

Part 3

# Growing in your Faith

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Spending Time With God  
Spending Time With Other Christians  
Spending Time Giving

Christianity is a lifestyle...not just a decision we make at some point in our life. Because it's a way of life, it is normal to grow and mature in your faith. In the same way it would be strange for an infant to stay at that maturity level for five years, it is abnormal for a Christian to stay in the same place spiritually for a length of time. While we may need to learn what to do to help us grow, growing comes naturally over time if we discipline ourselves to do what it takes. This section will cover what we need to do in order to mature into a healthy, balanced Christian.

## Spending Time With God

This is the most basic thing we need to do in order to grow. Just as we discussed earlier, we were created to have fellowship with God – He died so we could be in a relationship with Him, not just to make us good. This relationship is the goal of Christianity and where the true joy in being a Christian is found, so if we neglect it, we're missing the whole point.

We can relate to God just as we would a close friend. While this may be a hard concept to grasp at first, in time you will experience what it means to have God as your friend. Jesus made His time with God a priority (read the stories in Mark 1.25, Luke 22.39, and Luke 5.16) and set the example for how we are to relate to our heavenly Father.

There are many reasons to discipline ourselves to spend time with God. Here are some of the things that happen when we are close to Him:

- we can more easily find out what God wants for our lives
- we can refocus and get our mind off the world and worries around us
- we find it easier to worship Him
- we naturally become more like Him
- and most importantly, the more time I spend with God, the more I will love Him!

Here are the main ways I can spend time with God:

### Reading the Bible

The Bible is God's letter to us: in it we will find what God wants to communicate to us directly. Reading it requires some time and discipline, but this is a small payment for all that we will get out of it!

#### How to Read Your Bible

- If you've never read your Bible before, talk to someone who has so that they can help you find a good place to get started – unlike other books, you may not want to start at the beginning!
- Find a translation you like. Translations vary in their difficulty and trueness to the original text. Paraphrases (like The Message) are easier to read but are less true to the original (not word-for-word translations), while more literal translations (like the NASB) are very true to the original, but are more difficult to read. The NIV is a good balance of the two.
- Have someone keep you accountable. Find another Christian who will help encourage you to keep reading and perhaps consider meeting regularly so you both can share what God's been teaching you through your reading.
- Read daily. When you make a habit of reading, it will be easier to do it regularly.
- Apply what you read. When a passage stands out to you, that's God speaking to you! Think about how it applies to your life and what you will do or change as a result of what you read. See James 1.22,25.
- Be ready and eager to read. Come to this time expecting to learn and listen to God. Don't let busyness, pride, or a bad attitude get in the way.
- Don't try to understand everything. Write down questions you have and don't get bogged down trying to figure it all out.
- Find one "nugget" a day. Write down one thing God showed you in your reading everyday.
- Confess sin - sin will make it hard to listen to and spend time with God reading another in a different book the next), your reading can become directionless and unmotivated, plus you may not get the overall picture of what God is communicating in His Word
- If you miss a day (or more) don't feel guilty. Just get back on track! Guilt will just keep you from your reading even longer.

#### ▫ Bible Reading Tips

Everyone is different in what helps them to read their Bible effectively, but these ideas may help you:

- Set a specific time to read everyday. Find a place and time when you can focus and have minimal distractions.
- Set a specific amount to read everyday. The goal can be in time or chapters, but be sure to focus on quality not quantity.
- Take notes. Keep a spiritual journal or notebook, so you can write down what you're learning or questions you have as you read. This will help you focus on what you're reading.
- Read systematically. If we jump around too much, our reading can become directionless and unmotivated and we don't get the overall view of what is being said because we will tend to read out of context. Set some goals or decide on a reading plan (short-term or long-term)
- Be armed to resist excuses! Reading the Bible daily requires discipline and excuses will come. Think about some excuses you could see yourself making and decide now how you will handle them.
- Switch translations from time to time just to keep God's Word fresh for you.

## When Reading Your Bible is Difficult...

Sometimes reading gets difficult and feels pointless. Here are some possible causes and solutions:

- 1 Physical condition – being tired or sick. This may or may not be preventable. If it is, do something about it: go to bed earlier, read at a better time in the day, or cut back on your activities.
- 1 Sin. Sin makes it hard for God to talk to you, so if you're living in a way that's not pleasing to Him, deal with it. Confess your sin and make things right.
- 1 Rushing your time with God. He can't say what He wants to say, when you don't have time to listen. Slow down!
- 1 Getting in a rut. Find ways to spice up your time with God: read a different translation, in a different spot (ignore your reading plan!), at a different time or place, add a devotional – do whatever it takes to make your time with God new and interesting.
- 1 Not sharing what God is teaching you. When we don't share with others what God is doing, it can discourage us and get us bored – find some friends to share with from time to time.

Sometimes none of these solutions will be of help to you. If that is the case, remain disciplined and read even if you don't feel like it. God is faithful and, if you are seeking Him, will not let your time in His Word be like this for the rest of your life!

## Prayer

Prayer isn't just us talking to God. It's us conversing with God, which means that it's a way that He can talk to us. Prayer can be a difficult habit for many people to form, but once you learn to pray regularly, it will add so much to your relationship with God!

### Why Pray?

Prayer is more than just a way for us to express our needs and feelings to God. It also helps us be in tune with God and know His heart. When this happens, we can make more godly decisions, realize truths about difficult situations that we might not have understood before, and we can see how our life fits into the overall picture. Prayer is a great way to deal with stressful situations, not only because God can help us with them, but more importantly, prayer can give us a fresh, godly perspective about life – what may have seemed like a major crisis can quickly become less important.

## Worship

The idea of worship is partially covered by prayer, but because it is so important, we want to talk about it separately. Worshipping God can take place on our own, or with other believers – both are important. While worshipping God publicly with a praise band can be easy and fun, it won't be as good if we haven't been worshipping God privately on our own.

### Why Worship?

Worship is a decision and action, not a feeling. We need to discipline ourselves to worship even when we don't feel like it. We need to worship for many different reasons. Here are a few:

- 1 God deserves our worship, so we should give it to Him.
- 1 Worship helps us focus on God, not ourselves. Sometimes we need to stop thinking about ourselves so much, and need to focus on God so we put things in perspective.
- 1 Worship also humbles us because we see how great God is in comparison to us.
- 1 Worship reminds us of the truth of who God is. The enemy often tries to lie to us about who God is so that we lose faith in Him. When we accept these lies we're fearful, when we reject these lies, we become confident in Him.

### u Prayer Tips

- 1 Just talk to God! He's your friend, so tell Him about your joys and fears just like you would any other friend. Remember, prayer isn't a way we "impress" God, so don't worry about how you say things – just be honest with Him about what's going on.
- 1 Make a prayer list. Don't rely on this list, but use it as a guide when you're not sure what to pray about. Be sure to go back to see what God has answered!
- 1 Pray out loud or walk as you pray. Some people find it hard to focus when they're sitting down and praying quietly. Do what it takes to be focused.
- 1 Set a specific amount of time to pray. Sometimes we need to discipline ourselves to pray even when we don't feel like it. Set a minimal amount of time to begin with and let it grow.
- 1 Don't spend all your time asking. God wants to know your needs and desires, but He also wants to hear you worship Him, thank Him, confess your sin, and just spend time with Him, seeking His heart.
- 1 Look over the quiet time and prayer guides in your Growth Packet for additional ideas.
- 1 Read Prayer by O. Hallesby. It has amazing insights into strengthening our prayer life.

### u Worship Tips

- 1 Sing some of your favorite worship songs at home with God as your only audience.
- 1 Make list of God's qualities or who He is and praise Him for that. It is especially beneficial if you can find verses in your Bible that support these qualities.
- 1 Make a list of things you are thankful for and thank Him.
- 1 Buy (and listen to) worship tapes or CDs.
- 1 Read 31 Days of Praise by Ruth Myers. It will help you cultivate a lifestyle of worship.

# Spending Time With Other Christians

In the same way that we need to spend time with God in order to grow, we need to spend time with other Christians. By spending time with other Christians, we become encouraged in our faith and realize that we're not alone - whether we're facing struggles or experiencing joys. We also need other Christians around us to "keep us in line" and help us see where we need to grow and what behavior or ideas we have that might be damaging to our faith.

## Fellowship

Fellowship is spending time with other Christians, not just in social interaction, but spiritual interaction. Whether it's through a close friendship, church, small groups, or whatever else, we all need to be close to other Christians who will encourage us in the faith and help keep us accountable.

### Why Engage in Fellowship?

- 1 We're instructed to. Hebrews 10.25 tells us to assemble with other believers.
- 1 We are all a part of God's family - we are the body of Christ. Romans 12.5 and Ephesians 2.19 talk about how we all need each other in order to function properly.
- 1 We all need encouragement, especially during difficult times in our walk. Read Hebrews 10.24.
- 1 Fellowship provides accountability. When we decide to live the Christian life on our own, we easily open the door to doing things we shouldn't do, or entertaining ideas that can hurt us spiritually. Good Christian friends will warn us when they see these things, but if we don't have these friends, we won't hear the warning.
- 1 To get away from the negative influence of the world. Spending time with other believers help us refocus. Our friends will affect you, whether positively or negatively. Choosing to spend time with Christians and limiting time with friends that distract us or are negative influences is a sign that God is working in us and that we are willing to surrender. The Bible tells us it's not bad to break off bad friendships, even though it may be difficult and we might feel mean or disloyal.
- 1 We need the opportunity to share struggles and joys. We need friends, and Christian friends are more likely to identify with the spiritual struggles and joys we experience.

## Teaching

We need to get teaching from other Christians to remind us of truth and stimulate our thinking, which will help us grow in our faith. As growing Christians, we need instruction from those who are more mature in their faith, and we need to hear other perspectives and thoughts. If we just focus on what we think, we can run into some risks, like:

- 1 not thinking or learning anything new, so that we are not challenged to grow
- 1 not seeing faults in our life or in our thinking
- 1 becoming overly absorbed in our own way of thinking so that we only feed off it and don't grow

### 1 Teaching Tips

There are many different ways to get teaching, and especially with all that we have access to through technology, we have little excuse for missing out on it:

- 1 attending church or church-related events where teaching takes place
- 1 listening to sermons or teaching online (many churches and Christian organizations feature online teaching)
- 1 reading books
- 1 attending seminars or special events where speakers are featured
- 1 listening to teaching tapes

# Spending Time Giving

If we are participating in the previously mentioned activities we need in order to grow, we will be getting a lot of spiritual food! But we also need spiritual exercise. If all we do is take in everything, we will get spiritually fat – we need to give in order to balance it out. When we don't give of ourselves, our faith will become stagnant because we will not be using what we're learning and experiencing. Not only do we need to give for our own sake, we need to give for others' sake. God gives us so much love when we relate with Him, that we need to let that love overflow from our life into the lives of others. There are two main ways we can give of ourselves:

## Ministry

The term “ministry” can seem intimidating to many people because we tend to think of pastors, missionaries, or people who work in the church. But don't worry – you don't always have to give up your career goals in order to minister! Ministry is simply reaching out to others and giving of yourself. It can be something we do through our church on a regular basis, or something we do personally from time to time.

### Why Minister to Others?

God designed the church, the body of Christ, to work like a human body (read 1 Peter 4.10 and 1 Corinthians 12.5, 27). Just like your body needs all its limbs and organs to do their part in order to function normally, a church needs all its members to do their part to function normally. When we all do our part to make things work, we not only meet our needs, but also the needs of those around us. When we aren't doing our part, the body suffers.

Perhaps more importantly for our own growth, ministry helps us experience God and know Him more fully. When God asks us to love and reach out to others, we often have to rely on His strength. We get to know God more as we obey Him and He provides us with what we need so that we CAN obey Him. Ministry is truly a life-changing part of our walk, as we see God work in lives around us, as we see Him using us in His work, and as we experience His love and grace when we otherwise wouldn't.

## Giving Resources

When we think of giving resources, we mostly think of our money. But we often have many other resources we can give or allow others to use that will benefit the body of Christ, like our time, our possessions, our home, our talents...anything we have that God can use for His work and glory.

### Why Give?

There are many reasons to give of our resources:

- 1 Giving keeps us from being materialistic. Read 1 Timothy 6.17-19.
- 1 Giving strengthens our faith because it teaches us to rely on God, not ourselves and what we have. We can experience how God will provide all our needs.
- 1 Giving blesses us! Read Malachi 3.10. While this shouldn't be a motivation for giving, it certainly is a benefit!
- 1 Giving makes me more like God. In the same way that God gave His Son on the cross for us, we can sacrificially give our resources for others.
- 1 Giving shows we love God more than anything else. Read 2 Corinthians 8.7-8.
- 1 Giving helps us recognize that God gave us all we have – we're just stewards of it.

### How do I give?

- 1 We are to give God the best and first part, not our “leftovers.” Read Proverbs 3.9-10.
- 1 We are to give willingly and cheerfully. Read 1 Corinthians 9.12 and 2 Corinthians 9.7.
- 1 We are to give sacrificially and what God has placed on our heart to give. Read 1 Corinthians 9.7 and 2 Corinthians 8.3-4. There are no rules about what we are supposed to give, so we each need to find out what God wants us to give.

### u Ministry Tips

We can minister to others in many different ways – it can be through an existing church or ministry or it can be through your own personal way of sharing God's love:

- 1 talking to and reaching out to people who need friends or are hurting
- 1 showing God's love (being friendly) to those who have no friends
- 1 helping out leaders in ministry or helping with church ministries like youth group, children's ministries, music, etc.
- 1 teaching or leading Christian groups like Bible studies, prayer groups, etc.
- 1 doing “grunt work” like setting up, cleaning, or errand running for a ministry
- 1 spending time with those who are less mature in their faith with the object of helping them grow, or influencing them positively
- 1 going out of your way to encourage or be kind to someone
- 1 any other way we can serve others and the body of Christ – the opportunities are endless!

### u Giving Tips

- 1 read The Treasure Principle by Randy Alcom.