



Growing in Christ—Little by Little

I often teach on a variety of subjects, but I believe my primary calling is to help Christians grow up and mature in Christ and really begin to enjoy the great life He has in store for them.

As a young woman, I went to church for years, but I really didn't know much about spiritual maturity. I loved God with all of my heart, but I wasn't changing—I was still as critical, judgmental and rebellious as ever. And even though I knew my life should be getting better, I was still miserable from dealing with all of the same problems.

I believe this is one of Satan's greatest strategies. If he can't keep people from hearing the gospel and accepting Christ, he will do everything he can to make sure they never grow spiritually and experience the peace and joy that's promised to them in the Bible.

You see, when we're born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live in our heart—God plants a seed of *everything He is* in our spirit. He instantaneously deposits inside of us everything we need to live a great life.

For instance, Galatians 5:22-23 (AMPC) says, "The fruit of the [Holy] Spirit [the work which His presence within accomplishes] is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness, gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control...."

Did you know all of these things already exist on the inside of you? You may wonder, *Well, if that's the case, then why aren't I experiencing any of it in my life?*

When it comes to the maturity process, we have a part to play. *Our part* is to cooperate with God to cultivate and develop His character in our lives so we can grow and become more like Him. How do we do that?

It all begins by spending regular time in God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 (AMPC) says, "The Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]...."

When we spend time in God's Word, we are spending time *with God*. His Word changes us—it changes how we think and how we act. It changes how we see God, ourselves and the world around us.

Romans 12:2 is a great Scripture that shows us how we grow spiritually: "Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs],

but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God..." (AMPC).

God has a "good and acceptable and perfect" plan for our lives, but we must renew our minds with His Word before we can experience it.

It's important to remember that growing spiritually is a process.

When I first began to read and study God's Word, I immediately saw things I needed to change. For a while, I felt guilty and condemned that I wasn't "measuring up."

However, God helped me to understand that He never shows us these things to condemn us and make us feel guilty. He convicts us of our behavior in order to help us grow and come up higher in that area.

For example, I was extremely rebellious in the early years of my marriage. Because my father sexually abused me when I was growing up, I had developed a distrust of men. I vowed that no man would ever again push me around.

But as I learned God's Word, I saw that my behavior toward my husband, Dave, was wrong. The Lord was asking me to walk in love with Dave in my speech, attitudes and actions.

This was easier said than done! But God always gives us the grace to do what He is asking us to do. He doesn't expect us to do it all on our own.

So, little by little, by God's grace, I began to change. The Lord transformed me from being rude, critical, harsh and rebellious into someone who has real peace, love and joy.

But it was a process—it didn't happen overnight.

Look at 2 Corinthians 3:18 (AMPC). It says we "are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another...."

The Lord changes us a little at a time. None of us will ever be perfect until we get to heaven, *and that's OK*. But as long as we're here on this earth, God desires for us to continually cooperate with Him to learn and grow.

As we do—as we continue to grow spiritually and change "from glory to glory"—we will experience the incredible peace, joy and fulfillment that only God can give us.

And we will show the world around us what God is really like.

"We have a part to play...to cooperate with God to cultivate and develop His character so we can grow and become more like Him."

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