

What is spiritual growth?

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Living according to God's will › Living with God

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The moment you become a Christian is the start of your walk with God. Everyone who has received the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus Christ, is justified before God. But that is not the whole story. The moment God freely justifies a person, the process of ‘sanctification’ begins. Sanctification can also be described as ‘spiritual growth’. But what is spiritual growth? And how does it work?

Image of God visible in us

The Bible pictures spiritual growth as a way of increasing beauty and purity in the lives of God’s children. The object of the Christian’s life is no longer himself, but the Lord Jesus Christ ! Therefore, the beauty in the life of a Christian is not his own beauty, but the image of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Bible speaks about the ‘putting off’ of the old self and the ‘putting on’ of the new person. For example, we read in Colossians 3:1-17 a great description of spiritual growth. The image of God , our Creator, becomes more visible in us. Beautiful virtues

like honesty, genuine love, forgiveness, kindness, and speaking the truth will grow. It is as though you meet Christ Himself when you meet a Christian.

Spiritual growth is hard, but it's worth it

But is spiritual growth easy? No, it's not. Proverbs 24:16 reads like this: "The righteous falls sevens times and rises again..." Jesus Himself warns His followers that "the narrow way leads to life" (Matthew 7:13-14). The writer of Hebrews says that Christians must pursue "the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Paul the apostle acknowledges that Christians face a spiritual battle, a conflict, between the flesh and the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26). But don't be discouraged because you face temptations or trials, for God has called you to become like Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). What a glorious day it will be when you pass the finish line of this narrow way! Then, the image of Jesus Christ will be seen perfectly in you. No more sin. No more spot, nor blemish.

Be with Jesus

On that day you will be with Jesus forever; you will shine like Him! Be courageous! The life of the Christian will be kept by the power of God. If you believe in Jesus Christ, your position is sealed in the hand of God. You may become the person you already are in Christ. Remind yourself of this truth: your spiritual growth is not about you; it's all about Jesus. Look to Him! Look to what He has done for you. Remind who He wants to be for you. Look to His purpose for your life: "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God, through Him" (Hebrews 7:25).

Eternal glory

God doesn't leave you, nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5-6). He transforms you through His Holy Spirit. It is your responsibility to use the means God has given through His Word. So, read your Bible, pray, commune with brothers and sisters, and obey the Word of Christ (John 8:32). The end of the road is eternal glory. Be encouraged by these words of the apostle Paul:

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Abraham as the model example of faith

If you want a very helpful picture of what spiritual growth looks like, try reading the story of Abraham from beginning to end in one go (Genesis 11:27-25:11). Abraham is held up in the New Testament as the model example of faith (e.g. Romans 4; Galatians 3:6; Hebrews 11:8), and that’s the reason his story is there at the beginning of Genesis. Notice that he faces some of the same problems more than once, and makes the same mistake more than once (e.g. compare Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20:1-18).

But despite his constant mistakes, Abraham’s faith also grows. For example:

Genesis 15:2: he struggles to believe God’s promise of an heir.

Genesis 16: he takes matters into his own hands to produce an heir.

Genesis 22: he trusts God so much he's prepared to sacrifice his heir.

Abraham made loads of mistakes as he tried to trust God every day, but rather than give up, he got up and pressed on. Which is, perhaps, the closest thing you might call to “the secret” of living the Christian life: when you fall into either sin or discouragement, learn how to pick yourself up and press on by saying sorry to Jesus and asking Him for help. Learning how to face setbacks is one of the most important lessons to learn on the road to Christian maturity.

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