient response to Him. Great victory and extraordinary liberty come as we are set free from self-consciousness and brought into the God-consciousness of sacrificial praise and worship.

“Through him [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” Hebrews 13:15

PRAYER

“...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...” Ephesians 6:18 (NIV 1984)

Of all the disciplines, prayer can seem like the most familiar. We were created with an awareness of God, and even before we really knew Him, we probably all prayed at some point. However, God’s desire is for more than just our cries for divine help in times of need, and He is certainly not interested in the repetitious chanting of traditional prayers (see Isaiah 29:13). Prayer is intended to be conversation with God, a spiritual dialogue between child and Father, between loving servant and loving Lord.

THE “WHY” AND “HOW” OF PRAYER

There are many reasons why we pray and many ways in which we can and should pray. Not surprisingly, the best instruction comes from Jesus, who said to His disciples:

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’” Matthew 6:9-13



This is, of course, “The Lord’s Prayer.” Jesus was not confining us to these exact words, but was showing us how to pray:

“**Our Father in heaven...**” — First and foremost, prayer flows from our relationship with God. He loves it when we come to him crying, “**Abba, Father!**” (Romans 8:15), reveling in the reality that we belong to Him and that He cares for us.

“**hallowed be your name...**” — Although He is our Father, we recognize that He is also the Holy God, King of kings and Lord of lords. Prayer and worship are inextricably linked. Our prayer should include specific thanksgiving, praise, and adoration (Psalm 100:4, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

“**your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...**” — Though we will have requests to bring to God, our primary desire should be to see His will done in and through our lives, and beyond us to the ends of the earth. His will is revealed to us as the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word—so studying the Bible is essential if we are to grow in effective prayer.

“**Give us this day our daily bread...**” — In prayer, we acknowledge our dependence on God for everything. He takes pleasure in meeting our needs and responding to our Spirit-led requests, as He has promised (see Matthew 7:7-11, 21:21-22; John 14:12-14, 15:7-8; 1 John 5:14-15). Jesus doesn’t instruct us to pray in terms of “my and me,” but rather “our and us.” Therefore, we are not just to petition God for our own needs, but also for the needs of others (see 1 Timothy 2:1, Romans 8:26-27, James 5:15-16).

“**forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...**” — Confession of sin, repentance, and the seeking of forgiveness were part of our conversion and should, where necessary, continue to feature in our prayer life (see Psalm 32:5 and 1 John 1:9).

“**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**” — We pray that God will lead us into the good that He has for us (Ephesians 2:10) and away from the snares of the enemy. By prayer, we also equip ourselves to resist the attacks of Satan and to advance the Kingdom of God (see Ephesians 6:13-18, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11).

PUTTING PRAYER INTO PRACTICE

If prayer has not been a significant part of your walk with God to this point, consider how that might change in the days ahead. Without making any rash vows that might lead you into a legalistic schedule (and possibly set you up for failure), determine how you might develop your prayer life. Many people find that it is helpful to have a particular time and place to pray (see Psalm 5:3, Mark 1:35, Matthew 14:23, Matthew 6:6 and Luke 5:16).

Remember, prayer is conversation with God, so you shouldn’t do all the talking! Ask Him to speak to you, and take the time to listen. Having heard God’s voice, be determined to obey.

FASTING

“**But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**” Matthew 6:17-18

Though most Christians acknowledge the importance of Bible study, worship, and prayer—and engage in these disciplines to varying extents—fasting does not receive the same recognition. However, the practice is evident all the way through the Bible. We see God directing His people to corporate fasts, and the people giving themselves to fasting at critical times. Many of the most prominent individuals in the Bible fasted, including Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Paul, and Jesus Himself.



Jesus didn't just say to his disciples, "if you fast," but rather, "when you fast." It is assumed that fasting will be part of the lifestyle of those who follow Him. In fact, in [Matthew 9:15](#), Jesus specifically said that His disciples would fast when He—the Bridegroom—was taken from them. So during this time, while we are waiting for the return of the Bridegroom, we are to fast.

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is deliberately abstaining from all food for spiritual purposes. In [Luke 4:2](#), we are told that Jesus "ate nothing during those [forty days of fasting]. And when they were ended, he was hungry." Since it does not say that he drank nothing or that he was thirsty, we can assume that he continued to drink water. This would be a "normal fast" (except that most fasts will not be for forty days!). Such fasting is not likely to be harmful for people in reasonably good health, and can actually have physical benefits.

[Esther 4:16](#) and [Acts 9:9](#) show instances of "absolute fasts" from all food and drink. These seem exceptional and should probably only be undertaken for short periods at the clear leading of God.

THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

Revelation is necessary for us to engage—and continue—in any spiritual discipline, but it is probably especially important when it comes to fasting, since it can seem so unattractive as a concept and so uncomfortable as an experience! Sometimes Christians fast simply because they feel they "ought" to, or with a completely wrong motive. If our fasting is not unto God, we have missed the point.

Fasting is not a "spiritual hunger strike" by which we hope to gain God's attention or sympathy and get what we want from Him. It is not a means of proving to Him (or others) how spiritual we are and how much we are willing to suffer. It is a way in which we are able to focus wholly—including physically—on God. Fasting has been described as "praying with your body," letting the natural yearning for food remind us of our deeper yearning for God, the One who truly sustains and satisfies us.

Much revelation can come through fasting. First, it reveals a lot about us. It is easy to be content when you have everything you want, including a full stomach. When deprived of this, we can feel a lot more than just hungry! If anger, bitterness, jealousy, or frustration are within us, they will surface during fasting. However, those who want to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ will welcome this potential for inner cleansing. David writes, "I... humbled myself with fasting" ([Psalm 35:13 - NIV 1984](#)). Whatever is revealed, healing and freedom can be found in Christ.

Also, fasting can give us greater revelation of God. At first allowing our body's natural cravings to prompt us to reach to God, then gradually finding ourselves freed from those distractions to focus fully on Him, we can enjoy a wonderful season of intimacy, clarity, and breakthrough. Like Anna the prophet ([Luke 2:37](#)) and the apostolic company of Antioch ([Acts 13:2](#)), our fasting should be an aspect of our worship of God.

"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."

2 Peter 1:3 (NIV 1984)



VISION FOR GROWTH

“...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 1:6 (NIV 1984)

In His commitment to our maturity, God has graciously given us the spiritual disciplines as channels through which we can know Him, and the Holy Spirit can apply His transforming power to our lives. Let us determine to gratefully embrace these wonderful gifts for His glory.

RECOMMENDED READING:

1. *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard
2. *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster
3. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart
4. *Exploring Worship* by Bob Sorge
5. *With Christ in the School of Prayer* by Andrew Murray
6. *A Hunger for God* by John Piper
7. *God's Chosen Fast* by Arthur Wallace

