

88. PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Aim: To identify and apply Bible principles that will promote personal spiritual growth.

Introduction:

How does one maintain their spiritual vitality in a world that opposes spiritual things so strongly?

How do we help others to maintain strong spiritual growth, strength, balance and good spiritual sense?

Sometimes we learn so much that we forget to tie together all the important Bible teachings. What are these basic key truths? (Note: these are not in order of importance).

1. Sacrifice for God and for others.

This stops us from being selfish. Let Christ live in us controlling our behaviour and our decisions.

"present your bodies a living sacrifice..." Romans 12:1.

Put yourself out to help others and promote the cause of Christ on earth. Matthew 7:24-28.

"Neither will I offer burnt offerings (sacrifice) unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." II Samuel 24:24.

Notice how the early apostles and early Christians made great sacrifices to plant churches all over the world. How about you? What ministry/service are you doing?

The world is full of selfish people, whose main goal in life is to accumulate wealth and material things for themselves.

God gave Christ to die for us; let us give our lives and time to build God's work all over the world. "Give and it shall be given unto you." Luke 6:38. Sacrificing proves our love for God and for others. God will not forget our work and labour of love in ministering to the saints. He will reward our service now and later.

2. Obey God whether you feel like it or not.

Many Christians **destroy** their lives through disobedience.

Our whole society teaches us to rebel against authority from our earliest age. School's teach rebellion, as do TV, rock music, universities, radio, undisciplined homes, permissive child philosophies, newspapers, books and magazines.

Question: Will you be a disobedient rebel against God, or will you be protected by submitting to God's authority figures, such as Pastors, God's Word, parents, police and your conscience? Suffering teaches us to obey God.

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he **obedience** by the things which He suffered." Hebrews 5:8.

"The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." Joshua 24:24.

"Bringing into captivity every thought to the **obedience** of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5.

"To obey is better than sacrifice... for **rebellion** is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." 1 Samuel 15:22,23.

Look up these verses on obedience: Nehemiah 9:16,17; Job 36:11,12; Isaiah 1:19,20; Acts 5:29; II Thessalonians 1:8 and 3:14.

"Obey them that have the **rule** over **you**, and **submit** yourselves." Hebrews 13:17.

"ye have **obeyed from the heart** that form of doctrine which was delivered you." Romans 6:17.

Question: How does the devil get you away from a good church?

Answer: A common method is to get you to **believe evil** about the **Pastor**. The devil uses people to spread lies about the Pastor so that you will disrespect him. You then leave the church and rarely ever serve God obediently in a church again. The Pastor is placed there to protect people from wolves and false doctrines. For wolves to attack a believer they must entice him away from the Pastor/Shepherd. You will enjoy great safety in obeying your Godly Pastor who is true to the Word of God. He cares for you more than you think. Millions of Christians have made shipwreck of their faith by disobeying their Pastors. He knows more than you think.

If every Christian disobeyed God and their Pastor, God's work would go nowhere and fall apart quickly. A church must function like an army in obedience to authority. A Pastor is a Bishop which means a military commander. We must obey, because people's eternal souls are heading to hell and **need to be rescued**.

Matthew 7:24-27 teaches that if we **hear** Christ's sayings and **DO** them, we will be **wise** people whose lives will withstand the trouble and difficulties that come. Those who **DISOBEY** Christ's sayings **will** find that they may succeed for a little while, but when the storms of life come, their lives will fall apart with great ruin. Obedience is a matter of the **will** choosing God's ways.

"yield yourselves unto God." Romans 6:13.

"The churches walked in the fear of the Lord." Acts 9:31.

"let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." II Corinthians 7:1.

"Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." I Peter 1:17.

3. Fear God.

The Greek word for fear is "phobou" meaning "reverence, respect, honour, a deep and reverent sense of accountability to God. "So then everyone of **us** shall give account of himself to God." Romans 14:12.

Disobedience comes from pride and arrogance in thinking that we know better than God, pastors, parents, police, etc. It is rebellion, like witchcraft. Rebellion is Satan's problem. When you disobey God, you follow in the same steps as Satan. If you disobey your authority figures, your children will follow your example and disobey your wishes. Galatians 6:7. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Believers should fear God's displeasure at sin. We should follow **JESUS'** example of obedience:

"I do always those things that please Him." John 8:29.

"Children, obey your parents in all things." Colossians 3:20.

"Enoch...had this testimony that he pleased God." Hebrews 11:5.

Obeying God is an act of faith, because often we think that if we obey God we will miss out on some immediate pleasure. Yet God promises that if we obey Him, He will exalt us in due time. **Obedience** and **faith** is choosing God's will instead of our will. It means being prepared to accept loss in order to please God. The obedient Christian is later on pleasantly surprised to learn that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Ephesians 3:20.

God can bless you more for your obedience than what you can arrange for yourself by ignoring God. "Them that honour me, **I WILL HONOUR.**" I Samuel 2:30.

"No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Psalm 84:11.

We must not listen to the World, our faithless, unbelieving peers, nor to our fears, nor to the devil, nor to our own understanding, but to the Word of God as our guide. This is called "walking by faith" and this is the only way that we can please God.

"But without faith it is **impossible to please God**...(we) must believe that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him". Hebrews 11:6.

All through our life we will be tested to see if we will obey God in faith, or take what appears to be a "short cut" against God's Word and thus sin. Which will you choose?

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affair of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier." II Timothy 2:4. (I Corinthians 10:1-11 (v.10).

"Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer."

"If a man have long hair it is a shame unto him." I Corinthians 11:14.

4. Duty.

Duty is a decision of the will to do what is commanded. We are under the law of liberty, and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:2.

Many Christians have an elastic conscience, like King Saul, who was told to kill the Amalekites. He disobeyed God and as a result he lost the kingdom. **Obey God at all costs.** To obey is an act of faith.

I John 2:28 says that some Christians will be ashamed in heaven because of a life of disobedience to Christ. We should feel guilty and convicted if we disobey God.

"If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15.

Sometimes God may take away the joy of reading the Bible, of prayer, of church, of soul winning etc, so that we'll do them not because we feel like it, but because it is right. "we have done that which is our duty to do." Luke 17:7-10.

Duty is an act of love. Duty does things well, but **LOVE** does things beautifully.

The Christian race is like a marathon, and we sometimes need commitment and determination as well as love for God and others in order to obey God's calling.

So many lazy Christians give up and drop out of serving God. I don't want to waste my opportunities. I want my life to count for Jesus Christ so that people will be in heaven through my life's work and so that God will say to me, "...well done thou good and faithful servant." Will Christ say this to you, or will you be ashamed at His coming because of selfish disobedience?

5. Overlook other Christians faults.

Overlook other Christians faults as much as possible.

"As much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men." Romans 12:18.

If necessary tell them of their faults to help them overcome them.

"and above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." I Peter 4:8. Proverbs 10:12; Proverbs 12:16; 17:9.

Where they can't be overlooked, then confront the person in love according to Matthew 18.

6. Obey God whether you feel like it or not.

Say "Yes" to God and "No" to self. I Corinthians 9:23-27; Acts 5:32; 5:29.

We are in a race and we discipline our bodies to do God's will as an athlete for:

- a) the gospel's sake. I Corinthians 9:23.
- b) to save some. I Corinthians 9:22.
- c) to receive the prize. I Corinthians 9:24.
- d) to not become a castaway. I Corinthians 9:27.

7. Maintain the Basics daily of:

- a) Bible reading.
- b) prayer.
- c) confess sin to God.
- d) look for soul winning opportunities.
- e) be filled with the Holy Spirit and show the fruit of the Spirit.

8. If you have a problem tell the Pastor or another Christian.

Cultivate close, Godly friends.

The Pastor can't read your mind. James 5:16.

Don't keep problems to yourself because someone else has already gone through that problem and surely has some answers that will help you to get victory.

9. Help another Christian to grow.

Get a Timothy. Seek to teach what you learn to other people. Don't just take it all in. Your Christian life becomes more exciting when you get a Timothy that you are discipling. Who are you discipling this year? Find someone you can thoroughly pour your life into properly. Hebrews 5:11-14. Becoming a teacher of the Word is a big step to becoming a strong meat Christian. In Acts 9:20-29 Barnabus and other disciples helped get Paul started in his Christian life. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul helped Timothy get started. Who are you helping to get started?

10. Read Good Books, Especially The Bible.

Paul knew the helpful value of good books that teach Bible truths. 2 Timothy 4:13. A good Christian book is often just a sermon in print.

By continually reading good books we:

- a) keep our mind on good things.
- b) we learn much faster.
- c) we can teach the Bible better.
- d) we can tap into others knowledge and experience.

11. Trust God's Love, Wisdom And Goodness in all circumstances of life, especially the bad, to be working out His best plan for us as He guides us in life. If we lose trust in God then we will become very bitter and cynical. This is a problem with many older people. Proverbs 3:5,6; Job 12:15; Psalm 37:25,28; Romans 8:28; Matthew 6:23; Romans 8:32. Believe that God is teaching us and working out His plan in our lives for our and others good, eg: Joseph in Genesis 50:20. Trust God that He knows what He is doing. Just keep obeying God joyfully.

12. Realise that we are in a very intense Spiritual Warfare.

We are to fight to win the souls of mankind for Christ. We fight wrong ideas with the truth of the Bible. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-18. When you understand that life and the history of the world is a battle and war between the forces of God and the forces of Satan, you can more readily see how you fit in and why world events happen, such as WW I and WW II.

Satan and demons oppose your work for God, but God has given you:

- a) the armour of God to put on.
- b) the Holy Spirit indwelling you.
- c) angels to assist you.
- d) fellow Christians to encourage, teach and help you.

We are therefore fighting wrong ideas that take control of people's mind and turn them from the truth of God, eg:

- a) evolution.
- b) lawlessness. The idea that I can make up my own rules.
- c) atheism.
- d) false religions.

13. Be Grateful to God and others. 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

If we are constantly saying thanks to God and to others, this teaches us humility, as we realise our dependence on God for all that we have. It kills pride. It gives us a happy joyful spirit as we constantly live a life of excitement and rejoicing in all the good things that happen to us that we are focusing on. It teaches us not to focus on bad things, but only the good. This is a big secret in living a life of victory. Philippians 4:8.

14. Be Humble.

Jesus first, others second, yourself last. This takes your mind off self. This then gives us mental stability and strength.

Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. Proverbs 16:19

"I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Isaiah 57:15.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:3,5.

"Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." Matthew 8:8.

"Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:4.

"Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." Matthew 23:12.

"I say... to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." Romans 12:3.

"Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." Romans 12:16.

"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." James 4:6.

If you want peace in yourself and with God and man, be humble.

If you want to be a good father to children, be humble.

If you want to be great, be humble.

If you want people to follow you, be humble.

If you want people to like you, be humble.

If you want God to uplift you, be humble.

If you want your wife to love you, be humble and seek to provide her needs. The way up is down.

15. Tithe.

Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek. Jacob paid tithes. The Israelites paid tithes to the Levites. Tithing is giving a tenth of your income to God's work in the local church.

This is beneficial for several reasons:

- a) God will give you a blessing. Malachi 3:7-12.
- b) God will plug up waste and loss.
- c) People will see that you are blessed of God.
- d) You will get back the same measure that you give. Luke 6:38.
- e) They that preach the gospel should live of the gospel. Therefore the gospel goes out more.
- f) Christ endorsed tithing by the Pharisees. Luke 11:42.
- g) It is our way of acknowledging that all we have comes from God. John 3:27.
- h) It is designed to increase our faith as God blesses us more than we can give back to Him.

16. Get Baptised as soon as possible.

The conditions of Bible baptism are:

- a) Right candidate - believer. Acts 8:35-39.
- b) Right motive - obedience to Christ. Matthew 28:18-20.
- c) Right method - immersion. Mark 1:9-11.
- d) Right authority - local church. Acts 2:41,47.

Baptism pictures:

- a) Christ's death, burial and resurrection that I am trusting in to pay for my sins, as I go down in, under and up out of water.
- b) My death to my old way of life, burial of my old man with his habits, and rising to a new walk with Christ.

We should get baptised because:

- a) Christ was baptised by immersion. Mark 1:9-11.
- b) We can completely obey Christ here.
- c) It greatly helps us to take a confident stand publicly for Christ.
- d) It helps unsaved friends and family to understand the gospel.
- e) It is the answer of a good conscience toward God. I Peter 3:21. Our conscience is eased.

17. Ask Questions about the Bible and think the Bible Doctrine through carefully.

Be a student of the Bible. II Timothy 2:15. Find out what the Bible is saying and work out how to apply it in every life situation. Ask questions of the Bible because:

- a) It helps you understand the Bible better.
- b) You can defend it better.

- c) Questions open up new concepts.
- d) It's not good just to accept everything unquestioningly, but to check it out, because you may be believing something false. People fall into false doctrine when they accept things unquestioningly without checking the Bible. "Prove all things." I Thessalonians 5:21.
- e) You find the Bible to be true and infallible, thus increasing your faith.
- f) You'll teach the Bible better.

Be like the Bereans who searched the scriptures daily to see if Paul's teaching was so. Acts 17:11.

18. **Attend two Church Services per week and one Teaching Study.**

With one service per week you will mark time or backslide, but with two services per week you will grow. Develop a hunger for God's Word and God's house. Matthew 5:6; Psalm 19:7-11; Jeremiah 15:16

- a) The pastor generally spends so much time preparing suitable, helpful, practical teaching that we will miss something very important if we miss one service.
- b) It makes us loyal to God's work and to each other.
- c) We learn things that we can teach to other people.
- d) It makes us disciplined and dedicated to God.

19. **Learn as much as you can, as fast as you can.**

This will allow you to be more useful in getting more people saved earlier in life. When you learn things, find someone that you can teach them to. Collect good messages in a notebook. This helps you to stay enthusiastic for Christ. Ask: What do I believe and why do I believe it?

20. **Hell.**

Problem: All unsaved people at death will go to hell fire, then to the Lake of Fire forever.

What is hell like:

- a) Hell and worms forever. Mark 9:42-48.
- b) Torment, flame, separation, loneliness, bad memories. Luke 16:19-31.
- c) Wailing and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 13:41,42.
- d) Chains of darkness forever. II Peter 2:4.
- e) The Lake of Fire forever. Revelation 20:14,15.

If we love people, we will warn them about hell so that they see Christ as the answer, repent and receive Christ as Saviour.

Question: How can so few people win so many to Christ and eternal life and heaven in a short time? Answer: By multiplying disciples.

21. **Get a World Vision of Multiplication, Missions and Winning the World to Christ.**

Christ gave us all the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 of:

- a) Teaching all nations about salvation in Christ.
- b) Baptise people when they are saved.
- c) Teach them to observe all things I command you in the Bible.

As one person can't go overseas and be in Australia as well, we send MISSIONARIES overseas and to other parts of Australia to plant Bible believing churches which seek to win people to Christ in their area. These churches may start other churches elsewhere. Our aim is to get as many people saved and trained in the fastest way, so they can win and train as many as fast as possible. This is called multiplication of disciples. II Timothy 2:2 describes it. (See Discipleship by Multiplication chapter 57).

22. **Keep Soul Winning as your Main Priority.**

If you do, this will help to keep you from error.

Problem: So many Christians get sidetracked and involved in things that don't help win people to Christ. Luke 19:10; Acts 4:12; Proverbs 11:30.

Ask yourself in everything you do, "How does this action lead to people getting saved?" This is the main reason why God left us on earth. It is to get people saved from the fires of eternal hell. Your efforts to lead people to Christ determines where they will spend the next infinite years. We can't win people to Christ in heaven, only on earth. If you stop soul winning you'll have less joy and may backslide. Speak to at least one person each day about Christ or give a tract out each day or go visiting once a week. If you don't know how to win souls, learn from someone.

23. **Get Eternal Values now.**

Everyone of us is born with earthly values as being important, such as going to school, get a good job, earn lots of money, go on holidays, enjoy life, get married, look out for your own interests, etc. These are good in themselves but they don't lay up treasures in heaven. In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus tells us not to lay up treasures on earth because we can't keep them permanently and forever, but to lay up treasures in heaven because we can never lose them. What are you really living your life for? What is your life's goal? Luke 12:16-21; Revelation 22:12; II John 8; II Corinthians 5:10. After getting saved we must get eternal values, such as living for Christ and for eternity, not just the here and now.

24. **Take Every Opportunity to Serve God**

This is how you develop your spiritual gifts. Don't make up excuses such as: "I can't do that." You'll never know Christ's enabling power if you don't attempt things for God. Give it a go. You may succeed.

- a) There are many people who could win many people to Christ if they only knocked on some doors and spoke to people.
- b) Many could run a Bible study if they asked a new Christian for a study each week.
- c) Many people at Bible College could start a church if they went out and worked at it.
- d) We would have more of God's blessings if we asked Him. "Ye have not because ye ask not." Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 12:42-48; Luke 19:11-27.

Principle: Use what you have got and you will get more. If you don't use it you'll lose it. John 6:1-14; Genesis 12:1-5; Exodus 3:1-14; I Samuel 14:6.

Hudson Taylor went to China and started the China Inland Mission. This mission later on had over 1000 missionaries in China, yet people opposed him and told him he was unsuitable and couldn't do it.

"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."

25. Make Best Christians your Best Friends.

If a person is going to be a bad influence on you or pull you down, then don't be close friends with them. Psalms 1:1-6; Proverbs 22:24; 27:17. Seek to win them to Christ but don't let them win you to error.

26. Love God with All your Heart, Soul, Mind, Strength and Love your Neighbour as Yourself. What are we told to love and to love not?

Love: God, Psalms 18:1; Thy Salvation, Psalms 40:16; Thy Law, Psalm 119:97; Thy Commandments, Psalm 119:127; Wisdom, Proverbs 4:6; Judgment, Isaiah 61:8; Good, Amos 5:15; Mercy, Micah 6:8; Truth and Peace, Zechariah 8:19; Your Enemies, Matthew 5:44; One Another, John 13:35; Husbands love your wives, Ephesians 5:25; His appearing, II Timothy 4:8; Wives love your husbands and children, Titus 2:4; Let brotherly love continue, Hebrews 13:1.

Love not or hate: Evil, Psalm 97:10; Vain thoughts, Psalm 119:113; Lying, Psalm 119:163; Sleep, Proverbs 20:13; Robbery, Isaiah 61:8; False Oaths, Zechariah 8:17; Money, I Timothy 6:10.
If we love things other than God we will become bitter and selfish.

27. Don't Be Lukewarm, Be Zealous, Hot, Keen, Not Half-Hearted.

God hates lukewarmness more than being cold. Revelation 3:15-17. Don't leave your first love, Revelation 2:4; Eccles. 9:10, 10:18; Proverbs 22:29; Proverbs 12:24; Proverbs 24:30-34; 6:6-11.

28. Have a very High View of the Local Church.

Do all you can to build it. Be a church planter and builder. Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:25; Psalms 133:1; Ephesians 1:22, 23; Hebrews 10:24, 25; Mark 16:15.

The Local Church by soul winning and multiplying and training disciples is the way to turn the world to Christ. If you or I desert the church, then God's work slows down, sin grows faster and more people have wrecked lives and go to hell. Let us plant churches everywhere before Christ returns.

29. Faithfulness. Revelation 2:10; James 1:12.

A crown of life is awarded to those that: a) Are faithful unto death,
b) Endure temptation,
c) Love God. I Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9.

Aim: For us to be faithful to God's ways all of our life.

What is Faithfulness? Faithfulness is a continuous, steady, uninterrupted, reliable performance in life with all its responsibilities, without boasting about it.

Who should we be faithful to? God, the Bible's Commands, our spouse, our church, our friends, our employer, our employees, lost people in bringing them to the gospel, training Christians to reach the world for Christ, and in praying for people. I Samuel 12:23.

Faithfulness is my behaving to God and others just as how God behaves towards me. Lamentations 3:23; Hebrews 13:5; Psalm 40:10; Psalms 89:1; 119:75,90.

Faithfulness is God and others being able to rely on us. Six reasons for faithfulness are:

- a) It is **rare** in man. Proverbs 20:6.
- b) It is **reflected** in Christ. Hebrews 3:1,2.
- c) It is the **result** of living by faith in God's promises in the Bible. Acts 6:5,8.
- d) It is **required** of stewards. I Corinthians 4:2.
- e) It is **rewarded** by a crown of life. Revelation 2:10; Commendation by Christ, Matthew 25:21,23; cities in the kingdom, Luke 19:17,19; and reigning with Christ. Revelation 17:14.
- f) We are solemnly warned against failing to be faithful. II Peter 3:17,18.

The Realm of Faithfulness. Where should we be faithful?

- a) In support of the local church. Hebrews 10:23-25; Luke 4:16. Christ was faithful in attending the synagogue every Sabbath and attending every Passover even at death. Acts 2:41,42.
- b) In the basics: Feeding on God's Word, spiritual growth, holy living, fellowship with the Father and Son, warring against Satan, the world and the flesh, giving, following Christ.
- c) In stewardship.
- d) In service.

When you do all these, you are no longer a spiritual babe, but you are progressing to spiritual adulthood.

Conclusion: Will God say to you, "Well done thou good and faithful servant?"