

The
5 Means
Of
Spiritual
Growth

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

It is God's desire that we should mature as Christians (see Ephesians 4:11 - 16 and Hebrews 6:1 - 3).

The ultimate aim is to become more and more like Christ in our walk.

MEANS OF GROWTH

There are five means of growth:-

1. The Bible
2. Prayer
3. Worship
4. Fellowship
5. Witness

1. THE BIBLE

One of the key means of growth in your Christian faith is provided for by the Bible which is a "living word" and teaches us how we ought to live and walk for God.

Read the following Scriptures:

2 Timothy 3:16 - 17; Ephesians 6:17; Psalms 119:105; Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 4:1 - 11

What do these scriptures say to you about the Word of God?

There is, however, a difference between knowing the word and doing the word. The Word of God says that we should not just be hearers of the word but doers as well.

(See James 1:22)

'it's not so much how much you get into the Word, more how much of the Word gets into you'.

The Bible is but one part of how GOD speaks to His people, there are five additional ways in which His voice is recognised:-

- (a) His Word in creation - the universe came into being at the Word of God (read Genesis 1 and John 1).
- (b) His Word through prophecy - God speaking through prophecy is direct and challenging and demands a response from those who hear it.

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- (c) His Word in Jesus - Jesus was and is the Word (John 1:14). Never will there be a clearer word from God's own heart than that which is declared in Jesus.
- (d) His Word through preaching - God has ordained that through the proclamation of His Word, men and women will be saved. (I Corinthians 1:21).
- (e) His Word through the Holy Spirit - of course every means by which God speaks is through the Holy Spirit, but there are some more direct means of communication mentioned in Scripture, e.g. Samuel (I Samuel 3:10 - 14).

The Acts of the Apostles is full of instances where God speaks directly to His servants with an audible voice, through dreams, prophecy, signs and wonders, etc. These instances reflect the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the giftings of the Holy Spirit available as a result.

Finally and in conclusion:-

His Word in Scripture - All Scripture is the Word of God. We can have confidence in the Scriptures. The Scriptures testify to all the other means of God speaking, but the Scriptures play a distinctive part in the life and development of the Christian.'

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16 - 17).

The Scriptures also stimulate us in faith and encourage us in hope (Romans 15:4).

It is important for us to see the link between the fact that the Holy Spirit has spoken in Scripture and the fact that He still needs to speak to us through Scripture. It is this twofold work of the Spirit of God which guarantees that what God has given will be the Word of God for us today. It is not by a process of critical analysis that we will decide this but by openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. All that is spoken or written and purports to be the Word of God need to be in accordance with the Word of God as recorded in Scripture.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE BIBLE

- (a) Focus

The Bible brings the central Word that God has for all our lives into sharp focus, that is, Jesus. (John 5:39).

- (b) Character

The Bible reveals to us in an unfolding way something of the character of the God who speaks. We can see God's heart through the biblical record of His dealings with men, and we can see man's response to God as He speaks to them.

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(c) Definition

Through the unfolding of biblical revelation we are given examples, teaching, fundamental doctrines and insights which bring definition to the Word so that we can apply it to our daily lives. The Bible, especially the New Testament, lays down practical principles for living that can be applied in almost any situation or context.

(d) Clarity

There is an objectivity about the Word of God through Scriptures that our personal experience may lack. Clarity is the doorway to understanding.

(e) Discernment

The Scriptures are not only a source of wisdom but they are wisdom. Through the work of the Holy Spirit's inspiration the Scriptures have dynamic power. They become for us, in the power of the Spirit, what they say. We need this wisdom when it comes to discerning all the other words we receive from God. We will become wise in discernment if we live in the Scriptures, which are wisdom.

In the section on the Quiet Time are some pointers to help in Bible Reading.

2. PRAYER

Prayer put quite simply is talking to God; nothing particularly mystical, mysterious or difficult just a plain and simple two way communication between the Creator and His created.

Read the following Scriptures:-

Matthew 6:5 - 18; Luke 11:1 - 13; Romans 8:26 - 27; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6-7; I John 5:14 - 15.

What do these say about the 'how, when and why' of praying - make some notes.

We do need to pray - Jesus made prayer a priority (Luke 6:12; 5:15 - 16)

Some additional facts about prayer:-

- (a) God always answers prayer that is in line with His will (1 John 5:14 - 15).
- (b) Prayer is a privilege that enables us to grow spiritually.
- (c) Pray knowing you are a son of God, with a loving heavenly Father who wants to give to His children.
- (d) Pray under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit because then your prayer will be God initiated.
- (e) Prayer links us to the unlimited possibilities of God.

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How to Pray

Relax and focus on God (Psalm 46:10). Set aside a time when you will not be disturbed, allow time for you to speak to God and for Him to speak to you. Prayer is a discipline that soon becomes a joy.

Confess any sin - sin blocks the communication between God and yourself.
(Consider 1 John 1:9).

Protect your life - proclaim the Lordship of Christ in your life, submit to God and put on His armour. (James 4:7; Ephesians 6:10 - 18).

Expect God to speak - (Psalm 62:5).

As we hope in God He will not let us down and will speak with us.

Stick at it - against all obstacles - persevere until the peace of God settles in your heart. Pray on days when it's the last thing you want to do.

Se natural - God is your Father - treat Him as you would any loving father should be treated, not in the formal terms of a legal document but naturally and lovingly.

Don't worry - anxiety is a sin because it shows a lack of trust in God. (Matthew 6:25 - 34).

Pray with faith.

Present your requests and those of others, God is interested (Philippians 4:6), when you run out allow the Holy Spirit to lead you.

Pray and give thanks interspersed with praise - praise and thanks to God often releases the prayer because it releases the power of God.

Remember anyone can pray for anything at anytime.

3. PRAISE AND WORSHIP

The words 'praise and worship' cover the whole of our response of love and appreciation to the Lord. They sum up our reason for living (Isaiah 43:21; Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14).

- We should thank God for what He has given to us.
- We should praise God for what He has done for us.
- We should worship God for who He is to us.

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We need to always have a thankful heart towards God who has done so much for us (Psalm 100:4). In fact, Paul exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord always. (Philippians 4:4). God loves us, cares for us, and wants us to know this. Out of grateful hearts we can give thanks to Him and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

What is Praise?

- Recognising who God is (Psalm 104:1 - 35; 1 Chronicles 29:10 - 13)
- Acknowledging God for all He has done for us (Psalm 25:8 - 10)
- Exalting God (Psalm 34:3)
- Honouring God (Daniel 4:34 - 37).
- Magnifying God (Luke 1:46 AV)
- Marvelling at God (2 Thessalonians 1:10)
- Glorifying God (Revelation 15:4)

What is Worship?

Worship = worth-ship = appreciating God because He is worthy (Revelation 4:11; Revelation 5: 12).

The Hebrew words for 'worship' are 'segad' and 'shachah' and these mean 'to bow down'. They also carry in their meaning the thought of a relationship between a dog and his master, i.e. adoring love. The main Greek word translated as 'worship' is 'paroskuneo' and it means, 'to kiss the hand; to homage or reverence'. Biblical worship then has the implied meaning of selfless adoration of a greater being.

Jesus shed His blood to give us the privilege of worshipping the Father (Hebrews 10:19 -22).

Through Jesus, every believer becomes a priest to God, i.e. those who present the people of God to God and God to the people (Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:9). We must put God first in our lives and worship is an expression of this. When we give to God in this way He draws us to Himself and gives back to us.

Worshipping God is not just singing songs. In fact, as disciples of Jesus everything we do (i.e. our work, pleasure activities, study, family life, etc.) should be worship of God. True worship of God involves us giving 100% of our lives to Him; being totally available and totally obedient to Him. Worship of God is a lifestyle of bringing glory to God.

In what ways can we offer praise and worship to God?

- with words (Psalm 9:1)
- by shouting (Psalm 95:1)
- by bowing down (Psalm 95:6)

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- in song (Psalm 104:33)
- with dancing (this is a symbol of a larger truth, that our whole lives, body, soul and spirit, are given to the Lord in response to His love) (Psalm 150:4)
- with raised hands, expressing dependence on the Lord or victory in the Lord (Psalm 134:2)
- with instruments, usually but not always, accompanied by singing (Psalm 150:3 - 5)
- with our whole lifestyle (Romans 12:1)
- singing with the spirit, i.e. our God given language (1 Corinthians 14:15). - with psalms: words sung from the Bible (especially the Psalms); hymns: compositions which especially exalt Jesus as Lord; spiritual songs: original songs, either prepared or spontaneously inspired by the Holy Spirit, which express our experience of the Lord (Ephesians 5:19 - 20).

4. FELLOWSHIP

In Acts 2:42 it says of the early church:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer".

In the Greek the word 'proskartereis' is used which means continuing steadfastly or giving unremitting care to. The early church held firmly on to what the apostles were teaching and equally firmly to fellowshiping one with another. This two-way relationship is seen in Hebrews 10:24. *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds". (Hebrews 10:24).*

Another Greek word used for fellowship is 'koinonia' which means communion or sharing in common. It is this word that best describes how Christians should live together as a community of mutual sharers who live in and share in the agape or selfless love that God has given them (John 13:34). *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another". (John 13:34).*

Read the following Scriptures and make notes on what our attitudes should be towards one another in the Body of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:1 - 18

Hebrews 10:24 - 25

Ephesians 4:1 - 31

Colossians 3:1 - 16

1 Peter 3:8

Romans 12:10

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5. WITNESS

Witnessing is sharing the joy of salvation with others. It has been commanded by Jesus (see Matthew 28:18 - 20) and brings a benefit with a warning! (See Matthew 10:32 - 33).

We are Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). As we act as ambassadors we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:8)

Notice the breadth of the witnessing area, not only does the Scriptures speak of the Bible Lands but "*...the ends of the earth*", i.e. where you live and work and take your leisure.

Write out the words of Romans 10:14 - 15.

We have some awesome but yet deeply satisfying responsibilities to discharge. Read the following Scriptures and make short notes on what is involved in witnessing:-

Mark 16:15

Ezekiel 33:8 - 9

Proverbs 24:11 – 12

John 14:6

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Some encouraging pointers:-

Some people are afraid to share their faith and experience of the work of God in their lives because they lack confidence. This fear arises out of ignorance, that is, they don't feel they know enough to be able to answer questions or difficulties which may result from their testimony. There are three simple steps; you can take to deal with this *fear*.

FIRST, start where you are. A testimony is a witness to what you have come to know of God within your own life. People don't want a theological treatise and it is likely that Satan will try to paralyse you with fear about questions that other people will never ask you anyway! You know something that no one else in the world knows:-

What God has done for you in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep it simple.

SECOND, be determined to move on *from* where you are. The Holy Spirit Himself is your teacher. You will be amazed at how much you can grow in your understanding if you take time and effort with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 2:12 - 13).

THIRD, get help where you can to develop your understanding. Today, there are available to us a large number of aids to our spiritual understanding, e.g. books, concordances, etc. We need to be willing to give our time and minds to the Lord, and to leave aside some of the trivia with which so many of us *fill* our lives.

Finally, go ahead and get trained to be witnesses. Enjoy seeing people coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and knowing that they have a secure future in Him. Our Evangelism Explosion programme (EE) will help you to get trained and be confident in your witnessing.

Read the following Scriptures and make notes on what our attitudes should NOT be towards one another in the Body of Christ:

Galatians 5:16 - 26

Titus 3:3

James 4:11

James 5:9

Colossians 3:9

Romans 14:13

1 Corinthians 6:1 - 8

The human body, with its millions of cells and members all working together in harmony, unity and life, illustrates the harmony, unity and life which are to *flow* in the Church, the Body of Christ. In the body, every cell, every member lives *for* the other; we need to do the same in the body of Christ by caring for one another, learning to appreciate one another and loving one another.