

session 8 study guide

spiritual growth

message

Imagine you have some seeds. You plant one in the ground. You wait.

Nothing happens.

So you water it, and soon you notice it begins to grow, pushing its green shoots out from underneath the soil. *It's growing*, you think.

But watering the seed is not enough. In order to have a healthy plant, you must feed, tend, prune and care for the plant. Not just once, either, but continuously throughout the plant's life.

Christian faith works much the same way. When you accept Jesus into your life, the seed is planted. But in order to flourish and grow, you must nurture your faith into a blossoming relationship with Jesus Christ.

How is the garden of your faith? Flourishing or lifeless?

In the passage you are about to read from Colossians, Paul is writing to the people of Colosse to encourage them in their spiritual growth. Many of them were being distracted by a growing number of counterfeit religions that were arising in the region. Just as the Starter activity demonstrated, it is easy to get distracted by other voices in our lives. But as we move closer to God, His voice becomes easier to hear (see John 10:27-28).

Paul writes to the Colossians to remind them of their foundation in Jesus and to encourage them to deepen their faith. He says, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6-7).

As you read, keep the following questions in mind: (1) What does it mean to grow spiritually? (2) What does it look like in a Christian life? (3) What directions do these verses provide for our spiritual development?

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:1-17).

dig

1. Colossians 3:2 says that because you have been raised with Christ, you should set your heart and mind on “things above, not earthly things.” What are “things above”?

2. What are “earthly things”?

3. This passage lists a number of attributes associated with our “old self” or “earthly nature” that we should put to death. List as many of them as you can find.

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4. Colossians 3:12-17 lists several qualities of our “new selves” in Christ. What are some of the qualities or actions that are characteristic of this new life?

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5. Colossians 3:17 states, “Whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” What does it mean to “do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus”?

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apply

1. What is spiritual growth? How would someone know if he or she were growing?

2. Look back at the list of traits of the old self and new self. Which of these traits do you need to improve?

A trait of my old self I need to work on getting rid of is . . .

A trait of my life in Christ I would like to get better at is . . .

3. For each of the two qualities above, what specific actions can you take to become more Christlike in these areas?

4. What do you find the most helpful in growing your faith in the Lord?

5. Read the following verses:

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 2:1-3, emphasis added).

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:11-14, emphasis added).

What does “milk” symbolize in these passages? Is it something to be desired?

6. Is your Christian walk sustained by milk or solid food?

7. What promise about your spiritual growth can be found in Philippians 1:6?

reflect

1. What is the difference between salvation and spiritual growth?

2. If someone says he or she is feeling spiritually far from God, what advice would you give to that person?

3. How has your faith grown or changed over time?

4. When do you feel closest to God?

5. Do you feel that you are growing spiritually or do you feel stagnant? What actions are you taking in order to nurture your faith?

6. Who has been a major spiritual influence in your life? What is the value of having spiritual role models?

7. Memorizing God's Word so that you can call upon it in times of need is one way to deepen your faith. Do you have a favorite verse or Bible story? If yes, what is it?

meditation



"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me,
and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me
when you seek me with all your heart. I will be
found by you," declares the LORD.

JEREMIAH 29:12-14