

LESSON

1 Godly Desires for Growth

Most fathers and mothers watch eagerly as their children grow. They point with pride to each new sign of growth. Children also long for the day when they will be grown up. Then they are mature enough to accept full rights and duties in the family. From the viewpoints of both parents and children, nothing is more sad than a lack of normal growth.

All of this is true when applied to our spiritual life as well. God desires a growing fellowship with humans. Humans also desire this relationship and feel lost without it. Even when man does not understand what he needs, he is searching for this fellowship with God. But he cannot find it until he accepts Jesus Christ as Savior. Then, as a believer man cannot experience the level of fellowship which God desires until he accepts God's purpose for him. That purpose is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. We can say, therefore, that Christian maturity fulfills the desires of both God and man.

Growing up is fun but difficult. I am sure you remember exciting things about becoming an adult. But you have not forgotten the hard things either. This course, as the Holy Spirit uses it to teach you, will challenge you and help you grow. As you grow, you will become aware of new rights and more important duties in God's family. Apostle Paul writes in the Bible, "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11). Such growth is necessary for you also.

lesson outline

God's Desire for Man's Growth

In Creation

From the Fall to Redemption

From Redemption to Maturity

Direction of Humanity's Growth

Through Jesus' Life

Through Assurance of Salvation

Through Understanding Natural Growth

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain why God created humans.
- State the goal that God has planned for man to attain through redemption and growth in Jesus Christ.
- Use Ephesians 4:13 to point out the goal of Christian maturity.
- Explain why no man can find complete satisfaction for his need for growth unless he looks to God.
- Exercise faith in Christ to fulfill the true purpose of your desire for growth.
- Tell why the basis for your spiritual growth is supernatural.
- Compare spiritual growth with natural growth.

learning activities

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study. Remember that He desires to guide you into all truth (See John 16:13).
2. Before starting this lesson, get a notebook. In it, write the answers to exercises that are too long to include in this independent study textbook, and any other notes you desire to make as you study this course.
3. Read carefully the introductory material in this independent study textbook.
4. Read the inspirational section, outline, objectives, and learning activities of Lesson 1.
5. Look up in the glossary at the end of the textbook the definitions to any key words that you do not understand.
6. Carefully read the lesson development, answering each question as you come to it. After answering each one check your answer with the answer given at the end of the lesson, then correct your answer if necessary.
7. Look up each Scripture reference in the lesson development as soon as you come to it.
8. Take the self-test at the end of the lesson. Check your answers carefully. Review any items answered incorrectly.

key words

Understanding the key words we have listed at the beginning of each lesson will help you as you study. You will find key words listed in alphabetical order and defined in the glossary at the back of this independent-study textbook. If you are in doubt about the meaning of any of the words on the list, you may look them up now or when you come across them in your reading. Please take time to learn the definitions of any new words, since they are important to a complete understanding of this course.

destiny
dynamic
evaluation
fellowship

grow up
growth
maturity
perfect

purpose
relationship
stature

lesson development

GOD’S DESIRE FOR MAN’S GROWTH

We will begin our course in Christian maturity by considering God’s reason for creating man. Have you ever asked, “Why did God make man in the first place?” Maybe you have wondered, “Just what does God expect from man?”

In Creation

Objective 1. Explain why God created humans.

Several times God stopped the process of creating the world to view His own work. Each time He saw that it was good. On the sixth day, God created man according to His plan. Man was made in the image or likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Without man, the creation had been incomplete. The creation of man fulfilled the plan of God. Through fellowship between God and man, man would grow in God, glorifying Him, and fulfilling the purpose of his creation.

Application

1 Look up Ecclesiastes 12:13. According to this verse what two things must man do to fulfill God’s reason for creating him?

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To “fear God” means to respect and reverence Him. Certainly that includes respect for His purpose for man.

From the Fall to Redemption

Objective 2. State the goal that God has planned for man to attain through redemption and growth in Jesus Christ.

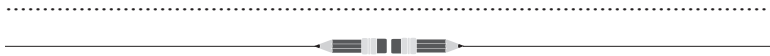
Unfortunately, the story of creation does not end with man’s fulfillment of God’s glorious purpose for him. Because of man’s sin, he fell and became unable to fellowship with God and

glorify Him. The thoughts of fallen man were far from God. His desires led him away from God. His actions were often offensive to God. Sin ruined man by keeping him from the fellowship with God that was God’s purpose for him.

But God loved man so much and desired his fellowship so greatly that He provided the plan of salvation. God’s plan was to restore the broken fellowship through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. God sent His own Son to die for man so that he could be redeemed and again have fellowship with Him.

Application

2 What is the goal for humanity in God’s plan of salvation?



The likeness of God in man was damaged by the fall. But through Jesus Christ, God brings man back into His own likeness. This is a major theme of the New Testament. We become like God as we grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

From Redemption to Maturity

Objective 3. Use Ephesians 4:13 to point out the goal of Christian maturity.

Maturity may be defined as a “state of having been brought by natural processes to completeness of growth and development” or “pertaining to a condition of full development as a man of mature years.” As we will see, the natural processes which lead to maturity can be hindered or helped. The ministry of the church of Jesus Christ is to help each believer become a mature person like Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:11–16, to which we will later devote almost a full chapter, gives this basic truth.

Application

3 According to Ephesians 4:11, who are the ministering persons that Christ has given to help us attain spiritual maturity?

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4 According to Ephesians 4:13, what is the goal of Christian maturity?

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There are words in this passage listed in the *Key Words*. Make sure you look them up in the glossary.

The word translated “mature” in Ephesians 4:13 is often translated “perfect” (compare Matthew 19:21 and Philippians 3:12 with Colossians 1:28). The word “perfect” generally means “complete” or “whole.” It can also mean “finished” or “accomplished” (see John 19:30).

5 Read Colossians 1:28. Which of the following items best defines the word *mature* in this verse?

- a) Flawless
- b) Sinless
- c) Whole or complete

The closer we come to being like Christ, the more we fulfill the purpose which God has for our lives, and the more we glorify Him. Can you see why God has such a great desire for each Christian to mature, to become complete and Christlike? Spiritual maturity is the highest goal which God has for each believer’s life. Our heavenly Father eagerly looks for each development toward maturity in our lives.

DIRECTION OF HUMANITY’S GROWTH

Objective 4. Explain why no man can find complete satisfaction for his need for growth unless he looks to God.

There is within every man a hunger to find his reason and purpose for being. Much of the restlessness among all people is caused by a search for life’s meaning. Man needs a goal. Even when unsaved, a man feels linked with destiny and eternity. He is searching and longing for a satisfaction which can only be fully found in fellowship with God. Human personality can be fully developed only in a God-man relationship that pleases God. As long as man remains apart from God, his desire for spiritual growth cannot be fulfilled.

There is an emptiness inside every unsaved person which is like an alarm or signal placed there by the Creator. When man does not fulfill God’s purpose for him, he experiences spiritual distress which may be likened to the physical pain of losing an arm or leg. People often find a temporary escape from such spiritual distress through sin. The temporary nature of this escape may be compared to the relief that certain medicines give to physical pain. Man’s denial of his need to know and serve the Creator is an act of sin that prevents spiritual maturity.

Our human spirit is, in a sense, a borrowed godlike nature. Only in our spirit are we truly like God. It is our most precious gift. It is our spirit which demands purpose.

Application

6 The godlikeness or *image of God* in man is man’s spirit. (This spirit includes such things as will, mind, choice, etc.) Read 1 Corinthians 2:10–11. What part of a person relates him to God?

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7 According to Romans 8:16, how does God’s Spirit declare to us that we are children of God?

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We can say that every person is born with a pressing need to be growing toward a goal. Often a person feels this need in terms of schooling, wealth, or status and promotion. In truth, this need can be satisfied only by a proper relationship to the Creator. It is met as we become more and more like Him. We are then able to have true fellowship with God. The need or desire in every man for growth is a quality that becomes a godly desire only when man focuses his desire on Christian maturity.

Have you ever watched someone trying to dam a rapidly flowing river? Sometimes it is almost impossible because there is a great power surging forward which is extremely difficult to stop. That movement is called the *dynamic*. Dynamic is an inner force that demands movement.

God has placed this force within man yet allows man to choose the direction for this force. You might say the river of desire within a person moves in various directions seeking its course. People without God are referred to in the Scripture as *forceful moving waters* (Jude 13). Unsaved people use this dynamic for self-goals. These are ultimately unsatisfying. We believers, on the other hand, must learn to use this dynamic to move toward maturity in God.

Application

8 How did the Samaritan in Luke 10:30–35 allow his dynamic of pity to move him forward in God?

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Through Jesus' Life

Objective 5. Exercise faith in Christ to fulfill the true purpose of your desire for growth.

Jesus Christ came into our world as a revelation of God's concern that we find our true purpose. Jesus is a model of the correct "God-man" relationship. His wholeness was the result of a life lived in correct relationship with its source. His life,

death, and resurrection opened the way for man to truly *fulfill his purpose*. What sin had robbed from man, Christ restored to him. Through faith in Christ we are born into the family of God and discover the right direction for the *dynamic* of our spirit.

Application

- 9 In John 10:10, Jesus expressed our true purpose by saying He had come in order that
- a) we might escape hell.
 - b) the Scripture might be fulfilled.
 - c) we might have life in all its fullness.
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Through Assurance of Salvation

Objective 6. Tell why the basis for your spiritual growth is supernatural.

Some people think that to be born again is the ultimate Christian goal. But the mere knowledge that we are Christians does not guarantee us a dynamic Christian life! Dynamic living implies being in motion and growing. Just as a newborn baby grows because he has life, so must the new Christian. He now has the possibility of moving in the direction God wants him to. But growth is not automatic—the believer must want to grow toward Christian maturity.



Your first step toward Christian maturity must be to believe that Jesus' death and resurrection was for the forgiveness of your sins. Your next step is to recognize and confess Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life. The person who believes and confesses receives the Spirit of Christ upon his human spirit as Master and Lord. Then the Holy Spirit gives to him a dynamic drive toward man's true purpose. In this drive, man will encounter

many obstacles. But through all these obstacles, man can make progress with the Spirit’s help toward maturity in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 3:23, “You are of Christ” implies that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Master.

Application

10 According to the following texts, why do we belong to Christ?

- a) 1 Corinthians 6:20
- b) 1 Peter 1:18–19
- c) Ephesians 1:4

11 The Bible explains in John 3:19–20 why all the world does not recognize the claims of God through Christ on their lives. Why is this?

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12 The following three Scriptures tell us what a person must do in order to belong to Christ. By studying these verses you can understand and explain to others how to become a Christian. Read each passage and write down what is necessary to have the new life in Jesus. The first answer is provided.

- a) John 3:16–18 *Requires a person to believe in God’s only Son.*
- b) Romans 10:9–10
- c) John 1:12



The answers to the preceding exercise tell us that *a man can know that he is saved*, that he is born as a child in God’s family. Take a moment to read 1 John 4:14–16 to make this truth especially real to you.

Application

13 Now, write in two sentences, using your own words, the truth in 1 John 4:14–16. Write these sentences in your notebook, wording them as if you were explaining this wonderful truth to a friend.



Through Understanding Natural Growth

Objective 7. Compare spiritual growth with natural growth.

Christian maturity may be defined as a process, similar to natural growth, whereby we are brought to spiritual completeness.

Our life in Christ is compared to a seed. In the Bible, growth and maturity are often illustrated by farming. When we are born anew, it is through an incorruptible seed. The Bible describes this special seed in 1 Peter 1:23.

Application

14 According to 1 Peter 1:23, through what have we been born again?

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First John 3:9 refers to God's seed which remains in us as believers. You know that in all life the potential for full growth is in the tiny seed. For example, the potential for the full grown corn plant is in the corn seed. It is hard to believe that a great tree can come from a small seed. Yet it does. The nature of the plant contained in the seed can only be seen through the growth process.

In the newborn believer, potential for his *likeness of God* is the seed of the Word of God. His new life is a dynamic, which can through spiritual growth move onward toward Christian maturity.

Application

15 In 2 Corinthians 9:10, what are the two things that God promises us in the realm of our need for natural sustenance and growth?

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Remember that just as God can cause the natural seed to grow, so also He can cause spiritual seed within us to grow. And, just as God requires the farmer's labor in the growth of natural seed, so also He requires that the believer's own effort be a part of the process of growth of the spiritual seed within him.

Application

16 Without looking in the text, write out in your notebook your own definition of *Christian maturity*. Then review the definition of this term at the beginning of this section of the lesson and compare your definition with it.

Notice particularly from the definition of Christian maturity in this text that we are brought to spiritual completeness by a process that is similar to natural processes. The image of God in man—man's spirit—is a dynamic force which was meant to flow within the banks of a proper and wonderful fellowship between creature and Creator.

Although broken by sin, that purpose can now be restored through Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us clearly that there is a measuring rod for our maturity as Christians.

Application

17 According to Ephesians 4:13, what is the measuring rod for Christian maturity? Circle the letter in front of your answer.

- a) Ability to quote Scriptures
 - b) Living without mistakes
 - c) Christ's full stature
 - d) Educational advancement
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Perhaps you are asking yourself, "Why isn't Christian growth an easier process?" Again, the answer can be seen in nature. Seed has many natural enemies. It can be buried too deeply or not deeply enough in the soil. Wind can blow it away. The soil can be stony or filled with thistle seed. Many farmers face what

seems an impossible task to produce a harvest. The fact remains that good seed will always produce if it is given right conditions.



The greatest enemy of the seed of godlikeness in man is Satan. He is the enemy of any likeness or reflection of God in the world. He designed the temptation which caused man to fall from his original purpose. He directs a world strategy which attempts to keep unsaved men from the gospel. He plans further to keep the Christian from growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ—the goal of Christian maturity.

Application

18 Jesus told a story in Luke 8:4–15 which relates to seed and growth. Please see how many things you can find in this passage which prevented seed from growing.

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Do you think any of the things mentioned in our answer to the preceding question are symbols of things or situations that are keeping you from spiritual growth?

Application

19 God has provided us with a number of resources that will help make our lives dynamic. These resources may be described as gifts, talents, opportunities, etc. Please evaluate yourself as to how well you are using the following resources to help you grow spiritually (see illustration):

RESOURCE	MUCH	SOME	NONE
STUDY OF GOD'S WORD			
PRAYER			
ATTENDING WORSHIP SERVICES			
FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS			
YOUR INBORN DESIRE FOR GROWTH			
YOUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD			



Do not read further until you have completed the above personal evaluation exercise. Now, pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to mature through diligent use of these resources for spiritual growth.

To truly glorify the Father in our spiritual life, we must accept the goal of true Christian maturity in our lives. We must decide to reach this goal with the strength and determination of a team attempting to score against their opponent. We cannot accept second best.

Application

20 An important verse for us is 2 Peter 3:18. Read this Scripture then fill in the missing words. But grow in the and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be both now and forever! Amen.



Let us desire the full Christian maturity which can be ours through the grace of God. And may this Christian service course enable us to help others grow in the likeness of Christ.

self-test

After you have reviewed this lesson, take the self-test. Then check your answers with those given in the back of the textbook. Review any questions answered incorrectly.

TRUE-FALSE. Write **T** in the blank space before each true statement. Write **F** if the statement is false.

- **1** Creation was complete even without the creation of man.
- **2** Man can never be restored to Godlikeness.
- **3** Man's purpose cannot be truly fulfilled without a proper relationship with God.
- **4** The Christian experience is a guarantee that life will be dynamic.
- **5** A requirement for being born again is to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in a person's life.

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Circle the letter of the correct answer or answers.

- 6** Indicate the proper understanding of the word *perfect* or *mature* in the Scriptures. (More than one may be correct.)
- a) Full grown
 - b) Sinless
 - c) Complete
 - d) Whole
 - e) Finished
 - f) Childish
- 7** The area of man's nature which demands a purpose or reason for being is his
- a) soul.
 - b) body.
 - c) spirit.
- 8** The purpose of Jesus Christ's coming into our world can best be stated by which two of the following expressions?
- a) That man might be condemned
 - b) As a model of a correct God-man relationship
 - c) That man might be brought into abundant life
 - d) To form an important new religion

SHORT ANSWER. Fill in the blank, providing the proper answer to each question.

9 The greatest enemy of the seed of Godlikeness in man is:

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10 Name at least two of the types of soil that Jesus described in Luke 8 which represent how men receive the gospel.

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answers to study questions

- 1 Fear God and obey His commandments.
- 11 Because men in darkness reject the light
- 2 To restore fellowship between God and man
- 12 a) See example.
b) Confess Jesus as Lord and believe in His resurrection.
c) Receive Christ and believe in Him.
- 3 Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers
- 13 The truth in 1 John 4:14–16 in your own words.
- 4 Christlikeness
- 14 The living and eternal Word of God
- 5 c) Whole or complete
- 15 Plenty of seed and a rich harvest
- 6 That person's own spirit
- 16 A definition of Christian maturity in your own words
- 7 By joining himself to our spirit
- 17 c) Christ's full stature
- 8 By using his pity in an unselfish manner to help someone in need
- 18 The seed fell along the path, was stepped on, was eaten by birds, fell on rocky ground with no moisture, and among choking thorns.
- 9 c) we might have life in all its fullness.
- 19 Your own evaluation of yourself
- 10 a) Because Christ bought us for a price
b) Because the price Christ paid for us was the costly sacrifice of His own life
c) Because God chose us to be His through Christ
- 20 grace, knowledge, glory

