

Spiritual Growth and Maturity
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Scripture describes a series of **conditional blessings** that depend on the believer's fellowship, obedience, and daily walk with the Lord. These blessings do not alter salvation or positional truth, but they greatly shape the believer's **experience, growth, usefulness, and reward** in time.

Spiritual growth is related to discipleship. It follows salvation in Christ. Jesus secured our eternal salvation at the cross where He died for us and paid our sin debt in full (Mark 10:45; John 19:30; Rom. 5:8; Heb. 10:10-14; 1 Pet. 3:18). Having accomplished our salvation through Jesus, God now offers eternal life as a free gift to all who want it (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23). There is nothing we have to pay to receive it. Jesus paid it all. A gift, by its very nature, has been paid for by another and is offered freely, without charge. God's free gift is received by faith alone in Christ alone (Rom. 3:28; 4:4-5; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9). Faith is nonmeritorious. It is the empty hand that receives what God freely offers. Jesus is the object of our faith. He is the Savior; we are the saved. Jesus is the eternal Son of God (John 1:1, 14; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:1-3), who added humanity to Himself (John 1:14; Phil. 2:6-8; Heb. 2:14), lived a sinless life (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5), willingly died a penal substitutionary death on the cross (Isa. 53:5-6; Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:25-26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18), and offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who want it (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 10:43; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14; 1 John 5:11-13). To believe in Jesus is to trust Him to accomplish what we cannot: our eternal salvation. Man needs only Christ to be saved. No one else. Nothing more.

Once saved eternally, God then calls us to a life of discipleship. Whereas our eternal life is a free gift, discipleship requires our involvement, our participation, our willing submission to God, and many thousands of decisions over a lifetime to learn and live His will. He wants us to be aligned with His revealed will in His word (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2-3; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jam. 1:22-25). He wants us to grow up and become spiritually mature Christians who walk in righteousness and do good works (1 Pet. 2:2; Eph. 4:13-15; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-10; Tit. 2:11-14). Such a life glorifies Him (Matt. 5:16; John 15:8; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 1:11) and edifies others (Rom. 14:19; Eph. 4:11-16, 29; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:24-25). Discipleship can be costly. It may require denying ourselves, abandoning personal ambitions, enduring rejection, suffering for Christ, and faithfully following Him regardless of the personal cost (Matt. 10:37-39; 16:24-26; Luke 9:23; 14:26-33; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12).

How We Grow Spiritually

Spiritual growth is the progressive development of the believer into greater conformity to the character of Jesus Christ through the consistent intake and application of God's word under the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual growth does not make a believer more accepted by God, for every believer is already complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). Rather, growth deepens fellowship with God, strengthens the inner life, increases wisdom, and prepares the believer for faithful service. Just as physical life requires nourishment, exercise, and time, spiritual life requires the continual nourishment of God's word, obedience to its truths, and perseverance through the experiences God allows. Growth is therefore a conditional blessing. Every believer possesses eternal life, but not every believer matures spiritually.

The primary ingredient for spiritual growth is the consistent intake of God's word. Peter exhorts believers, "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2). God's word is spiritual food that nourishes the soul, renews the mind (Rom. 12:2), and equips believers for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Jesus declared, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Regular reading, careful study, meditation, memorization, and faithful Bible teaching provide the truth necessary for transformation (Ps. 1:1-3; 119:9-11; Acts 17:11). Neglected Bible study inevitably produces a weak believer because spiritual maturity cannot exist apart from divine truth.

The second essential ingredient is faith expressed through obedience. Knowledge alone does not produce maturity. Spiritual growth comes through the acquisition and application of divine viewpoint to every area of life. James instructs believers to "prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (Jam. 1:22). Jesus likewise said, "blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:28), and, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13:17). Hebrews describes mature believers as those "who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). God's blessing rests on those who obey His will, for the "effectual doer...will be blessed in what he does" (Jam. 1:25). Every act of obedience strengthens spiritual discernment, while repeated disobedience dulls the conscience and hardens the heart. Spiritual growth occurs as biblical truth moves from the mind into daily decisions, attitudes, priorities, relationships, and conduct.

A third ingredient is dependence upon the Holy Spirit. The Christian life cannot be lived by human strength alone. Paul commands believers, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Likewise, believers are instructed to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), allowing Him to direct their thoughts, motives, and actions through God’s word. As believers remain in fellowship with God through confession of sin (1 John 1:9), the Spirit teaches, convicts, strengthens, and produces His fruit within them: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). These qualities are develop as the believer consistently yields to God’s direction.

A fourth ingredient is prayer, fellowship, and active participation in the body of Christ. The early church “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). God designed believers to grow together rather than in isolation. Faithful participation in a sound local church provides encouragement, accountability, opportunities for service, and the exercise of spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:11-16; Heb. 10:24-25). Prayer cultivates dependence upon God, helps to align the believer’s thinking with His will, and opens the heart to His guidance (Phil. 4:6-7). Mature Christians are rarely isolated Christians. They seek opportunities to worship, learn, serve, encourage, and be encouraged.

A fifth ingredient is perseverance through testing and divine discipline. God uses trials to strengthen faith and refine character. James writes, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jam. 1:2-4; cf. Rom. 5:3-4). Peter explains that trials refine faith like gold tested by fire (1 Pet. 1:6-7). Likewise, the Lord lovingly disciplines His children for their spiritual benefit: “He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness” (Heb. 12:10). Trials expose weaknesses, reveal misplaced priorities, deepen dependence upon God, and produce spiritual stability. While suffering is never pleasant, God often accomplishes His greatest work in believers through adversity rather than prosperity. It is often in life’s darkest hours that His light shines most brightly through us.

Spiritual growth is a conditional blessing because it depends upon positive volition toward God’s word and a consistent walk of faith. God provides every resource necessary for growth (Eph. 1:3), but believers must choose daily to receive His instruction and obey His will. Mature believers enjoy greater stability in adversity (Eph. 4:14), increasing wisdom for life’s decisions (Ps. 119:98-100), effective

service (2 Tim. 2:21), fruitful Christian living (John 15:5-8), confidence in prayer (1 John 3:21-22), deeper fellowship with God (John 14:21-23), and eternal rewards at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). By contrast, believers who neglect God's word often remain spiritual infants, vulnerable to deception, worldly thinking, and divine discipline (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-14). Spiritual maturity is therefore one of God's richest blessings in the Christian life, not because it secures salvation, but because it enables the believer to experience the abundant life Christ promised (John 10:10), glorify God in daily living (Matt. 5:16), and hear His commendation in the life to come (Matt. 25:21).