

LESSON 3 Growing in Community

Human life is a miracle that most of us pay little attention to. Babies grow because they eat and they learn because those who take care of them teach them. Their physical and mental growth continues for many years until finally they are adults. When they become adults, we say that they are mature.

In lesson 2 we learned about Jesus' command to witness. In order to witness effectively, we must develop spiritually. In this lesson you will study how to become spiritually mature. God wants us to become mature, "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Then we will be able to grow in community with others.

The Plan

- A. Ways to Grow
- B. Principles for Growth

The Goals

1. Explain how you can grow in the Lord.
2. Describe the principle of separation unto God and from the world.

A. WAYS TO GROW

Know the Scriptures

Goal 1. Explain how you can grow in the Lord.

The Sadducees told Jesus a fictional story of a certain woman who married a man and he died. Then she married his brother, but he died too. This happened seven times. The Sadducees then asked Jesus whose wife this woman would be in heaven. (See Matthew 22:28.)

The Sadducees invented this story to test Jesus. They did not believe in the resurrection. They wanted Jesus to oppose their beliefs so they could reject His teaching. However, instead of answering the Sadducees, Jesus went to the root of the problem. He exposed their lack of understanding of the Scriptures. ““You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God”” (Matthew 22:29). Notice the order Jesus used. He put knowledge of the Scriptures first and God’s power second.

There is much to learn here. People seem to have a great desire for God’s power, but there is not a great desire to know the Scriptures. Do you want to have the power of God? Then you must live by the teachings of the Scriptures. The apostle Peter advises, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).

Psalm 119 has 176 verses. In almost all of these verses, the Scriptures are mentioned in one way or another. Among other things, these verses show the Word of God to be our guide, our wisdom, our joy, and our defense against sin.

If reading the Word of God is not a regular part of your life, ask the Lord to help you have the wisdom to read and understand the Scriptures. Sometimes we do not do what we should because we lack discipline. There are certain things that only God can do for me. There are other things that I must do for myself. For example, when it comes to daily prayer and Bible reading, I have to do it. This calls for an act of my will. No one is ever going to force me to do it. I must make myself do it. And as I read the Word daily, I will experience the satisfaction and growth that it brings.

Babies only grow as they receive proper milk and food. It is the same in the life of the believer. If you expect to grow in the Lord you have to let Him feed you through His Word. Plan a regular time each day for this purpose, just as you plan a regular time to eat every day. The Holy Spirit will help you understand what you read, and you will grow in the Lord.

Application

- 1 Circle the letter in front of the TRUE statements.
 - a) Jesus exposed the Sadducees because they did not understand the Scriptures.
 - b) God feeds us spiritually when we read the Bible.
 - c) Jesus said that knowing the power of God is more important than knowing the Scriptures.

2 What is the result of regular Scripture reading?

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Think About the Lord

Another aid to Christian growth is prayer and meditation, or thinking about the Lord. The apostle Paul, in Philippians 4:8, tells us to fill our minds with “whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable.” We have a promise in Isaiah that God will keep us in perfect peace if we keep our minds on Him (Isaiah 26:3). Thinking about the Lord makes our faith in Him grow.

We also need to pray that God will teach us His ways and direct our paths. He wants us to pray for a better understanding of His Word. We are instructed in Philippians 4:6 to ask God for what we need. And we read in Ephesians 6:18 to “be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” When we pray for other Christians, we are showing the spirit of community towards them. We should also pray for those who do not know Christ, that they may be drawn to Him.

Application

3 Why are prayer and meditation important?

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4 Name two things the Bible tells us to pray about.

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Be Ruled by Christian Love

God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites as one of the earliest sets of rules for true community living (Exodus 20). The Ten Commandments deal with relationships between God and people, and with relationships between people. Everything the Israelites did had to be compared to these laws. Not one

of them was to be disobeyed. However, Israelites found it very difficult to follow these rules.

The people who received these commandments disobeyed them. So God sent Jesus Christ to make a way to restore the relationship between God and humanity. Read Romans 8:3 and Galatians 4:4–5. These verses show the mercy of God and His desire to have perfect communion (community) with humankind. People's relationships with others are improved when they have the right kind of relationship with God.

When I was young, I was assigned to work with an older man who was an expert in his work. But he was not an easy person to work with. I treated him with love no matter how badly he treated me. When he saw that his unpleasant way did not affect me, he changed his attitude toward me. He responded to my love. From him I learned many valuable lessons, one of which is that most people will not resist love.

When we accept Christ as our Lord, we get a different view of God, the Bible, and other people. Jesus does for us what the Ten Commandments, the Law, could not do. We become new beings when we enter into community with Him (2 Corinthians 5:17). He writes His law of love on our hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3). This new law of love urges us to obey God because we love Him. His law of love rules our relationships with other people. Our conscience is made clean and our mind is renewed. Now we do by nature the things that are commanded by the Law.

Has someone treated you badly since you became a Christian? Did you feel angry? If you are a Christian, the power of God has changed your nature. His law of love becomes your rule of life and behavior. This is the way to have a spirit of community.

Application

5 Complete the following sentences with the correct words.

a) God gave Israel a set of rules called

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b) Jesus taught the law of

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c) It is possible to obey Christ's law because we

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d) Christ writes His law on our

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6 Now that I am a Christian, it is easier to forgive someone who has wronged me because

a) the Law tells me I must forgive.

b) when I became a Christian my nature was changed.



Worship With Others

Worshipping with other Christians will help you grow. We need to meet together to study God's Word. Regular church attendance and teaching build us up in the Lord. Sharing with others their problems and joys, and having them share ours, is a great help. A basic principle of community is that we need each other. We need to spend time with others who know and love the Lord as we do. Do you meet with other Christians? Do you share their joy and encourage them when they are sad? If you do, you are showing the spirit of community and love in its fullest sense.

Application

- 7** Which statement best explains how worshipping with others helps us to grow spiritually?
- a)** When we share the joys and sorrows of others, we realize that they need us.
 - b)** Worshipping and sharing with other Christians gives us strength and builds us up in the Lord.
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B. PRINCIPLES FOR GROWTH

Goal 2. Describe the principle of separation unto God and from the world.

As we mature in our Christian walk through studying God’s Word, praying, thinking about God, worshipping Him, and loving others, God leads us into a life of holiness. The Bible sometimes speaks of this as being separated. The New Testament talks about two sides of separation—separation unto God and separation from the world. Both are very important.

Separation Unto God

God is calling you to be separated unto himself. He wants you to be dedicated, set apart for His use. Romans 12:1 says,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

This is the positive side of separation. Look at Acts 13:2: “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Also read Romans 1:1. Notice that the separation was unto God. Separation unto God calls for total dedication or commitment to Him so that He can help us to live holy.

Separation From the World

Second Corinthians 6:14 states, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” Here the message is that true partnership (community) cannot exist between a believer and an unbeliever, for there is little basis for the spirit of community between Christians and unbelievers. Concerning relating with unbelievers, this verse commands us not to have close relationships such as marriage or business partnerships. It is not talking about daily contacts with unbelievers in the world.

We are often with people who have no faith in God. These people are the ones we are to win to Him. The secret in being a child of God in a wicked world is knowing God. You must allow the Holy Spirit to rule your life. You are living in the world, but you are a citizen of heaven. You can be with unbelievers, but you must not be like them.

Application

8 Write YES in front of those activities that illustrate the principles of separation unto God or separation from the world.

- ... **a** Daily reading of the Bible
 - ... **b** Choosing Christian friends for times of fellowship
 - ... **c** Participating in activity that is not pleasing to the Lord
 - ... **d** Marrying someone who is not a Christian
 - ... **e** Being too busy to pray regularly
 - ... **f** Asking God to give you guidance
 - ... **g** Showing love and concern for someone who has a need
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Tolerance and Moderation

It is sometimes difficult for Christians to know the standards of behavior they should have. We should let the Bible be our guide in areas where it gives specific direction, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in other areas.

Some Christians say that we are no longer under the Law, so we are free to live according to our own standards. Others have a more legalistic attitude. That is, they try to gain favor with God by the things they do or do not do. They try to make themselves acceptable to God by following a list of rules, rather than by living in faith in Christ. Christianity is not a set of rules that one must follow. It is receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and allowing Him to become Lord of our lives. Jesus himself said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).

When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, we do things that are pleasing to Him. We do not want to do those things that harm our Christian testimony. We are not bound by legalistic rules, nor do we feel that the grace of Christ permits us to do whatever pleases us. Christ’s law of love helps us to practice moderation or balance in our standards of behavior. God deals with us as individuals. He knows what we need. He will help us to be balanced in our Christian behavior.

Since God does deal with us as individuals, we must be careful not to judge others by our own standards. An explanation is found in Romans chapters 14 and 15, in relationship to eating certain foods and honoring certain days. However, the principles taught in these chapters apply to any other questionable areas of our lives. Here are some of these principles:

1. “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way” (Romans 14:13).

2. “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).
3. “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves” (Romans 14:21–22).
4. “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 15:7).

These passages of Scripture make it very clear that we should be tolerant towards others whose standards of behavior are different from ours. To be tolerant means to be patient and accepting of others even when we are not in complete agreement with them.

God knows how to deal with us as individuals. He deals with us on a personal basis because He is bringing us into a closer relationship with himself. He knows the areas in which we need help. He may require one thing of you, and something entirely different of another person. He can impress us to do certain things, and He can also impress us not to do other things. We should not try to make everyone do exactly as we feel God is telling us to do. We must accept other Christians as they are and expect God to lead them. We must be tolerant.

Jesus said, “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2). Therefore, it is not wise to be harsh or critical in our judgment of others. Tolerance toward others is an example of the law of love and is present wherever there is a spirit of community.

Application

9 What two things do Romans 14:19 and Romans 15:7 tell us to do?

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10 Circle the letter in front of the TRUE statements.

- a)** The Bible clearly states what our behavior should be in all situations.
- b)** The Holy Spirit is able to show us what is right and wrong.
- c)** Christians should separate from other Christians whose standards are different.
- d)** If we judge others harshly, God will judge us harshly.
- e)** We should try to get other Christians to live by our standards.

11 What principle have you learned in this lesson about each of the following?

a) Christian behavior

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b) Legalism

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c) Tolerance

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Check Your Answers

- 7 b)** Worshipping and sharing with other Christians gives us strength and builds us up in the Lord.
- 1** Statements **a)** and **b)** are true.
- 8** The principles of separation are seen in **a)**, **b)**, **f)**, and **g)**.
- 2** We grow spiritually.
- 3** They help us to grow spiritually, and we have a greater spirit of community.
- 9** Do things that make peace; accept each other
- 4** Any of the following: For God's direction; to understand God's Word; for our needs; for other Christians; for unbelievers
- 10** Statements **b)** and **d)** are true.
- 5 a)** the Ten Commandments.
b) love.
c) love Him and want to obey Him.
d) hearts.
- 11** Your answer. Here are some possible answers:
- a)** We should let the Bible be our guide in areas where it gives specific direction, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in other areas.
- b)** We should let Christ's law of love guide our actions, rather than follow a list of rules.
- c)** We should accept others whose opinions may be different from ours, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide them.
- 6 b)** when I became a Christian my nature was changed.