

LESSON 3 Further Illustrations of Growth

The primary illustration of Christian maturity in the Bible is Jesus Christ. He is our elder brother. He took the form of a servant, and obeyed the Father perfectly. He humbled himself through death on the Cross. Christians are to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. This is the goal of Christian maturity. The believer lives to do the will of Jesus Christ. This is revealed by God's Word and the Holy Spirit. The "likeness of Jesus Christ" applies to the physical, mental, and social parts of our lives as well as to the spiritual part.

But the Bible illustrates our Christian growth in other ways too. In this lesson, we will study several other illustrations. These will include the family, farming, and building. Our purpose is to see the concept of Christian maturity as clearly as possible.

Perhaps you have seen a great hill or mountain. From a distance, it looks rather close. You think you can reach it in a short time. As you approach it, the distance seems much greater. We sometimes call this perspective or point of view. We are trying to see our subject from several perspectives—several approaches. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you the right perspective.

lesson outline

We Grow Up in a Family

Starting As a Baby

Changing Our Diet

Accepting Different Roles

We Are Like a Valuable Farm

Belonging to God

Carrying Out Responsibility

We Are a Building of God

Foundation and Building

How to Build God's Building

lesson objectives

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

- State how a new Christian can grow from a spiritual baby toward Christian maturity.
- Explain how a Christian can gain understanding of more advanced spiritual truth.
- List three things included in the process of our growing up spiritually.
- Explain how Ephesians 3:17–18 indicates that we belong to God.
- Describe the responsibility to God's field that we must carry out in order to reap God's harvest of blessing.
- Use 1 Corinthians 3:12 to explain the operation of man's free will in the choice of materials for God's spiritual building.

learning activities

1. Check the glossary at the end of your study textbook for definitions to any key words you do not understand.
2. If a concept seems difficult, read the section twice or more. Underline or mark important parts of the lesson development.
3. Work carefully through the study questions, writing your answers in pencil *before* checking the correct responses.
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to make these examples of growing up very real to you.

5. Take the self-test at the end of this lesson, and check your answers carefully.

key words

architect

artisan

brokenness

childish

conformed

conviction

cultivate

repentance

responsibility

viewpoint

lesson development

WE GROW UP IN A FAMILY

Every human life is a product of parents. The human infant is born with a great need for care, and it is the responsibility of parents to provide that care.

Starting As a Baby

Objective 1. *State how a new Christian can grow from a spiritual baby toward Christian maturity.*

Have you noticed an infant recently? Think of the various things which must be done for the child to keep it alive and healthy. Parents gladly provide for the infant, knowing it will eventually mature. A new Christian has been “born again” (John 3:3). Scripture refers to him as a *baby*. He needs spiritual food in order to grow from spiritual infancy into spiritual maturity.

Application

1 Read John 3:3–6. What is the source of our spiritual birth?

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Notice in John 3:6 that John contrasts physical birth with spiritual birth.

When you thought about an infant a moment ago, you may have remembered hearing it cry when hungry. God’s Word describes this reaction in the new Christian.

Application

2 According to 1 Peter 2:2, what can we expect of a born-again person?

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Changing Our Diet

Objective 2. *Explain how a Christian can gain understanding of more advanced spiritual truth.*

It is clear in the Scripture that the believer is neither to remain a spiritual baby, nor to continue to use spiritual milk. Let us examine several Scriptures which we shall develop later.

Application

- 3 Look first at 1 Corinthians 3:1–3. Please circle the letter before the correct answer. This passage indicates
- a) mature Christians no longer need spiritual milk.
 - b) mature Christians continue to need spiritual milk.
 - c) nothing definite concerning mature Christians and spiritual milk.
- 4 Now read aloud an important message in Hebrews 5:11–14. Here again the Christians are still using “milk” and not “solid food.” Verse 13 indicates that a milk-drinking Christian is
- a) experienced in the matter of right.
 - b) still a child.
 - c) experienced in the matter of wrong.
- 5 What does Hebrews 5:14 imply mature Christians can do which milk-drinking Christians cannot do?
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Perhaps you are asking, “What is the difference between spiritual milk and spiritual solid food?” Milk comes from a body which has eaten solid food. Milk has gone through the digestive system of another: the mother, for example. Milk to a Christian is primary spiritual truth rather than more advanced spiritual truth. Understanding of more advanced truth comes through practical application of already known primary truth (see 1 John 1:6–7).

Application

- 6 Turn to 1 Corinthians 14:20. The apostle commends a childlike attitude toward evil. But he urges the believers to not be like..... in their

7 Again in 1 Corinthians 13:11 we are urged to grow up. In what three ways does a child reveal himself according to this verse?

.....

Paul continues in this verse by saying, “When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” Do you remember when you put away play things or clothes you used as a child? It was not always easy. Growing up *can be painful*.

Accepting Different Roles

Objective 3. *List three things included in the process of our growing up spiritually.*

God’s concern for the believer to achieve full spiritual stature is found in many places in the Bible. God is concerned that the believer knows His full purpose for His children. The apostles shared God’s yearning father’s heart. Paul and John particularly sought to move the believer through childhood into adulthood.

Do you remember the changes of your duties as you became older? Are you now a mother or father yourself? If so, your view of life certainly differs from that of a child or youth. The apostle John writes from the position of a spiritual father in 1 John 2:12–13.

Application

8 Read 1 John 2:12–13 carefully. Select the three stages John refers to from the following list. Circle the letter before each correct answer.

- a) Babies
 - b) Children
 - c) Old men
 - d) Young men
 - e) Boys
 - f) Fathers
-

You can see in 1 John 2:12–13 that the situations are different at each of the three levels of maturity. The children *receive* forgiveness for their sins; the young men *do* notable deeds in their victory over evil, and the fathers *know* God better than the others. The children are portrayed as the *most dependent*, the young men as the *most active*, and the fathers as the *most mature*. Fathers have fullest understanding of God and His purposes.

You have noticed that three levels of growth in God’s family are represented in this passage. Three things included in the process of growing up spiritually are *reaching higher levels of knowledge*, *accepting more responsibility*, and *performing more significant duties*. As we have seen, *growing* means “leaving,” leaving childish things to gain greater stature.

WE ARE LIKE A VALUABLE FARM

Some farmland is much more valuable than other land. Good land with rich soil and well-watered plains is precious. The farmer’s very life is built around his land. He clears and plows, plants and cultivates, waters and waits. The harvest is his reward. He has worked hard for long hours. He deserves the joy of a good harvest. How sad when his efforts are in vain and the land or climate robs him of his due reward.

Belonging to God

Objective 4. *Explain how Ephesians 3:17–18 indicates that we belong to God.*

The Bible often refers to God’s people as being the Lord’s vineyard or field (Isaiah 5:1–7; Jeremiah 12:10). God has chosen us and we are His field. He has carefully planted His seed in the soil of our lives. He expects and deserves a harvest. He awaits our maturity as anxiously as the farmer awaits the harvest of his crops.

Application

- 9 Read 1 Corinthians 3:9. According to this verse, believers are God's field. Now read verses 5–8. Notice the phrases “planted the seed,” “watered it,” and “made it grow.” According to these verses, who makes the plant grow? Circle the letter of the correct answer.
- a) Apollos
 - b) God
 - c) Man
 - d) Partners
-

NOTE: *Although God has the power to develop spiritual growth in us, He requires our cooperation with Him in developing it.*

Ephesians 3:17–18 is a prayer by the apostle Paul that the believers may have their *roots* in love, so that they together with all God's people, may have the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, is Christ's love. To have our *roots in God's love* denotes that we belong to God and continues the analogy between believers and a valuable farm. God's love, like rich soil, will help growth. In this passage Paul is praying for what God awaits in us: Christian maturity.

Carrying Out Responsibility

Objective 5. *Describe the responsibility to God's field that we must carry out in order to reap God's harvest of blessing.*

The believer is sometimes pictured as the keeper of the field of God. He has responsibility as a workman in God's field. You remember reading in 1 Corinthians 3 that Paul sowed seed, Apollos watered, and so forth.

Application

- 10 In Jeremiah 4:3, what is God telling His people to do that refers in a literal sense to farming?
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The answer to the preceding question means we can make the spiritual soil of our lives ready to receive God’s seed. Perhaps you ask, “How can I plow the soil of my life?” Plowing breaks up soil to eliminate its hard crust. Then both seed and moisture can enter the soil and cause growth. Brokenness in the believer’s life is a result of responding in humility to God’s conviction. Such response keeps the soil of one’s heart open. The Holy Spirit will faithfully tell or show (convict) our spirit when something is wrong.



Can you remember a recent time in your life when the Holy Spirit convicted you? Perhaps it was because of something you said. Or maybe you were angry or bitter toward a fellow believer. How did you respond? Did you excuse yourself? Did you resist the conviction? An attitude of brokenness in true humility responds with repentance to God’s conviction.

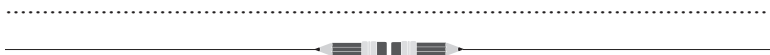
Repentance means “to turn away from.” An illustration of brokenness and repentance in response to God’s conviction is found in the following prayer:

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for showing me this sin. I am genuinely sorry for this wrong. I repent and turn from this. Thank You that I am forgiven through Jesus’ sacrifice. Praise You, Father.

Through my brokenness and repentance, the soil of my life is kept open and permits spiritual growth.

Application

11 Read another verse concerning this matter: Hosea 10:12. This is a wonderful command from God to His people. According to this verse, what are the people to plant and reap?



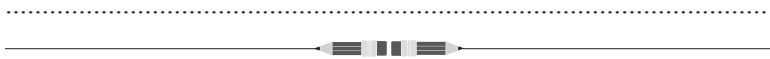
Our responsibility to God's field is to plow and plant in devotion to the Lord. When we carry out these responsibilities, we are blessed with God's abundant harvest.

WE ARE A BUILDING OF GOD

Perhaps near where you live is a grand building. Does it stand above all others in size? Is it made of more beautiful materials? No doubt it was built with the skill and care of dedicated workmen. Its perfection shows it was built to an exact design. People like to look at it. Other buildings are built more quickly, with less skill, and contain less costly materials. They are less durable. Anyone can tell the difference.

Application

12 Quote the part of 1 Corinthians 3:9 that relates most closely to this section of the lesson.



Foundation and Building

Objective 6. *Use 1 Corinthians 3:12 to explain the operation of man's free will in the choice of materials for God's spiritual building.*

In 1 Corinthians 3:9–12, Paul places special emphasis on three things:

1. God's building.
2. Foundation for God's building.
3. Materials in God's building.

Notice the specific difference between the composition of the foundation for this building and the composition of the building upon that foundation.

Application

13 Who is the foundation for this building (verse 11)?

.....
14 What are the six building materials listed in this passage (verse 12)?

- a
- b
- c
- d
- e
- f



We saw above that we are both God’s field and the keepers of His field. Now we understand we are both His building and His builders. It is significant that man can exercise his free will in choosing materials he uses in building God’s building. In one sense, the great building we are working on is the church (the body of Jesus Christ in the world—not a physical building). In another sense, our bodies are like a church.

Application

- 15 In 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, our body is compared to
- a) a growing field of grain.
 - b) a tall, fruit-bearing tree.
 - c) a pearl of great price.
 - d) the temple of the Holy Spirit.
-

How to Build God's Building

Read 1 Corinthians 3:13–17, and answer the following questions.

Application

16 What about man's work on God's building will be judged?

- a) The amount
- b) The quality
- c) The beauty

17 In the Day of Christ, every man's work will be exposed and revealed by

If what was built on the foundation survives the fire, the builder will receive a



Every day, I must choose how and what to build. The foundation cannot be changed. It is Jesus Christ our Lord. The Father has a wonderful plan for what my personal *Christian building* should be like. He tells me in His Word of the right attitudes, habits, words, and character. He designed what a Christian should be like. When I build to His specifications (the specific orders on *His* plan), the *building of* my life will be beautiful and durable. It will be like the grand building we talked about. If I neglect God's plan and choose materials that do not please Him (wood, grass, or straw), my building will not survive fire and I will never become a mature Christian.

Perhaps you would like to pray this prayer with me:

Father, Your plan is best. The materials You choose are best. I want the building of my life to be made to your standard. I want to be conformed to your Son Jesus Christ in my body, mind, and spirit. Amen.

self-test

SHORT ANSWER. Write the answer to the question on the lines provided.

1 At what point should a believer no longer need the *milk* of God's Word?

.....
.....
.....

2 MATCHING. Match the Scripture to the basic ideas brought out in this lesson by writing the correct number in each blank space. (The first answer is provided.)

- 1) "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13).
- 2) "I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning" (1 John 2:13).
- 3) "Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns" (Jeremiah 4:3).
- 4) "Each one should be careful how he builds ... If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is" (1 Corinthians 3:10, 12-13).

- a A fuller level of maturity is to have a fuller knowledge of God and His purpose.
- b Believers choose the material they use to build their lives upon the foundation of Christ.
- c The soil of our lives can be kept open by responding in humility to God's conviction.
- d An understanding of more advanced spiritual truth must be added to our knowledge of primary truth in order to understand more difficult problems.

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Circle the correct letters before the correct choices to each question.

3 In this lesson, the believer is compared to several things by way of illustration. Select the five correct illustrations.

- a) A tree
- b) A baby
- c) God's field
- d) A ship
- e) An island
- f) Soil
- g) An old man
- h) God's building
- i) A road
- j) The temple of the Holy Spirit

4 Select the three building materials which represent qualities that will last at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

- a) Gold
- b) Hay
- c) Straw
- d) Wood
- e) Silver
- f) Costly stones

answers to the study questions

- 1 The Spirit of God
- 10 To plow up their unplowed fields
- 2 Thirst for pure spiritual milk
- 11 They are to plant righteousness and reap unending love or blessings.
- 3 a) that mature Christians no longer need spiritual milk.
- 12 “You are . . . God’s building.”
- 4 b) still a child.
- 13 Jesus Christ
- 5 Distinguish between good and evil
- 14 a) Gold
b) Silver
c) Costly stones
d) Wood
e) Hay
f) Straw
- 6 children, thinking.
- 15 d) the temple of the Holy Spirit
- 7 In speech, thinking, and behavior
- 16 b) The quality
- 8 b) Children
d) Young men
f) Fathers
- 17 fire, reward.
- 9 b) God

