



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Spiritual Growth and Sanctification

How God Transforms His People to Become More Like Jesus

The Short Answer

Spiritual growth is God's lifelong work of making believers more like Jesus.

Opening Memory Anchor

Spiritual growth is God's lifelong work of making believers more like Jesus.

Part One · 1. What Is Sanctification? Sanctification Can Sound Like A Complicated Theological Word. Its Basic Biblical Idea Involves Being Set Apart For God And Increasingly Transformed Into Holiness. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Paul Connects God'S Will For Believers With Sanctification And Holy Living. Sanctification Therefore Includes Both:

BELONGING TO GOD and

BEING TRANSFORMED BY GOD. Christians have been brought into relationship with God through Jesus. Now God works within them so that their lives increasingly reflect the One to whom they belong.

2. SALVATION AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH ARE NOT THE SAME THING This distinction is extremely important. A Christian does not become increasingly saved by becoming increasingly obedient. Salvation is God's gift.

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10. Paul says people are saved by grace through faith-not by works. But notice what follows. Believers are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. The order matters: GRACE v

SALVATION v NEW LIFE v

GOOD WORKS Good works are the fruit of salvation. They are not the price of salvation.

3. JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION Christians commonly use two theological words to describe different aspects of God's saving work:

JUSTIFICATION and

SANCTIFICATION. Justification refers to God's declaring sinners righteous through faith in Christ. Sanctification refers to God's transforming those who belong to Christ. A simple way to remember the distinction is:

Justification Changes Our Standing Before God.

SANCTIFICATION CHANGES HOW WE LIVE BEFORE GOD. These should not be separated as though God saves people without transforming them. But they should not be confused as though transformation earns acceptance.

4. DO I HAVE TO BECOME GOOD ENOUGH FOR GOD? No. Christianity does not begin with: "Become good enough, and perhaps God will accept you." The gospel says sinners cannot make themselves righteous before a holy God. Jesus saves.

Read Romans 3:21-28.

Acceptance with God rests upon Christ, not upon a believer's spiritual performance. That means spiritual growth begins from acceptance-not as an attempt to achieve acceptance. This changes everything. You are not obeying so that God might eventually love you. In Christ, you learn obedience because God has already shown His love.

5. SANCTIFICATION IS NOT SELF-IMPROVEMENT Many people want to become: more disciplined, more patient, healthier, more productive, less angry, more organized, or more successful. Those can be worthwhile goals. But sanctification is larger. Christianity is not merely a program for producing a better version of yourself. God is forming the character of Jesus Christ in His people.

READ ROMANS 8:28-30. God's purpose includes conforming believers to the image of His Son. The goal is not:

A MORE IMPRESSIVE ME. The goal is:

Christlikeness.

6. WHO ACTUALLY CHANGES ME? God does. But that does not mean Christians are passive. This is one of the most important balances in spiritual growth.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13. Paul tells believers to work out their salvation while immediately explaining that God is working in them. Both truths stand together.

God Works In The Believer.

THE BELIEVER ACTIVELY RESPONDS. Grace does not eliminate effort. Grace changes the source and purpose of effort.

7. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH Christian growth is impossible to understand without the Holy Spirit. God does not merely give believers better rules. He gives them His Spirit.

READ GALATIANS 5:16-26. Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. Notice the language:

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are not merely personality improvements. They are evidence of God's transforming work.

8. WHAT DOES "THE FLESH" MEAN? In passages such as Galatians 5, "flesh" does not simply mean the physical body. Paul often uses the term to describe fallen human life operating independently of or in rebellion against God. The flesh produces desires contrary to the Spirit. That helps explain something every Christian eventually discovers:

Becoming a Christian does not mean temptation immediately disappears. There is still a battle.

9. WHY DO CHRISTIANS STILL SIN? Because sanctification is not yet complete. READ 1 JOHN 1:5-2:2. John strongly calls believers away from sin. But he also recognizes that Christians still sin. These truths must remain together. Christians should never say: "Sin doesn't matter because God forgives me." But neither should they conclude: "I sinned, therefore God must have abandoned me." The Christian life includes an ongoing battle against sin.

10. DOES STRUGGLING WITH SIN MEAN I AM NOT SAVED? Not necessarily. In fact, the struggle itself may reveal something important. Before someone cares about following God, sin may produce little spiritual conflict. But when God changes a person's desires, sin increasingly becomes something the believer wants to resist. That does not mean every struggle proves salvation. Scripture calls believers to examine themselves honestly. But temptation and spiritual conflict are not automatically evidence that God is absent. A Christian can simultaneously: love Jesus, hate a particular sin, and still struggle intensely against it.

11. TEMPTATION IS NOT THE SAME AS SIN Jesus Himself was tempted.

READ HEBREWS 4:14-16. Yet Jesus did not sin. Temptation presents an opportunity or desire toward sin. Sin occurs when we yield to what is contrary to God. This distinction matters because Christians sometimes experience shame simply because temptation appeared. The presence of temptation does not mean you have already failed. Bring temptation into the light. Ask God for help. Look for the way of escape. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-13.

12. WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I SIN? Do not hide. Go to God. READ 1 JOHN 1:9. Confess sin honestly. Agree with God about it. Receive the cleansing He provides through Christ. Then turn from the sin. Christian confession is not informing God about something He failed to notice. It is bringing ourselves honestly before Him.

13. REPENTANCE IS PART OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH Repentance is not merely something a person does once before becoming a Christian.

The Christian life continues to involve repentance. As God exposes: pride, selfishness, bitterness, lust, dishonesty, greed, unforgiveness, fear, idolatry, or other sin, the believer learns to turn away from it and toward God. Maturity does not mean reaching a point where repentance is unnecessary. Often maturity makes us more willing to repent quickly.

14. CONVICTION AND CONDEMNATION ARE NOT THE SAME

READ ROMANS 8:1. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Yet the Holy Spirit does convict believers of sin. What is the difference? Healthy conviction is specific. It brings sin into the light and leads toward repentance and Christ. Destructive condemnation tends to say: "You are hopeless." "You will never change." "God is finished with you." "There is no point coming back." The gospel says something different: Your sin is serious. Bring it to Jesus. Repent. Receive grace. Keep following Him.

15. SCRIPTURE TRANSFORMS HOW WE THINK

READ ROMANS 12:1-2. Paul connects transformation with the renewing of the mind. Christians live within cultures constantly telling them what is: valuable, normal, successful, beautiful, true, and desirable. Scripture retrains the mind according to God's truth. This is why Bible reading is not merely information gathering. God's Word reshapes how believers understand reality.

16. WHY SHOULD I READ THE BIBLE REGULARLY? Because you cannot intentionally follow someone whose words you rarely hear. READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17. Scripture teaches, corrects, trains, and equips God's people.

Regular Bible reading helps believers: know God, recognize truth, identify sin, understand the gospel, develop wisdom, resist deception, and learn obedience. The goal is not merely: "I completed today's reading." The goal is: "God, teach me to know You and live according to what You have said."

17. PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH Prayer is not simply asking God for things. Prayer develops relationship, dependence, worship, confession, thanksgiving, and trust. Jesus regularly withdrew to pray.

READ LUKE 5:15-16. If Jesus' earthly ministry included deliberate prayer, Christians should not imagine they can mature without it. Prayer reminds us: I need God. I cannot transform myself. I cannot carry everything. I am not in control. God is.

18. WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES? Christians often use the phrase spiritual disciplines for intentional practices that help believers seek God and grow. Examples include: Bible reading, prayer, worship, fasting, solitude, fellowship, giving, service, confession, and meditation on Scripture. These practices do not earn God's love. They place believers in rhythms where they intentionally attend to God and respond to His Word. A helpful distinction is:

Spiritual Disciplines Are Means Of Growth.

They Are Not Means Of Earning Salvation.

19. WHAT IF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES BECOME A CHECKLIST? That can happen. You can read the Bible every day and become proud about reading the Bible every day. You can pray and become proud of your prayers. You can fast and secretly admire your discipline. Jesus warned against religious practices performed to impress others.

READ MATTHEW 6:1-18. The problem is not discipline.

The problem is using spiritual practices to create: pride, self-righteousness, comparison, or a sense that God now owes us something. Spiritual disciplines should lead toward God. Not toward admiration of ourselves.

20. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ABIDE IN JESUS?

READ JOHN 15:1-11. Jesus uses the picture of a vine and branches. A branch does not manufacture life independently. It receives life through connection to the vine. Jesus tells His disciples to abide-or remain-in Him. Abiding includes continuing in relationship with Christ, receiving His words, depending upon Him, obeying Him, and remaining in His love. The image protects us from a major mistake: Christian growth is not independent self-development.

The Branch Needs The Vine.

21. FRUIT COMES FROM CONNECTION Return to John 15. Jesus says the one who remains in Him bears much fruit. This is important. Fruit is the result of life. You do not tape artificial apples onto a dead tree and call it healthy. Likewise, Christian behavior is not meant to become a religious costume placed over an unchanged heart. God transforms people from within. The fruit eventually becomes visible.

22. OBEDIENCE MATTERS Grace does not make obedience irrelevant. Jesus repeatedly connects love for Him with obedience.

READ JOHN 14:15-24. Obedience is not the cause of salvation. But obedience matters deeply in discipleship. A Christian should increasingly learn to ask: What has Jesus said? How can I obey Him? Where am I resisting Him? Faith that never affects life is not the biblical picture of discipleship.

23. WHY DOES GROWTH FEEL SO SLOW? Because transformation usually takes time. Think about how Scripture describes growth. Fruit develops. Children mature. Plants grow. Athletes train. Minds are renewed. Character develops through endurance. These are processes. God can produce dramatic change quickly. Sometimes He does.

But much Christian maturity develops through thousands of ordinary acts of: trust, repentance, obedience, prayer, endurance, forgiveness, and dependence. Do not despise slow growth.

24. SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS NOT A STRAIGHT LINE You may experience a season when spiritual growth seems obvious. Then another season may feel difficult. You may overcome one struggle and discover another. You may think you have learned patience until God places you in a situation requiring deeper patience. Growth often looks less like: UP -> UP -> UP -> UP and more like: growth, struggle, repentance, learning, growth, failure, grace, renewed obedience, deeper growth. God can use even failures to teach humility and dependence. That does not make sin good. It demonstrates that God is gracious.

25. WHAT IF I KEEP STRUGGLING WITH THE SAME SIN? Do not normalize it. But do not surrender either. Bring it repeatedly into the light. Ask: What situations trigger this? What lies am I believing? What access needs to be removed? Who should know about this struggle? What

Scripture speaks directly to it? What practical boundaries are needed? Do I need pastoral, professional, or other appropriate help? Some patterns are deeply rooted. Serious addictions, compulsive behavior, trauma-related patterns, or mental-health concerns may require qualified professional support in addition to spiritual care. Seeking appropriate help is not evidence of weak faith. Keep fighting sin. Keep returning to Christ.

26. FELLOWSHIP HELPS US GROW Sanctification is personal. But it is not purely private.

READ HEBREWS 10:19-25. Believers encourage one another.

READ GALATIANS 6:1-2. Believers restore and bear burdens.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-17. Believers teach, forgive, sing, and live together. Other Christians can see things in us that we may not see ourselves. God frequently uses His people as instruments of growth.

27. SUFFERING CAN PRODUCE GROWTH This does not mean suffering is automatically good. Pain hurts. Loss is real. Evil should not be called good. But God can work within suffering.

READ ROMANS 5:1-5. Suffering can produce endurance, character, and hope.

READ JAMES 1:2-4. Trials can produce perseverance. Christians do not need to pretend pain feels pleasant. They trust that suffering is not beyond God's ability to redeem.

28. GOD DISCIPLINES HIS CHILDREN

READ HEBREWS 12:3-11. The word discipline can sound purely punitive. But Hebrews presents God's discipline as the loving training of a Father. God's discipline is aimed toward holiness. This does not mean every painful event is a direct punishment for a specific sin. Scripture does not allow us to make that assumption. God can use hardship to: correct, train, strengthen, redirect, and mature His children.

29. WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FRUIT? Return to Galatians 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit includes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Notice what is not on the list: popularity, platform size, Bible trivia, religious vocabulary,

social-media influence, or appearing impressive. Spiritual maturity is fundamentally about Christlike character.

30. DO NOT COMPARE YOUR GROWTH TO SOMEONE ELSE'S Comparison can produce either pride or discouragement. You may look at someone and think: "I am much more mature than they are." Or: "I will never be as spiritual as they are." Neither response is healthy. You do not know everything God is doing in another person's life. You do not know where that person began. Look to Jesus. Ask: Am I responding faithfully to what God is teaching me?

31. SPIRITUAL MATURITY IS NOT THE SAME AS BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

Knowing Scripture matters enormously. But information alone is not maturity. The Pharisees knew Scripture extensively and still resisted Jesus.

READ JOHN 5:39-40. A person can know: theology, Greek words, Bible history, doctrinal systems, and countless verses while remaining: proud, harsh, unforgiving, dishonest, or unloving. Biblical knowledge should produce deeper obedience, humility, worship, wisdom, and love.

32. SPIRITUAL MATURITY IS NOT A PERSONALITY TYPE Quiet people are not automatically more spiritual. Outgoing people are not automatically less spiritual. Emotional worship does not automatically prove deeper faith. Reserved worship does not automatically prove deeper faith. God sanctifies different personalities. The goal is not to make every Christian behave identically. The goal is Christlike character expressed through people God created differently.

33. WHAT ABOUT FEELINGS? Feelings matter. But feelings are not always reliable measurements of spiritual reality. You may feel close to God during one season. You may feel little during another. Faith sometimes continues when emotions are strong. Faith sometimes continues when emotions are nearly absent. Spiritual growth means learning to bring feelings under truth rather than pretending feelings do not exist. The question is not:

"Do I feel spiritual today?" The deeper question is: "Will I trust God today?"

34. WHAT IF GOD FEELS FAR AWAY? Many faithful believers experience seasons of spiritual dryness. The Psalms repeatedly express longing, confusion, grief, and a sense of God's distance.

READ PSALM 42. Spiritual dryness does not automatically mean you have failed. Ask honestly whether there is known sin requiring repentance. But do not assume every dry season is punishment. Continue: praying, reading Scripture, gathering with believers, remembering God's faithfulness, and obeying what you know. Faithfulness during dryness can itself become part of spiritual maturity.

35. GROWTH OFTEN LOOKS ORDINARY Some Christians spend years waiting for a dramatic spiritual breakthrough while overlooking ordinary faithfulness. Growth may look like: apologizing sooner, speaking more gently, resisting temptation one more time, giving generously, telling the truth when lying would be easier, praying when afraid, forgiving slowly but sincerely, remaining faithful during suffering, doing ordinary work faithfully, or choosing not to retaliate. Do not overlook ordinary Christlikeness.

36. WILL I EVER BECOME PERFECT IN THIS LIFE? Christians differ over some aspects of how completely sanctification can progress before death. But the New Testament repeatedly calls believers toward holiness while also recognizing ongoing sin and the need for confession.

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16. Paul does not describe himself as already having arrived. He presses forward. Christian maturity should produce greater holiness. But Christians should be cautious about claiming sinless perfection. Our final complete transformation awaits what Scripture describes as glorification.

37. WHAT IS GLORIFICATION? Glorification is the completion of God's transforming work in His people.

READ ROMANS 8:28-30. READ 1 JOHN 3:1-3. John says believers will one day be like Christ because they will see Him as He is. The Christian story does not end with: "I tried hard to improve." It ends with God completing His work. Sin will not always remain. The struggle will end.

Christ's people will be made whole.

38. HOW DO I START GROWING? Begin simply. Read Scripture. Pray honestly. Obey what you understand. Confess sin. Gather with healthy believers. Serve someone. Ask questions. Learn. Repent when necessary. Practice gratitude. Trust God during difficulty. Keep looking to Jesus. Do not attempt to create a complicated spiritual system overnight. Take the next faithful step. Then take another.

39. WHAT IF I FAIL? You will. Not because failure should be accepted casually. But because sanctification is unfinished. When you fail: do not hide, do not pretend, do not excuse sin, and do not decide following Jesus is pointless. Confess. Repent. Receive grace. Learn. Get up. Keep following Jesus.

40. WHO FINISHES THE WORK? Return to Philippians 1:6. God began the work. God continues the work. God will complete the work. That does not make your choices meaningless. It makes your hope secure. Your confidence is not ultimately: "I will never stumble." Your confidence is:

God Is Faithful.

Beginner Review

- 1. Spiritual growth is often described with the word _____.**
- 2. Christians are saved by _____ through faith.**
- 3. Good works are the _____ of salvation, not its price.**

4. The goal of sanctification is becoming more like _____.
5. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual _____.
6. Christians still struggle against _____.
7. Spiritual disciplines help believers seek _____.
8. Jesus described Himself as the vine and His followers as the _____.
9. Spiritual growth is usually a _____ rather than an instant event.
10. God promises to _____ the work He begins in His people.

Beginner Review Answers

1. sanctification
2. grace
3. fruit

4. Jesus

5. fruit
6. sin

7. God

8. branches
9. process
10. complete

BEGINNER SUMMARY Christians do not grow spiritually so God will save them. Jesus saves by grace. Spiritual growth happens because God has already begun a new work in those who belong to Christ. The Holy Spirit transforms believers. Scripture renews the mind. Prayer develops dependence. Christian community provides encouragement and accountability. Obedience matters. Repentance continues. Trials can produce endurance. Spiritual disciplines create intentional rhythms for seeking God. And through all of these things, God increasingly forms Christlike character. Growth can be slow. Christians still struggle. Failure does not make sin unimportant. And grace does not make obedience unnecessary. The Christian keeps returning to Jesus. God begins the work. God sustains the work. And God will ultimately complete the work.

Beginner Memory Anchor

We Do Not Obey So God Will Save Us.

We Obey Because God Has Saved Us.

Part Two · Want To Go Deeper?

41. SANCTIFICATION HAS MORE THAN ONE BIBLICAL DIMENSION The New Testament sometimes speaks of believers as already sanctified. **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2.** Paul addresses believers as sanctified in Christ Jesus. Other passages describe sanctification as an ongoing process. **READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8.** And Scripture looks toward a future completion of God's work. This has led theologians to speak about dimensions such as:

Definitive Or Positional Sanctification

PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION and

FINAL GLORIFICATION. The terminology varies among traditions. The biblical pattern is more important than the labels: Believers belong to God. God is transforming them. One day the transformation will be complete.

42. UNION WITH CHRIST One of the deepest foundations of sanctification is the believer's union with Christ.

READ ROMANS 6:1-14. Paul does not merely tell Christians: "Try harder not to sin." He begins with what has happened to them in relationship with Jesus. Believers have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection. Paul therefore tells them to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. Christian ethics flows from Christian identity.

43. ROMANS 6 - GRACE IS NOT PERMISSION TO SIN Paul anticipates a dangerous misunderstanding. If grace increases where sin increases, should Christians keep sinning? His answer is emphatic. No.

READ ROMANS 6:1-2. Grace does not mean: "Sin no longer matters." Grace means believers have been brought into a new relationship with sin. Sin is no longer their rightful master.

44. "Consider Yourself Dead To Sin"

READ ROMANS 6:11. Paul tells believers to reckon or consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. He is not asking them to pretend temptation does not exist. He is telling them to live according to their new identity. Sin may still call. But it no longer has the same claim. The Christian can say: "That may have ruled me. It does not own me."

45. PRESENT YOURSELF TO GOD

Romans 6 becomes extremely practical.

READ ROMANS 6:12-14. Paul tells believers not to present their bodies to sin but to present themselves to God. Sanctification includes actual choices. Eyes. Hands. Speech. Sexuality.

Money. Time. Habits. Relationships. The body matters in discipleship. Grace enters ordinary life.

46. ROMANS 7 - THE REALITY OF CONFLICT Romans 7 is one of the most debated passages in discussions of Christian experience.

READ ROMANS 7:7-25. Christians disagree about exactly how Paul's "I" should be understood in portions of this chapter and whether he is primarily describing his experience before conversion, under the law, as a believer, or rhetorically representing humanity or Israel in relation to the law. We should not pretend the interpretive question is simple. But several truths are clear within Romans 6-8: God's law is good. Sin is powerful. Human beings cannot rescue themselves. And deliverance comes through Jesus Christ. Do not build an entire doctrine of sanctification from one disputed interpretation of Romans 7. Read Romans 6, 7, and 8 together.

47. ROMANS 8 - LIFE IN THE SPIRIT Romans 8 begins with extraordinary news.

READ ROMANS 8:1-17. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. The Spirit gives life. Believers are God's children. And through the Spirit believers put sinful deeds to death. Notice again: GOD'S SPIRIT ACTS.

BELIEVERS ACT. Christian growth is neither independent self-effort nor passive waiting.

48. PUTTING SIN TO DEATH Romans 8:13 describes putting the deeds of the body to death by the Spirit. Older Christian writers sometimes called this mortification-putting sin to death. The word can sound dramatic. The reality should be. Jesus does not teach believers to manage cherished sin comfortably. Sin should be fought. That may mean: removing access, changing habits, ending inappropriate relationships, confessing to someone trustworthy,

establishing boundaries, replacing lies with truth, or fleeing situations where temptation repeatedly overwhelms you. Do not negotiate indefinitely with what God tells you to put to death.

49. PUT OFF AND PUT ON

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-17. Paul uses two complementary movements. PUT OFF. and PUT ON. Put off things such as: sexual immorality, greed, anger, malice, slander, and lying. Put on: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. Christian growth is not merely stopping bad behavior. It is replacing sinful patterns with Christlike ones.

50. THE INDICATIVE AND THE IMPERATIVE These grammatical terms can help explain an important New Testament pattern. An indicative states what is true. An imperative gives a command. Paul frequently tells believers what God has done before telling them how to live. For example: You have been raised with Christ. Therefore, seek what is above. You are God's chosen and loved people. Therefore, put on compassion and kindness. The gospel pattern is:

WHO GOD HAS MADE YOU v

HOW YOU ARE CALLED TO LIVE. Christian obedience grows from grace.

51. "Work Out Your Salvation"

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13. This passage does not say: "Work for your salvation." It says: "Work out" what God is already accomplishing. The next verse explains why believers can do this: God is at work in them.

This protects against two opposite errors.

PASSIVITY: "God does everything, so my choices do not matter."

SELF-RELIANCE: "Everything depends upon my discipline." Scripture gives us neither.

52. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY How exactly God's sovereign transforming work relates to human choice has been discussed throughout Christian history. Different traditions emphasize the relationship differently. But Scripture comfortably speaks of both. God works. Believers obey. God gives strength. Believers strive. God produces fruit. Believers walk by the Spirit. We should resist forcing Scripture into a false choice:

EITHER GOD DOES IT or I DO IT. Biblical sanctification involves God's gracious action producing and empowering genuine human response.

53. SANCTIFICATION TRANSFORMS THE WHOLE PERSON The beginner distinction that "sanctification changes how we live before God" is helpful. But sanctification is much deeper than external behavior modification. God increasingly transforms: what we believe, what we desire, what we love, what we value, what we pursue, how we think, how we respond, and ultimately how we live.

Read Ephesians 4:17-24.

READ ROMANS 12:1-2. God renews the mind. He reshapes desires. He exposes false loves. He forms new patterns of obedience. Christian sanctification is therefore not simply learning to behave better.

God Is Not Merely Modifying Conduct.

He Is Forming Christlike People.

54. ARE SANCTIFICATION AND DISCIPLESHIP THE SAME THING? Not exactly, although they strongly overlap.

SANCTIFICATION emphasizes God's work of setting believers apart and transforming them toward holiness and Christlikeness.

DISCIPLESHIP emphasizes the life of learning from, following, obeying, and becoming like Jesus. A disciple is being sanctified. And sanctification takes place within the lived reality of following Jesus. The terms emphasize different aspects of the same Christian life. God transforms His people as they follow Christ.

55. ABIDING AND OBEDIENCE John 15 should not be reduced to a vague feeling of closeness to Jesus.

READ JOHN 15:1-17. Jesus connects abiding with: His words, prayer, fruit, love, and obedience. Abiding is relational. But biblical relationship with Jesus changes how disciples live. The branch receives life from the vine. And living branches bear fruit.

56. PRUNING Jesus says the Father prunes fruitful branches so they will bear more fruit.

READ JOHN 15:1-2. Pruning is an agricultural image. Healthy growth sometimes requires cutting away what interferes with greater fruitfulness. We should be careful about declaring exactly what God is "pruning" in someone else's suffering. But believers can appropriately ask: Is God using this season to expose something? Is something distracting me from Him? Is there a habit, priority, or dependency that needs to change?

57. TRAINING VERSUS TRYING READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:7-10. Paul uses the language of training. There is a difference between occasionally trying something and training toward something. An athlete does not prepare by waiting until competition day to make an effort. Likewise, Christian practices develop patterns. Prayer trains dependence. Scripture trains discernment. Giving trains generosity. Fasting can train self-denial and dependence. Service trains attention toward others. Training does not earn grace. It teaches us to live faithfully within grace.

58. FASTING Fasting appears throughout Scripture. Jesus assumes His followers will fast.

READ MATTHEW 6:16-18. Biblical fasting commonly involves voluntarily abstaining from food for a spiritual purpose while seeking God. It can accompany: prayer, repentance, grief, dependence, or focused seeking of God. Fasting should not become: spiritual performance, a method of manipulating God,

or an unsafe practice. People with medical, nutritional, pregnancy-related, eating-disorder, medication, or other health considerations should use appropriate medical wisdom rather than assuming food fasting is required. The spiritual purpose matters more than proving endurance.

59. SOLITUDE AND SILENCE Jesus sometimes withdrew from crowds.

Read Mark 1:35.

READ LUKE 5:15-16. Christian solitude is not isolation from the body of Christ. It is intentional space away from noise and demands in order to attend to God. Silence can expose how uncomfortable we are without: entertainment, conversation, notifications, noise, or

productivity. But Scripture never establishes one mandatory solitude technique for every believer. Use the practice as a servant. Do not make it a law.

60. MEDITATION - BIBLICALLY UNDERSTOOD Biblical meditation means thoughtfully dwelling upon God, His works, and His Word.

Read Psalm 1.

READ PSALM 119:9-16. The goal is not simply emptying the mind. It is filling attention with God's truth. You might slowly consider: What does this passage reveal about God? What does it reveal about me? What promise should I trust? What command should I obey? What truth should reshape my thinking? Meditation helps Scripture move from rapid reading toward sustained reflection.

61. HABITS CAN HELP-BUT HABITS ARE NOT THE GOAL Habits reduce the number of decisions required to do something consistently. A regular time for prayer or Bible reading can therefore be helpful. But a perfect routine is not the definition of spiritual maturity. Some seasons disrupt routines: new babies, illness, caregiving, travel, grief, work changes, disability, or crisis. Do not confuse faithfulness with maintaining one ideal schedule. Spiritual disciplines should serve relationship with God.

62. THE MEANS OF GRACE Christians have historically used the phrase means of grace to describe the ordinary ways God has appointed to nourish, strengthen, teach, and mature His people.

Different Christian traditions define the category somewhat differently. Commonly discussed means include: God's Word, prayer, corporate worship, fellowship, baptism, and Communion or the Lord's Supper. Some traditions use the phrase more narrowly. Others use it more broadly. The important safeguard is this:

THE MEANS OF GRACE DO NOT PURCHASE GRACE. They are not techniques for making God love us. They are not spiritual transactions in which human effort earns divine favor. Rather, they are God-given ways through which His people: hear His truth, remember the gospel, seek Him, receive encouragement, confess faith, worship together, and grow. Grace remains grace.

63. GOD SANCTIFIES HIS PEOPLE TOGETHER Sanctification is deeply personal. But the New Testament does not present it as an isolated project. God is forming a people.

READ EPHESIANS 4:11-16. The body grows as its members are equipped and each part does its work.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-17. Believers teach, admonish, sing, forgive, love, and live together. Corporate worship can form believers as they: hear Scripture, pray together, sing truth, confess faith, remember the gospel, and respond to God together. Baptism publicly identifies believers with Christ and His people. Communion repeatedly brings the gathered church back to Christ's sacrifice and to its shared identity in Him. Fellowship gives believers opportunities to: forgive, serve, encourage, receive correction, bear burdens, and practice love. This means other

Christians are not merely spectators of our sanctification. God often uses His people as part of the process. The related studies Worship and Fellowship and the Church explore these dimensions more fully.

64. LAW AND GRACE Christians sometimes fear that any strong emphasis on obedience becomes legalism. That is not necessarily true. Jesus gives commands. The apostles give commands. Grace does not abolish obedience. Legalism can take several forms, but it commonly involves treating human performance or extra-biblical requirements as a basis for acceptance with God or imposing rules as though God commanded what He did not. Biblical obedience says: "Because God has saved me, I want to live according to His will." Legalism says, in effect: "My performance establishes or proves my superiority, earns God's favor, or binds others where God has not."

65. CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

READ ROMANS 14. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 8-10. Not every Christian decision is governed by an explicit command. Believers sometimes make different faithful choices in areas of conscience. Christian freedom should not become: selfishness, carelessness, or contempt for other believers. Nor should one person's conscience automatically become God's law for everyone else. Ask: Is it sinful? Is it wise? Is it loving? Could it master me? Could it harm someone else? Can I do it with thanksgiving to God?

66. THE CONSCIENCE The conscience matters. But conscience is not identical to Scripture. A conscience can be: sensitive, weak, misinformed, or damaged. It therefore needs formation through truth. Do not violate conscience casually. But do not assume: "I feel guilty" automatically means: "God has forbidden this." Learn Scripture carefully. Allow God's Word to train conscience.

67. SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND THE HEART Christian transformation reaches deeper than behavior. Jesus repeatedly addresses the heart. Anger lies beneath murder. Lust lies beneath adultery.

Greed lies beneath accumulation. Pride can hide beneath religion.

READ MATTHEW 5-7. Behavior matters. But Jesus aims deeper. Ask not only: "What did I do?" Ask: "What did I want?" "What was I believing?" "What was I loving?" "What was I afraid of losing?" Sanctification reaches motives.

68. IDOLATRY IS NOT ONLY ABOUT STATUES An idol is anything treated as though it deserves the devotion, trust, identity, or allegiance belonging to God. Modern idols can include: money, approval, comfort, romance, success, family, politics, control, appearance, career, or even ministry. Good things can become ultimate things. One helpful question is: "What feels so necessary that I believe I cannot be okay without it?" Our strongest reactions sometimes reveal what the heart is worshiping.

69. RENEWING THE MIND

READ EPHESIANS 4:17-24. Christian transformation involves learning to recognize lies and replace them with truth. For example: LIE: "My worth depends on other people's approval." TRUTH: My identity is rooted in Christ. LIE: "If I cannot control everything, I cannot be safe." TRUTH: God is sovereign, and I can trust Him. LIE: "This temptation is too strong to resist." TRUTH: Sin is no longer my master in Christ. Renewal requires repeated exposure to truth.

70. SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND SANCTIFICATION The New Testament describes Christian life as involving spiritual conflict.

READ EPHESIANS 6:10-18. Believers face more than bad habits. Scripture speaks of: the world, the flesh, and spiritual evil. But spiritual warfare should not become speculation about demons behind every difficulty. Paul's emphasis in Ephesians 6 is remarkably grounded: truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, God's Word, and prayer. Stand in what God provides.

71. SUFFERING AND CHRISTLIKENESS READ 1 PETER 1:3-9. Trials can refine faith. Again, this does not mean Christians should seek suffering or remain unnecessarily in abusive or dangerous situations. Nor should someone tell a suffering person: "God is doing this because you need to grow." We often do not know why a particular suffering occurs. But Christians can trust that suffering cannot prevent God's ultimate purposes. God can form Christlike endurance even in places we would never have chosen.

72. GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS NOT DIVINE REJECTION Hebrews 12 describes discipline as evidence of fatherly care. This matters especially for Christians who imagine every hardship means: "God is angry with me." God's relationship with His children should not be reduced to constant punishment. In Christ, believers are not living under condemnation. God trains His children toward holiness. His correction comes from His fatherly purpose-not from rejection.

73. SPIRITUAL DRYNESS Christian history has used various terms for seasons when God seems distant. Scripture itself gives us something more important than terminology: faithful people sometimes feel abandoned. Read Psalms such as: Psalm 13, Psalm 42, Psalm 73, and Psalm 88. The Bible gives believers language for lament. Faith does not require pretending everything feels spiritually vibrant. Sometimes faith says: "I do not understand what God is doing. But I will keep turning toward Him."

74. WHEN GOD SEEMS SILENT Do not manufacture an answer simply because you want one. God has already spoken authoritatively through Scripture.

When circumstances remain unclear: obey what Scripture clearly teaches, pray for wisdom, seek wise counsel, wait when necessary, and resist interpreting every coincidence as a private

message from God. Christian maturity includes learning to trust God when He has not explained everything.

75. HOW DOES GOD GUIDE SPIRITUAL GROWTH? God's primary revealed standard is Scripture. The Holy Spirit illuminates truth and transforms believers. God also uses: wisdom, prayer, Christian community, circumstances, and mature counsel. But subjective impressions should be tested rather than automatically labeled: "God told me." **READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22. READ 1 JOHN 4:1.** Spiritual maturity includes discernment.

76. SPIRITUAL PRIDE Growth itself can become an occasion for sin. You begin reading Scripture consistently. Then you judge Christians who do not. You learn theology. Then you become condescending. You develop discipline. Then you admire yourself. You overcome a sin. Then you despise someone still struggling.

READ LUKE 18:9-14. The closer Christians grow to Jesus, the less reason they have for boasting. Every good thing is grace.

77. KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE READ 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3. Paul warns that knowledge can puff up while love builds up. This does not mean ignorance is spiritual. Paul cared deeply about truth. But truth should produce love. If studying theology makes someone increasingly: arrogant, argumentative, dismissive, or cruel, something has gone wrong. Christlike truth and Christlike love belong together.

78. FRUIT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN APPEARANCE Religious appearance can be manufactured. Someone can learn:

Christian vocabulary, appropriate clothing, worship behavior, Bible-study answers, and ministry culture. None of those automatically prove maturity. Jesus warns about outward religious appearance without inward reality.

READ MATTHEW 23. God's goal is not religious camouflage. He transforms the heart.

79. SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE NOT THE SAME AS SPIRITUAL MATURITY A person can be gifted and immature. Corinth proves it. The Corinthian church possessed spiritual gifts while struggling with: division, pride, sexual sin, lawsuits, disorder, and misuse of gifts. **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1-3 and 12-14.** Do not confuse: ability with character. A gifted teacher may still need significant sanctification. A gifted leader may still lack maturity. Fruit matters. Christians also differ over whether all New Testament spiritual gifts continue in the same manner today. That continuationist/cessationist discussion is addressed more directly in the related study Fellowship and the Church. Whatever position a Christian holds, Scripture does not permit spiritual giftedness to substitute for Christlike character.

80. MINISTRY SUCCESS IS NOT PROOF OF PERSONAL HOLINESS Visible ministry results can create dangerous assumptions. People may think: "God is using this leader, therefore everything about the leader must be spiritually healthy." Scripture does not allow that conclusion. God's power does not make human leaders infallible. Evaluate character. Evaluate doctrine. Maintain accountability. Never let perceived ministry success become a shield against legitimate concerns.

81. COMMUNITY AS A TOOL OF SANCTIFICATION Other believers help expose: selfishness, impatience, pride, and blind spots. This is one reason community can feel difficult. People interrupt our preferences. They need forgiveness.

They misunderstand us. They disagree. And sometimes God uses those exact relationships to form Christlike love. Community is not merely where spiritually mature people gather. It is one of the places God produces maturity.

82. CONFESSION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

READ JAMES 5:16. Sin grows easily in secrecy. Appropriate confession to trustworthy believers can bring: prayer, support, wisdom, accountability, and freedom from isolation. But accountability should not become surveillance or control. Healthy accountability asks: "How can I help you follow Jesus?" It does not claim ownership over another adult believer's conscience or ordinary life.

83. HOW CAN I KNOW I REALLY BELONG TO JESUS? This question becomes especially urgent when someone is struggling spiritually. A believer may wonder: "If I were really saved, wouldn't I be further along?" "Does this recurring struggle prove my faith is fake?" "How much fruit is enough?" The foundation of Christian assurance is not flawless spiritual performance. It is Jesus Christ and His saving work.

Read John 10:27-30.

READ ROMANS 8:31-39. READ 1 JOHN 5:11-13. God's promises direct believers toward Christ. At the same time, Scripture also teaches that new life produces evidence. That evidence can include: faith in Christ, repentance, love for God, love for other believers, a desire for holiness, obedience, and spiritual fruit. But evidence should never become a replacement Savior. Do not turn sanctification into endless self-inspection. The Christian's hope is not: "I have produced enough fruit to make myself safe." It is: "Jesus is sufficient, and His transforming work is becoming visible in my life." A useful distinction is:

Christ Is The Basis Of Your Salvation.

Spiritual Fruit Is Evidence Of His Work-Not The Foundation Of Your Hope.

84. WHAT IF I AM NOT CHANGING? Take the concern seriously without immediately assuming the worst.

Ask: Am I actually trusting Christ? Is there known sin I am refusing to surrender? Am I regularly exposing myself to Scripture? Am I praying? Am I connected to healthy Christian community? Am I expecting instant change where God may be producing gradual growth? Are there changes I have overlooked because they seem small? Would a mature Christian who knows me see growth? Honest examination is healthy. Constant spiritual panic is not.

85. ASSURANCE AND SPIRITUAL FRUIT Scripture grounds salvation in Christ and God's promises. It also teaches that genuine faith produces fruit. These truths should not be turned against each other. Do not place confidence in your moral résumé. Place confidence in Christ. But do not use confidence in Christ as an excuse to ignore a life of persistent unrepentant rebellion. Faith looks to Jesus. And living faith bears fruit. Assurance becomes distorted when Christians either: look only inward and never rest in Christ, or claim confidence in Christ while refusing His call to repentance and obedience. Biblical assurance keeps both grace and transformation in view.

86. HABITUAL SIN AND ASSURANCE What if someone repeatedly falls into the same sin? Distinguish between:

STRUGGLING WITH SIN and

MAKING PEACE WITH SIN. A struggling believer may fall repeatedly while: hating the sin, confessing it, seeking help, building safeguards, and continuing to fight. Making peace with sin says: "I know what God says, but I have no intention of turning." Those are not spiritually identical postures. The appropriate response to ongoing sin is not despair. It is deeper repentance, deeper dependence, and serious action.

87. PERFECTIONISM Spiritual perfectionism often hides beneath sincere desires for holiness. It says: "I should be further along." "I should never struggle." "A mature Christian would not feel this." "If I fail, I have ruined everything." Biblical holiness is serious.

Perfectionism is different. Perfectionism makes personal performance the center. The gospel keeps Christ at the center. Pursue holiness intensely. And remember that your Savior is not surprised that sanctification is unfinished.

88. CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF "PERFECTION" AND ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION Christians have historically disagreed about the degree of sanctification possible in this life. Wesleyan and Holiness traditions have often taught forms of entire sanctification or Christian perfection, generally emphasizing perfected love or a profound work of grace rather than simplistic claims that a believer becomes incapable of every mistake. Reformed, Lutheran, Baptist, and many other Protestant traditions generally emphasize that substantial growth in holiness is expected while indwelling sin remains a reality until death or glorification.

Different traditions define important terms differently. Therefore, do not caricature a position based only on its label. Key passages include: Matthew 5:48, Romans 6-8, Philippians 3:12-16, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Hebrews 12:14, and 1 John 1:5-2:2. This is an area where faithful Christians differ. The clear shared call is: Pursue holiness. Depend upon grace. Look toward Christ's final work.

89. CAN A CHRISTIAN BECOME SINLESS? The New Testament holds an extremely high vision of holiness. Christians should never use ongoing imperfection as permission for complacency. Yet 1 John also warns believers against claiming to be without sin. **READ 1 JOHN 1:8-10.** Paul describes himself as still pressing toward the goal.

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16. Therefore, claims of complete sinlessness should be approached with great caution. The Christian posture is not: "I have arrived." It is: "Christ has taken hold of me, and I am pressing forward."

90. PROGRESS CAN BE REAL WITHOUT BEING COMPLETE Imagine someone who once responded to criticism with explosive anger. Years later, anger still rises. But now the person: recognizes it sooner, prays, controls speech more often, apologizes faster, and increasingly responds with patience. The temptation has not vanished. But transformation is real. Do not define growth only as: "I never struggle anymore."

Sometimes growth means: "The struggle no longer controls me the way it once did."

91. THE ROLE OF DESIRE Sanctification changes not only actions but desires. At first, obedience may feel difficult. Over time, God can reshape what a believer loves.

Read Psalm 37:4.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:13. God works within His people both to desire and to act according to His purposes. Christian maturity is not merely learning to do the right thing while permanently wishing to do the opposite. God increasingly reforms the heart.

92. WHAT ABOUT TRAUMA, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH? Not every struggle should be reduced to: "You need more faith." Human beings are embodied creatures. Emotional and psychological difficulties can involve complex combinations of: life experiences, trauma, relationships, physical health, neurology, environment, and spiritual concerns. Prayer, Scripture, Christian fellowship, and pastoral care are valuable. Qualified mental-health or medical care can also be appropriate. Receiving professional help is not automatically evidence of spiritual failure. Nor should a medical or psychological explanation automatically exclude spiritual dimensions. Wisdom avoids simplistic either/or answers.

93. PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY A Christian who cannot fast for medical reasons is not spiritually inferior. A person who cannot concentrate for long periods may need different Bible-study rhythms. A homebound believer may participate in Christian community differently. A caregiver may not have an uninterrupted hour every morning for prayer. Spiritual disciplines should not become standards by which Christians rank one another. Faithfulness occurs within real lives and real limitations. God knows His children.

94. REST, THE BODY, AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION Human beings are not disembodied spirits. God created human beings with physical needs. Jesus recognized ordinary human limitations.

READ MARK 6:30-32. At times Jesus called His disciples away from activity to rest. Physical exhaustion can affect: concentration, emotions, patience, judgment, and the ability to respond thoughtfully. Rest is therefore not automatically spiritual laziness.

Sleep, nutrition, movement, medical care, and appropriate rest can support faithful life because human beings live and serve God in bodies. But physical wellness should not become another measure of righteousness. A person can: exercise regularly, eat carefully, sleep well, and remain spiritually immature. Likewise, chronic illness, disability, aging, pain, exhaustion, or physical limitation do not indicate weaker faith. Christians also differ over how Old Testament Sabbath commands apply under the New Covenant. Some traditions emphasize ongoing Sabbath observance more strongly than others. Even where Christians differ on Sabbath theology, Scripture consistently reminds us that humans are creatures rather than machines. Work matters. Rest matters. Neither should become an idol.

95. AGE AND SANCTIFICATION Spiritual maturity does not automatically correspond to age. Someone may have attended church for forty years without growing deeply. A newer believer may demonstrate remarkable humility and hunger for God. Yet time can become a tremendous instrument of maturity when combined with faithful discipleship. Do not merely ask: "How long have I been a Christian?" Ask: "What is Christ producing in me?"

96. SANCTIFICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS One of the clearest places to evaluate spiritual growth is relationships. Are you becoming: more patient? more truthful? more forgiving? more willing to listen? less controlling? less defensive? more generous? more willing to apologize? more able to rejoice when others succeed? The people closest to us often see our spiritual formation more accurately than people who hear us discuss theology.

97. SANCTIFICATION AND SPEECH

READ EPHESIANS 4:25-32. Paul connects the new life with speech. No lying. No destructive speech. No bitterness and slander. Instead: truth, words that build up, kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. Speech is one of the most practical laboratories of

sanctification.

Ask: Does the way I speak increasingly sound like someone who belongs to Jesus?

98. SANCTIFICATION AND MONEY Jesus frequently spoke about money because money reveals the heart. Growth affects: generosity, contentment, honesty, stewardship, and freedom from greed. **READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19.** Spiritual maturity does not mean money becomes irrelevant. It means money increasingly loses its power to define identity and security.

99. SANCTIFICATION AND SEXUALITY The New Testament explicitly connects sanctification with sexual holiness. **READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8.** Christian sexuality is not simply whatever desire happens to feel strongest. The body belongs to God. Sexual discipleship may involve: boundaries, self-control, fleeing temptation, repentance, wisdom, and sometimes seeking help for deeply rooted patterns. Sexual sin should neither be trivialized nor treated as though it lies beyond Christ's grace.

100. SANCTIFICATION AND FORGIVENESS

READ EPHESIANS 4:31-32. Forgiven people learn to forgive. But forgiveness should not be confused with: denying harm, eliminating consequences, automatic reconciliation, or immediate restoration of trust. Sometimes spiritual growth means releasing vengeance while maintaining wise boundaries. Christlike forgiveness is not permission for continued abuse.

101. SANCTIFICATION AND SERVICE Jesus washed His disciples' feet.

READ JOHN 13:1-17. Christlike maturity bends downward. It notices needs. It serves without requiring applause. It performs tasks beneath social status. One sign of spiritual growth is becoming less obsessed with: "Who notices me?" and increasingly willing to ask: "Who can I serve?"

102. SANCTIFICATION AND ORDINARY WORK Spiritual growth is not confined to activities that look obviously "spiritual."

Read Colossians 3:17.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:23-24. Christian faithfulness reaches ordinary responsibilities. Sanctification happens: at the office, on the farm, in the classroom, running a business, raising children, caring for aging parents, managing employees, serving customers, cleaning a home, keeping appointments, paying bills, doing dishes, volunteering, and completing work nobody applauds. Work can expose: impatience, dishonesty, pride, laziness, fear, control, people-pleasing, and selfish ambition. It can also become a place to practice: integrity, diligence, patience, humility, service, fairness, dependability, and love. Not every Christian has paid employment. But every Christian has ordinary places where faithfulness matters.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS NOT CONFINED TO "SPIRITUAL" ACTIVITIES. Christlikeness enters ordinary life.

103. SANCTIFICATION SHOULD MAKE US MORE LOVING Love is not merely one Christian virtue among many. Jesus placed love for God and love for neighbor at the center of God's commands.

READ MATTHEW 22:34-40. Jesus told His disciples that their love for one another would identify them as His followers.

READ JOHN 13:34-35. Paul teaches that extraordinary gifts and remarkable sacrifice without love amount to nothing. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13.

Read Galatians 5:6. Read 1 John 4:7-12.

A person can become more disciplined without becoming more Christlike. A person can become more knowledgeable without becoming more Christlike. A person can become more religiously active without becoming more Christlike. Biblical sanctification increasingly produces: love for God, love for other believers, love for neighbors, patience, kindness, truthfulness, mercy, forgiveness, and self-giving concern for others. Love does not mean approving everything. Biblical love and biblical truth are not enemies. Jesus embodied both. The question is not merely: "Am I becoming more disciplined?" Ask: "Am I becoming more loving?"

Memory Anchor

If Spiritual Growth Does Not Increasingly Produce Love, Something Is Wrong With Our Measure Of Maturity.

104. SANCTIFICATION TURNS US OUTWARD Christian growth should not produce increasing preoccupation with ourselves. Jesus forms people who increasingly notice others.

READ MATTHEW 5:14-16. Jesus calls His people to live in ways that point beyond themselves toward God.

READ MATTHEW 28:18-20. Maturing Christians increasingly care about: people who do not know Christ, neighbors in need, people who are suffering, mercy, justice, generosity, service, hospitality, bearing witness to Jesus, and helping others follow Him. This does not mean every Christian will serve in the same ministry or possess the same gifts. Nor does every believer have the same opportunities. But Christlike maturity turns outward. God's transforming work should become increasingly visible in the way His people love and serve the world around them.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY DOES NOT TERMINATE ON OURSELVES. God transforms His people partly so that His character becomes visible through them.

105. SANCTIFICATION IS TRINITARIAN The entire Triune God is involved in the believer's salvation and transformation. The Father purposes and works for His children's good.

The Son saves, unites believers to Himself, and provides the pattern of Christlikeness. The Holy Spirit indwells, empowers, produces fruit, and transforms. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 3:17-18. Christian growth is not a lonely project. God Himself is at work.

106. FROM GLORY TO GLORY Second Corinthians 3:18 describes believers being transformed into Christ's image. This is not instant self-reinvention. It is transformation produced by the Lord. The direction of Christian life is increasingly toward Christlikeness. Sometimes that change is obvious. Sometimes it is almost invisible day to day. But God is forming His people.

107. GLORIFICATION - WHEN THE BATTLE ENDS READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58. READ 1 JOHN 3:1-3. Christian hope reaches beyond gradual improvement in this life. One day believers will be fully transformed. No temptation. No remaining sin. No spiritual dryness. No divided desires. No weakness produced by the fall. Sanctification points toward completion.

SANCTIFICATION IS MOVEMENT TOWARD SOMETHING GOD HAS ALREADY PROMISED TO COMPLETE. Christian growth is therefore fundamentally hopeful.

108. WHY FUTURE HOPE CHANGES PRESENT GROWTH Future glorification does not make present obedience unnecessary. It makes present obedience hopeful. READ 1 JOHN 3:2-3. John connects the hope of seeing Christ with present purification. Christians pursue holiness because they know where God's story is going. One day Christ's people will become what God has been forming them to be. The believer does not pursue holiness anxiously wondering whether God's transforming plan will ultimately fail. God has already revealed the destination. Present growth is incomplete. God's promise is not. We pursue Christlikeness with hope because God has promised to finish what He began.

109. A SIMPLE SPIRITUAL-GROWTH DISCERNMENT GRID Instead of asking only: "Am I doing enough?" consider these areas.

SCRIPTURE Am I increasingly allowing God's Word to shape my thinking? PRAYER Am I growing in dependence upon God?

REPENTANCE Am I becoming quicker to confess and turn from sin?

OBEDIENCE Am I increasingly willing to do what Christ says?

FRUIT Is the Spirit producing Christlike character?

COMMUNITY Am I learning to love, forgive, serve, and receive help from others?

ORDINARY LIFE Is Christlikeness becoming visible in my work, responsibilities, relationships, and commitments?

ENDURANCE Am I learning to trust God through difficulty? HUMILITY Is growth making me more grateful-or more impressed with myself? LOVE Am I becoming more like Jesus in the way I treat people? MISSION Is God's work in me increasingly turning my attention toward serving others and pointing people toward Christ? Look for direction. Not perfection.

110. WHAT THIS STUDY CONCLUDES

- Salvation is God's gift of grace received through faith, not the reward for successful spiritual growth.
- Sanctification is God's transforming work in those who belong to Christ.
- Sanctification transforms the whole person-not merely outward behavior.
- God increasingly transforms what believers think, desire, love, value, pursue, and do.
- Sanctification and discipleship strongly overlap but emphasize different aspects of Christian life.
- Believers actively participate in spiritual growth while depending upon God's power.
- The Holy Spirit is essential to Christian transformation.
- The goal of sanctification is Christlikeness rather than mere self-improvement.
- Christians still struggle with sin because sanctification is unfinished.
- Temptation itself is not identical to sin.
- Confession and repentance remain normal parts of Christian life.
- Conviction should lead believers toward repentance and Christ rather than hopeless condemnation.
- Scripture renews the mind.
- Prayer develops dependence upon God.
- Spiritual disciplines can support growth but do not earn God's love.
- Christians have historically described Word, prayer, worship, fellowship, baptism, and Communion as means through which God strengthens His people, while differing over how the category should be defined.
- The means of grace do not purchase grace.
- God sanctifies believers both personally and within Christian community.
- Corporate worship, fellowship, baptism, and Communion can form believers as part of God's people.
- Abiding in Christ is foundational to spiritual fruitfulness.
- Grace produces obedience rather than making obedience irrelevant.
- Spiritual growth is usually gradual and may be uneven.
- Persistent struggles should be brought into the light rather than hidden or normalized.
- Christian community is one of God's instruments of sanctification.
- God can use suffering and discipline to produce maturity without making suffering itself good.
- Spiritual maturity is measured more accurately by Christlike fruit than by religious appearance, knowledge, giftedness, or platform.
- Spiritual gifts are not identical to spiritual maturity.
- Christians should not compare their spiritual growth competitively.
- Spiritual dryness does not automatically mean God has abandoned a believer.
- Union with Christ provides a foundation for the believer's battle against sin.
- Christians are called to put sin to death by the Spirit.
- Sanctification includes both putting off sinful patterns and putting on Christlike character.
- God's work and human responsibility should not be treated as competing realities.
- Christian freedom must operate under truth and love.
- Conscience should be informed by

Scripture. • Spiritual growth reaches motives and desires, not merely external behavior. • Accountability should encourage discipleship without becoming coercive control. • Christ and His saving work are the foundation of Christian assurance. • Spiritual fruit can provide evidence of God's transforming work but is not the foundation of salvation.

Struggling against sin is different from making peace with sin. • Christians differ over the extent of sanctification possible before glorification and should represent those differences accurately. • Mental-health or medical care can appropriately accompany spiritual care when needed. • Real-life limitations should be considered when applying spiritual disciplines. • Physical rest and bodily care can support faithful life without becoming measures of righteousness. • Christians differ over aspects of Sabbath observance and should avoid binding consciences beyond Scripture. • Sanctification affects relationships, speech, money, sexuality, forgiveness, service, and ordinary work. • Spiritual growth is not confined to activities that appear explicitly religious. • Biblical sanctification increasingly produces love for God and love for people. • Spiritual maturity should increasingly turn believers outward in mercy, generosity, service, witness, and disciple-making. • The Triune God is at work in Christian transformation. • Sanctification will ultimately be completed in glorification. • Sanctification is movement toward something God has already promised to complete. • God's people can pursue holiness with hope because God is faithful to complete the work He begins.

111. A WEEK OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH DAY 1 - GRACE Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Remember where spiritual growth begins. DAY 2 - UNION WITH CHRIST Read Romans 6:1-14. Consider what it means to be alive to God in Christ. DAY 3 - LIFE IN THE SPIRIT Read Galatians 5:13-26. Ask which fruit of the Spirit needs particular attention. DAY 4 - ABIDE Read John 15:1-17. Spend time with Jesus rather than merely completing a task. DAY 5 - PUT OFF / PUT ON Read Colossians 3:1-17. Identify one sinful pattern to put off and one Christlike pattern to put on. DAY 6 - GROW TOGETHER Read Ephesians 4:11-16. Ask how God may be using His people to help you mature-and how He may use you to strengthen someone else. DAY 7 - GOD WILL FINISH Read Philippians 1:3-11. Thank God that He has not abandoned His work in you.

112. THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION A person can become: disciplined, morally respectable, knowledgeable about Scripture, consistent in prayer, active in church, generous, and outwardly religious- and still miss Jesus. Spiritual growth does not begin with self-improvement. It begins with salvation. Human beings are separated from God by sin. No amount of discipline can erase guilt. No spiritual practice can make someone righteous. No Bible-reading streak can purchase forgiveness.

No ministry service can pay for sin. Jesus did what sinners could not do. He lived faithfully. He died for sinners. He rose from the dead. Salvation is received through faith in Him. Only then can sanctification be understood correctly. God does not say: "Transform yourself, and then I will receive you." The gospel announces: "In Christ, receive grace-and now walk in the new life

God gives." Before asking: "How can I become more spiritually mature?" ask:

Do I Belong To Jesus?

113. RELATED 3NAILS STUDIES For continued study, these related 3Nails resources form a helpful pathway: **What Is Salvation? Repentance, Faith, and New Life Following Jesus - The Cost and Joy of Discipleship The Holy Spirit Prayer and Access to God Reading and Understanding Scripture Worship Fellowship and the Church Baptism Communion** These studies explore several foundations and practices through which Christians grow.

114. CONTINUE STUDYING

SALVATION AND GRACE Romans 3:21-28 Romans 5:1-11 Ephesians 2:1-10 Titus 3:3-8

UNION WITH CHRIST Romans 6:1-14 Galatians 2:19-21 Colossians 2:6-15 Colossians 3:1-4

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT Romans 8 Galatians 5:13-26 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

ABIDING IN CHRIST John 15:1-17

RENEWING THE MIND Romans 12:1-2 Ephesians 4:17-32 Philippians 4:4-9 Colossians 3:1-17

HOLINESS 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 Hebrews 12:1-14 1 Peter 1:13-25

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES Matthew 6:1-18 1 Timothy 4:6-16 2 Timothy 3:14-17

MEANS OF GRACE AND CORPORATE GROWTH Acts 2:42-47 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 Colossians 3:12-17 Ephesians 4:11-16 Hebrews 10:19-25

LOVE AND CHRISTLIKE MATURITY Matthew 22:34-40 John 13:34-35 1 Corinthians 13 Galatians 5:6 1 John 4:7-12

WORK AND ORDINARY FAITHFULNESS Colossians 3:17 Colossians 3:22-24 Ephesians 6:5-9 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

MISSION, WITNESS, AND SERVICE Matthew 5:13-16 Matthew 28:18-20 Acts 1:8 1 Peter 2:9-12

SUFFERING AND ENDURANCE Romans 5:1-5 James 1:2-8 1 Peter 1:3-9

CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE Psalm 51 1 John 1:5-2:2 James 5:13-20

ASSURANCE John 10:27-30 Romans 8:31-39 1 John 5:11-13

SPIRITUAL GROWTH Philippians 1:3-11 Philippians 2:12-18 Philippians 3:7-16 2 Peter 1:3-11

REST AND HUMAN LIMITATIONS Mark 6:30-32 Psalm 127:1-2 Matthew 11:28-30

FINAL TRANSFORMATION Romans 8:18-30 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 Philippians 3:20-21 1 John 3:1-3

115. QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN STUDYING SANCTIFICATION When reading a passage about spiritual growth, ask: **What has God already**

done? What does this passage say about Jesus? What does it say about the Holy Spirit? What identity is given to the believer? What command follows that identity? Is this passage describing salvation, sanctification, glorification, or more than one? What sin is being confronted? What virtue is being encouraged? What does obedience look like? What does dependence upon God look like? Is this command given to an individual, a congregation, or both? How does this passage describe believers growing together? Is this practice presented as a command, an example, or a helpful inference? Am I confusing description with command? Am I turning a helpful practice into a universal rule Scripture does not give? Am I trying to earn what God gives by grace? Am I using grace as an excuse to resist obedience? Am I looking to spiritual fruit as evidence of God's work-or mistakenly making my fruit the basis of my salvation? Is my understanding of spiritual growth producing greater love for God and people? How should this truth shape ordinary responsibilities and work? How should God's work in me turn my attention toward others? How does this passage point toward Christ? What response does God's Word require?

116. A SIMPLE BIBLE-STUDY METHOD FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

OPEN YOUR BIBLE. Read the entire passage. Then use four steps: OBSERVE What does the passage actually say?

INTERPRET What did it mean in its original context? CONNECT How does this passage fit the larger biblical story, the gospel, the believer's life in Christ, and life among God's people?

RESPOND What should be believed, confessed, obeyed, changed, or trusted? Be especially careful not to jump directly from: "I noticed something in this verse" to "God commands every Christian to practice this exactly as I do." Read context. Compare Scripture with Scripture. Then respond faithfully.

117. FURTHER VERIFICATION AND STUDY

For deeper verification, begin with Scripture itself. Especially study: John 14-17 Romans 5-8 Romans 12-14 1 Corinthians 10-13 2 Corinthians 3-5 Galatians 5-6 Ephesians 4-6 Philippians 1-4 Colossians 2-3 1 Thessalonians 4-5 Hebrews 10-12 James 1 1 Peter 1 2 Peter 1 1 John 1-5. When investigating differing Christian understandings of sanctification, consult responsible primary sources from those traditions. For example: Questions about Wesleyan or Holiness teaching on entire sanctification should be checked against responsible Wesleyan and Holiness doctrinal sources. Questions about Reformed sanctification should include representative Reformed confessions and theologians. Questions about Lutheran understandings of justification and sanctification should include historic Lutheran confessional documents. Questions about Baptist perspectives should include representative Baptist confessions and responsible theological sources. Questions about Pentecostal understandings of sanctification and Spirit-empowered living should include official Pentecostal doctrinal sources rather than relying only upon critics or unusual examples. Questions about sacramental or means-of-grace theology should be checked against the responsible primary sources of traditions that use those categories. Different traditions sometimes use the same words differently. Define terms before comparing

positions. Then return to Scripture.

Verification Principle

Understand A Position From Its Own Responsible Sources Before Critiquing It.

Then Test Every Human Teaching Against Scripture.

118. SCRIPTURE AND QUOTATION NOTE Scripture references throughout this study are provided to encourage direct Bible reading. Short biblical phrases may be included where helpful, while many passages are summarized or referenced rather than reproduced in full. Readers are strongly encouraged to open a complete Bible and read every cited passage in context. Do not depend on this study-or any commentary, pastor, teacher, tradition, website, denomination, ministry, or AI tool-as a replacement for Scripture. Use resources to help you study the Bible. Do not use them instead of studying the Bible.

119. FINAL REFLECTION There may be moments in the Christian life when you wonder: Why am I not further along? Why am I still struggling with this? Why does someone else seem to grow faster? Why did I fail again? Why does God feel distant?

Why is following Jesus sometimes so difficult? Those questions can become discouraging if you imagine sanctification depends entirely upon your ability to transform yourself. It does not. Look backward. God found you in grace. Look at the present. God is still at work. Look forward. God has promised that the story does not end with an unfinished Christian. Sanctification is movement toward something God has already promised to complete. You are not being asked to manufacture Christlikeness through sheer determination. And you are not being invited to sit passively while waiting for God to change you without your participation. You are being called to follow Jesus. Today. Then tomorrow. Then the day after that. Read His Word. Talk to Him. Gather with His people. Hear truth with other believers. Sing. Pray. Remember the gospel. Receive Communion faithfully within your Christian tradition. Remember your baptism and what it declares about belonging to Christ. Serve. Be served. Let other believers encourage you. Let trustworthy believers correct you. Obey what Christ shows you. Confess when you sin. Receive grace. Tell the truth. Forgive. Give. Love. Work faithfully. Keep ordinary commitments. Serve people who cannot repay you. Notice neighbors. Care about people who do not know Christ. Let God's work in you become visible to people around you. Resist temptation. Ask for help. Rest when your body genuinely needs rest. Receive appropriate professional care when a struggle requires it. Endure when life hurts. Keep going when you feel little. And when you fall, return to Christ again. There may be sins that disappear quickly.

Thank God. There may be sins you battle for years. Keep fighting. There may be seasons of remarkable spiritual joy. Receive them gratefully. There may be seasons when faith feels like placing one foot in front of another. Keep walking. Do not measure God's faithfulness by the

speed of your progress. Do not measure your spiritual maturity by how impressive you appear. Do not compare your chapter twenty with someone else's chapter forty. And do not make the dangerous mistake of looking at your spiritual fruit as though it were your Savior. Fruit matters. Growth matters. Obedience matters. Love matters. But Jesus remains the foundation.

Christ Is The Basis Of Your Salvation.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT IS EVIDENCE OF HIS WORK-NOT THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR HOPE. Look for fruit. Maybe you forgive sooner than you once did. Maybe you listen longer. Maybe you apologize faster. Maybe your anger controls you less. Maybe money matters a little less. Maybe you pray before panicking. Maybe you notice someone else's pain. Maybe you tell the truth where you once would have hidden. Maybe you work with greater integrity when nobody is watching. Maybe you serve without needing recognition. Maybe you increasingly care about people outside your own circle. Maybe you speak about Jesus more naturally because He increasingly matters to you. Maybe temptation still comes-but you are learning to run toward Jesus instead of toward the sin. Maybe suffering has made you softer instead of harder. Maybe Scripture is beginning to change the way you think. Maybe worship is becoming less about preference and more about God. Maybe church community is teaching you patience because people are difficult-and because you are difficult too. Maybe Communion keeps reminding you that your hope rests in Christ's sacrifice. Maybe another believer spoke truth at exactly the moment you needed it. Maybe you are simply becoming more loving. Do not despise those things. That is not nothing. God is not merely modifying your conduct. He is forming Christlike character. And Christlike character increasingly loves. One day the work will no longer be gradual. One day faith will become sight. The battle with sin will end. There will be no more temptation. No more divided heart. No more spiritual dryness.

No more shame. No more wondering whether you will ever become what God intends. You will see Christ. And God's transforming work will be complete. That promised future changes the way Christians understand growth today. You are not moving toward an uncertain destination. God has already promised where His saving work is going. Present growth may be slow. The destination is secure. Until then: Keep abiding. Keep repenting. Keep learning. Keep worshiping. Keep gathering. Keep obeying. Keep serving. Keep loving. Keep pointing toward Jesus. Keep trusting. Keep returning to Christ. Because the Christian's hope has never been: "I am strong enough to finish this." The Christian's hope is:

The God Who Began The Work Is Faithful To Complete It.

Final Memory Anchor

Spiritual Growth Is Not Becoming More Loved By God.

It Is God Transforming Those He Already Loves In Christ To Become More Like Jesus.

We Do Not Obey So God Will Save Us.

We Obey Because God Has Saved Us.

Christ Is The Basis Of Our Salvation.

Spiritual Fruit Is Evidence Of His Work-Not The Foundation Of Our Hope.

God Is Not Merely Modifying Conduct.

He Is Forming Christlike People.

If Spiritual Growth Does Not Increasingly Produce Love, Something Is Wrong With Our Measure Of Maturity.

Spiritual Growth Is Not Confined To "Spiritual" Activities.

Spiritual Maturity Does Not Terminate On Ourselves.

God Produces The Growth.

The Believer Actively Participates.

God Often Uses His Word, His Spirit, And His People To Form Us Together.

Sanctification Is Movement Toward Something God Has Already Promised To Complete.

Grace Is The Foundation Of It All.