

LESSON 6 God Wants You to Care for Yourself

A car is a complicated piece of machinery. We understand more or less how it works—the motor, transmission, steering, for example. We can wash, polish it, and even change a flat tire. But we may have never learned much about the mechanics of a car. What would we do if we had to make a major repair on our car? We would get the maker's repair manual. The manual explains how the car was put together and tells us what to do to make the car run properly. Sometimes the instructions might seem strange, but we can trust the advice of the auto maker. After all, the maker who designed and built the car ought to know what is best for it.

Human beings are much more complicated than cars. But the One who created all people understands us. He has given instructions and advice on how to live. Sometimes people think that the Creator is unfair or strange in what He says. They find His instructions unreasonable and old-fashioned. Yet is He not the One who ought to know what is best?

As Christians, we have confidence that God knows what is good for us. We are also sure that, in all the ups and downs of life, He wants the very best for us. His rules and principles are for our benefit as we grow into the image of God.

The Plan

- A. Four Ways God Expects You to Grow
- B. Biblical Guidelines for Growth

The Goals

1. Outline ways God expects you to grow.
2. Identify what helps or prevents the development of a healthy body.
3. Describe ways Christians can develop their minds and talents.
4. List Scriptural methods by which spiritual growth is possible.
5. Explain the importance of behaving wisely and respectfully towards non-Christians.

A. FOUR WAYS GOD EXPECTS YOU TO GROW

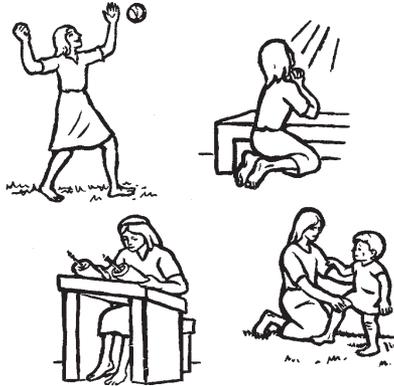
Goal 1. Outline ways God expects you to grow.

The Bible tells us little about the youth and young adulthood of Jesus. Yet that period is covered by these significant words: “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

The example of Jesus is important. He became mature by paying attention to four major areas of His life: by exercise and work He grew physically strong (body); by study and thought He cultivated His mind (wisdom); by prayer and studying God’s words He was spiritually alert (favor with God); by showing love and concern He became socially and emotionally acceptable (favor with people).

Had Jesus neglected His physical development, He may not have been able to walk the roads of Palestine or stand the pain at Calvary. If He had not shown interest in others, He would not have been the friend of sinners or the close companion of His disciples. If He had not become intellectually capable, He

would not have amazed people with His understanding. Even His enemies knew that nobody ever talked like He did (John 7:46). If Jesus had neglected communion with His heavenly Father, He would not have known God's perfect word and will. But Jesus did all these things. He was the perfect man. He was whole in all things. He was holy.



The word holiness comes from the word for wholeness or health. Jesus was a healthy, whole, and holy man, and Paul urges us to become like Him.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11–13, 15)

Application

1 In your notebook write the passage from Ephesians 4 quoted above. Learn it and pray for God's help in making it true in your life.

2 Ask God to show you how you are growing as a Christian. Then write in your notebook two short lists: one for the areas in which you see progress; the other, for things where you have not changed much since becoming a Christian. Pray daily, using these lists, thanking God each time for ways you are becoming more like Jesus.

B. BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR GROWTH

Guidelines for Your Body

Goal 2. Identify what helps or prevents the development of a healthy body.

God gave us a marvelous body. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is part of the body of Christ, so Paul urges, “Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). We honor God by caring for our bodies. Here are the principles of stewardship and service again. As the apostle Paul said earlier, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Corinthians 6:13).

God has created our body with needs. But He has provided for those needs. For example, marriage is God’s provision for the sexual needs of the male and female. Paul advises those whom God has not called to a single life to marry and to satisfy their partner’s sexual needs.

Sexual immorality and perversion are equally displeasing to God. They are sins against our body (1 Corinthians 6:18), but God wants our bodies to be holy and useful for His service.

The same principle of respect for our body applies to eating and drinking. The Lord Jesus fasted and prayed, but He also enjoyed good meals with His friends (though His enemies condemned Him for it). Romans 14 tells us that there is no special goodness in eating or not eating particular foods. “The

kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

With these important guidelines in mind, mature Christians choose what to eat and drink. They are mindful that excess is sin, for it abuses the body. That is why Paul warned against drunkenness and over-eating: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

We glorify God by keeping our bodies under control. A body out of control through abuse of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, marijuana, or even food is displeasing to God. Respect for our body as God’s temple is shown in the fruit of the Spirit called self-control. By the Holy Spirit’s help, we can determine to keep our bodies holy and clean for God’s Spirit to live in.

Jesus was always busy about His Father’s work. In John 5:17, He said, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” Physical work is good for the human body. Perhaps your job does not allow you to be physically active. Then you must take time to exercise your body. “Physical training is of some value” (1 Timothy 4:8) wrote Paul, who sometimes used athletes and boxers as examples of discipline. Running, walking, bicycling, working in a garden, or any other form of physical exercise is good, especially for the person whose job is mostly at a desk.

But while working and exercising are important, God calls us to rest. He even made rest a part of His creation. The seventh day is the day of rest and re-creation. Pastors and Christian workers also need to be reminded that God requires a day of rest. Jesus himself needed quiet and relaxation. And so did His disciples. Once, there were so many people coming to Jesus that the disciples did not even have time to eat. Jesus said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31).

Service to Jesus brings times of refreshing. Jesus calls to all His workers:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:28–29)

Application

3 Circle the letter before each statement below that tells you how to have a strong and healthy body.

- a) Do hard physical work.
- b) Keep God’s laws on sexual morality.
- c) Stay in bed all day.
- d) Eat as often and as much as you can.
- e) Have times of exercise and rest.
- f) Use your wages to get drunk.
- g) Eat regularly and wisely.

4 Write this important scriptural direction in your notebook. Learn it and find ways each day to apply it to your life: “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).



Guidelines for Your Mind

Goal 3. Describe ways Christians can develop their mind and talents.

It is obvious that all work and service to God is not physical. We serve God and people by using our minds, also. Imagine that you had a child with a lazy mind. He was of normal intelligence, but did not want to learn. Instead of going to school, he did nothing. Would you be happy with that child? Of course not! If the child were mentally ill, then you would be more patient. But if the child was willfully ignorant and inactive, then you would be right to be upset.

Some children of God are mentally lazy. Like the steward who did not use his money, they do nothing with the riches God has given them. They never learn to hear God's voice; never speak to Him in prayer; never study God's Word for themselves; and they believe everything anybody tells them (even wrong teaching about God).

Do you know people like that? If so, you need to help them. You are to build them up in the faith (Romans 15:2). Teach them these lessons on how a Christian grows in wisdom:



1. Help them learn to pray. It is not great words that matter, but needs and thanks simply shared with God our Father (See Philippians 4:6.).
2. Help them with Bible study. First they need to gain knowledge of God's ways—the facts about Jesus and His kingdom. Then they need to know how to apply the knowledge, for this is wisdom.

By studying and practicing God's ways, you will grow wiser. The psalmist asked how to be happy and have a pure life. He answered himself, saying that it was in studying the ways of the Lord.

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. (Psalm 119:15–16)

The psalmist was a poet and a thinker. He was able to put God-inspired thoughts into beautiful language. He had a gift from God for using words. He had worked at developing that gift. He understood the art of making poems that his own people would love.

That is one aspect of the creative side of the human mind. God is creative, and He has made us creative like Him. When Moses was making the sacred tent in the wilderness, God gave him skilled craftsmen and artists. About one of them the Bible says,

“See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.”
(Exodus 35:31)

Ability to tell stories, speak well, create poems, sing, paint pictures, make designs, sculpt wood or stone, write and act out plays, explain Scripture simply and correctly, see work that needs to be done and know how to do it—these are gifts of God’s Spirit. We are given such gifts to use and develop for God’s glory and the good of the church.

What gifts do you have? Do you know the songs and poems of your people? Study more and ask God’s help to create good songs and poems. Can you play a musical instrument? Practice hard. Good playing glorifies God. Perhaps it is time you studied how to create new music in your culture. The church in your country needs songs that speak to your people in the music and poetry they understand. Remember what Peter said about stewardship:

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10)

Application

5 Circle the letter before the ways you can develop your mind and wisdom.

- a) Always believe everything people tell you.
- b) Study the Word of God.
- c) Read good books.
- d) Never ask questions.
- e) Take Bible courses.
- f) Listen to older Christians.
- g) Refuse to discuss what you believe.

6 Set aside a special time of prayer each day this week to think and pray about the special gift or gifts you have received from God. Write in your notebook any gifts you think you have, and then write briefly how you are going to use them for the good of others.



Guidelines for Your Spirit

Goal 4. List Scriptural methods by which spiritual growth is possible.

When Jesus was a child, “the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). God was pleased with Him as He grew to manhood. At His baptism the voice from heaven said, ““You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”” (Luke 3:22). Not only had Jesus grown in human wisdom and strength, but He had also grown in understanding God’s ways. He knew that He was God’s Son; He had learned what God wanted Him to do and He was ready in all things to do what God told Him. This was pleasing to God.

When His enemies questioned who He was, Jesus told them that they would find out one day. He added,

“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just

what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” (John 8:28–29)



Jesus said and did nothing that did not come from God's command to Him. He was always sure of God's presence and approval in each word or action. He learned and acted on God's will even when that was difficult. Remember His prayer in Gethsemane: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Growing in God's favor comes from learning to say that prayer sincerely. It is finding out God's ways (those rules and principles) for all His children and putting them into practice. It is discovering God's special will for your life and acting on it.

In Lesson 3, you studied four methods God uses to help us know what He wants us to become. Do you remember them? They are: a purified conscience, the Word of God, the examples of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit's guidance. All these work together as we seek God's will out of our desire to please Him.

The Jews of Berea, to whom Paul preached about Jesus, are a good example to us.

The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was

true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. (Acts 17:11–12)

Notice how these sincere people handled the Scriptures:

1. Thoughtfully (“examined”)
2. Continually (“every day”)
3. Purposefully (“to see”)
4. Willingly (“believed”)

For spiritual growth, a Christian too must study God’s Word daily, seek God’s will, and prepare to put it into action.

In addition to personal Bible study, the Christian has another gift of God: pastors and teachers. These leaders, from their study and experience, share with other believers the insights given them in God’s Word. They bring God’s message to build up His people. (See Ephesians 4:11–16.)

Those who became Christians on the day of Pentecost learned that they needed instruction from those older in the faith. So “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

These Christians learned from the apostles who had been taught by Jesus and were filled with the Holy Spirit. Christians today need teachers and pastors who know God’s Word and are Spirit-filled. The Bible teaches that we are to obey and submit to such leaders (Hebrews 13:17) and be grateful for their teaching (Galatians 6:6).

But it is not just the pastors who teach in a local church. Because the church is the body of believers, encouragement and witness should come from all the members. By our lives and words, we can teach each other. The apostle Paul gives us this exhortation:

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. (Colossians 3:16)

When Christians come together, they can share knowledge about God's ways. A striking biblical example of this concerns the gifted preacher Apollos. Though he knew the Scriptures and the facts about Jesus, it seems that he was not filled with the Spirit. So Aquila and Priscilla "invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (Acts 18:26). The ministry of Apollos was transformed by this act of sharing.

It is important to see, too, the humility of Apollos. He had a teachable spirit. He accepted instruction from others, though he was an eloquent preacher. We will not learn from God's Word nor from others if we resist their teaching. We must be prepared to obey.

Remember the illustration of the repair manual with which this lesson began? How foolish if I read what it said and then refused to obey! Just so with God's Word. To please God and to grow in his favor, you have to do everything His way, just as our Lord Jesus did. However much we have grown by living for God, the Bible tells us there is still room for growth:

We instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

Application

7 Circle the letter which corresponds with every activity that helps the Christian grow in favor with God.

- a)** Praying for the Spirit's guidance
- b)** Studying the Scriptures for yourself
- c)** Listening to complaining
- d)** Reading the Bible while thinking about something else
- e)** Learning from other Christians' experience
- f)** Criticizing God's rules and principles
- g)** Reading God's Word daily
- h)** Paying attention to good teaching

8 If you do not already study the Bible regularly and systematically, begin right away. Write in your notebook a time each day you will give some minutes to prayerful reading. Write down the books you intend to read first. Many Christians are helped by reading and thinking about short passages from the New Testament, the Psalms, and the Old Testament every day. Ask a matured Christian or a pastor for advice.

Guidelines for Your Social Relationships

Goal 5. Explain the importance of behaving wisely and respectfully towards non-Christians.

Jesus was a man people liked. Mothers brought their children for Him to place His hands on them (Mark 10:13), and men left their homes and jobs to follow Him during His ministry. Though He had many enemies, it was not because He was harsh, proud, or wicked. It was because they “rejected God’s purpose for themselves” (Luke 7:30) and despised Him as ““a friend of tax collectors and sinners”” (Luke 7:34).

The first Christians were like their Master. They cared about the sick and poor. They ate together “with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:46–47).

Can we live in such a way that we please both men and God? The apostle Paul seems to make these opposites:



Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)

Paul was talking about not adapting his teaching—the unchanging gospel of Christ—to the desires of sinful men. Similarly, we cannot change our beliefs or our righteous behavior to please other people. We must serve God first. It is for God’s sake that we obey human laws, as the apostle Peter tells us. For God wants us to silence the ignorant talk of foolish people by the good things we do (1 Peter 2:15).

We are witnesses to other people by our good deeds. Paul was happy to commend the Christians of Thessalonica for their brotherly love. He encourages them to do even more:

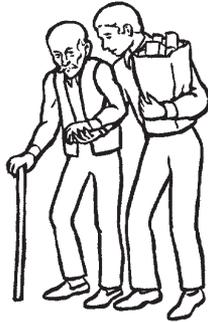
Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12)

We grow in favor with others as we work quietly and well, for then we are neither a problem nor a burden. Moreover, we are to show concern by our behavior towards other people. Paul wants Christians to be wise in their conduct towards those who are not believers, and to always be pleasant and interesting in discussions (Colossians 4:5–6). He instructs Titus to remind his people to be submissive and ready to do good:

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. (Titus 3:1–2)

Paul contrasts our lives now with our lives before we became God’s children: “We lived in malice and envy, being hated and

hating one another” (Titus 3:3). As we show our love to others by our respect and gentleness, we will not always win them for Christ. But many will recognize our concern and not find in our behavior an excuse to criticize the gospel. The proof of our good actions is not whether all people say good things about us now, but whether they must recognize our goodness before God himself.



Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Peter 2:12)

Application

9 Write 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 in your notebook and memorize it. Pray about the specific ways you can apply this verse to your own life.

10 List several reasons why it is important to use wisdom and respect with the people around you who are not Christians.



Check Your Answers

- 6** Your answer
- 1** Your answer
- 7** Phrases **a)**, **b)**, **e)**, **g)**, and **h)** are correct.
- 2** Your answer
- 8** Your answer
- 3** Phrases **a)**, **b)**, **e)**, and **g)** are correct.
- 9** Your answer
- 4** Your answer
- 10** Your answers. Some examples may be:
- To be a good witness
 - To grow in favor with people because of love
 - To show concern by our behavior
- 5** Phrases **b)**, **c)**, **e)**, and **f)** are correct.