Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Keys to Spiritual Growth: Introduction
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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We have the privilege of beginning in this session a study of spiritual growth as it's indicated in the Word of God. And frankly I don't believe there's anything more important for the believer than them growing spiritually. Let me just share with you, to begin with, two very important scriptures that help us to see this in perspective. In 2 Peter 3:18 - this is the last verse in the Second Epistle of Peter - it says this. "But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen." The summation of what Peter has to say in this great epistle is that we grow in grace. Backing up to nearly the beginning of his first epistle, 2:2 he said this, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that ye may grow by it."

Now Peter, then, in a sense, begins and ends his very practical epistles with an injunction to us to grow. Spiritual growth is basic to the life of a believer just as physical growth is basic to the life of a physical person. And God commands us to grow. There's really nothing more tragic than a stunted believer, than a Christian who has passed a long time in his spiritual experience without coming into maturity. And we've all seen children who are retarded in some way in their growth pattern. And really it's a sad tragedy when we see someone who has lived a long time but never really grown physically, or mentally, or emotionally, or socially.

And in a much more serious way, we often come across people who have named the name of Christ for many years but never grown spiritually. And so in our study together in these sessions we want to examine this theme of spiritual growth, or how you grow in grace, what it means to mature as a believer.

Now at the very beginning let me share with you some concepts that will help us as a start. First of all, spiritual growth has nothing to do with our position in Christ. Now by that I mean you don't grow into becoming a Christian. Becoming a Christian is an instant miracle. The new birth is a sudden thing that occurs in your life when you are placed by God into the body of Christ at the moment of faith in Him. It's not a process. It's a marvelous miracle that happens in a moment. Now there may be a process involved in being exposed to the gospel, but the actual point of salvation is a miraculous moment when you pass from death into life, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His dear Son, says the apostle Paul.

So spiritual growth is not a question of your position in Christ. You are placed in Christ at the moment of your faith. And at that point, says Paul to the Corinthians, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new

creation." You immediately become a new creation. Paul says to the Colossians in 2:10, that "you are complete in him" positionally. Peter also says that when you become a believer, you have "all things that pertain to life and godliness," 2 Peter 1:3.

So when you become a believer, you are placed into Christ, Christ comes to live in you, you receive all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, you have all things that pertain to life and godliness, and you are complete in Him. Positionally, everything is taken care of. So spiritual growth is not a matter of your position in Christ.

Secondly, spiritual growth is not a matter of God's favor or God's love. Sometimes you'll hear a parent say, "Well, if you do this I'll love you." God never would say that. God loves us no matter what we do. According to Romans chapter 5, God loved us when we were sinners, when we were enemies, and when we were alienated from Him, before we ever came to Christ. And when you become a believer, God still loves you infinitely, for there are no measurements, there are no grades, there are no gradual ascents, as it is, in the love of God. God loves all people totally and equally, even the unsaved, amazing as it may seem. So that when you become a believer God loves you totally as one of His family. It's not a question of gaining more of God's love. You don't grow into being in God's favor. That is a momentary thing that occurs at salvation.

Thirdly, spiritual growth has nothing to do with time. We said, first of all, it's not a matter of position in Christ; secondly, it's not a matter of being loved by God; and thirdly, it isn't a matter of time. There are people who have been saved a long period of time and grown very little. There are people who have been saved a brief period of time and grown very much. Now certainly, time should be a factor insofar as growth is concerned, for if we continue to grow over a long period of time, we will be more mature than one who has a shorter period of time. But it isn't the time itself, it is the commitment to the principles of growth that makes the difference. We don't measure spiritual maturity by the calendar.

Fourthly, spiritual growth is not a matter of knowledge only. I think sometimes we equate spiritual maturity with what we know, but that isn't really the key. Because, knowledge alone is not the issue. It's what you do with what you know. In fact, the Bible says knowledge has a tendency to puff up. And pride is a state. And when a believer gets into that kind of a state, spiritual growth is immediately retarded. Having a knowledge of facts cannot be equated with spiritual maturity. Only when those facts conform us to the image of Christ does our knowledge relate to our growth.

And then another thing to consider, spiritual growth has nothing to do with activity. Some people think that if they've been in the church, and been very active in the church, and very aggressive, and they've been on a committee, or a board, or sung in the choir, or whatever, that at that point they're going to be sure they've grown spiritually. After all, they've hung around the church for eons, and some of it's bound to rub off by osmosis. And if you're busy enough, you must be spiritual.

Listen, nobody was busier in religion than the Pharisees and no one was further from the truth. In Matthew 7, Jesus said, “Many shall say unto me in that day, ‘Lord, we’ve done many wonderful works.’ And I’ll say to them, ‘Depart from me, I never knew you.’ ” Listen, busyness doesn’t even qualify you for salvation, let alone spiritual growth.

And then a final introductory thought. Spiritual growth has nothing to do with prosperity. It’s been interesting to me to find out that many people equate their economic situation with the favor of God. If they have a lot, they think God has blessed them because they’re such wonderful Christians. Well, God may have blessed you, but that is not necessarily any indication that you’re spiritually mature. So don’t equate your positive circumstances with the stamp of God’s approval on your spiritual maturity.

Now if spiritual growth is not these things, not a matter of your position in Christ, not a matter of God’s loving you, not a matter of time, not a matter of knowledge, not a matter of activity, and not a matter of prosperity, just what is spiritual growth? Let me give it to you in a very simple definition which we’ll expand as we move through our study.

Spiritual growth is not a mystical, sentimental, devotional, psychological thing. It is not a result of some clever secret or some formula that can be applied easily to life and guarantee the future. Spiritual growth can be best summed up in this simple statement. It is matching my practice with my position. My position in Christ is perfect. I am complete in Him. I have all things that pertain to life and godliness. I have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. Now what I want to do is progress in my practical life to live in a way that is commensurate with my position.

I remember when I heard Bobby Richardson one time say that when he put on the Yankee baseball uniform he played about 50 percent better than he ever had in his life. There was something about being a Yankee that drew the best out of him. I can remember football coaches saying to me, “MacArthur, one thing we want you to do is play your position. Don’t get out of position.” And the same thing is true in a spiritual sense. You have a definition of who you are by virtue of Christ dwelling in you. And what God is saying is live up to that standard. Become in practice what you are in position.

Now very simply stated, I want you to understand this principle. There is a master key to really understanding and experiencing spiritual growth. There is one master key that unlocks the whole thing. And really in 2 Peter 3:18 it was subtly introduced to us, because it says there, “But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” And then it says this, “To him *be* glory both now and forever. Amen.”

Now it’s interesting to me that growing in grace is equaled with giving God glory. Now that is a very important comprehension. I want you to understand that. This whole idea of growing in grace is

related to glorifying God. And frankly, folks, if you get that point, you're well on your way to understanding this process of maturity. The master key to all spiritual growth is understanding what it means to glorify God. Now that's the key.

Now let me show you this, just in a very broad sweep of history in our session this time. First of all, keep in mind that the greatest theme in all of the universe is the glory of God. Glorifying God is the locus crucis [???], it's the sine qua non [???], it's the hierpunkt [???], if you want to know in German. It is the high point. It is the apex of God's revelation. The concept of glorifying God is the reason that we exist.

The old catechism, the 17th century Puritan catechism said, "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." That's right. In fact that's not only the chief end of man, that's the chief end of everything. Take for example the macrocosm, the universe. Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God." And so the vastness of space is set there to glorify God.

You move into Isaiah 43:20 and you hear Isaiah say, "The beast of the field shall give me - " glory, or " - honor." And so you have the macrocosm, the vastness of the universe glorifying God, and you have a simple beast of the field glorifying God. So that the created universe - now that would be mineral, if you will - and the beast, animal, and every other thing that's made is to give Him glory. In Luke chapter 2, you have the angels who appear at the birth of Christ, and what do they say? "Glory to God in the highest." So that all of the created universe is set to give God glory.

In fact, when everything is resolved in history, and you come into the book of Revelation, and the great summation of history comes together, and God redeems His people, and God is about to set up His glorious, eternal kingdom, there is a great song, and the song is, "Glory to God, glory to the Lamb," because that is the purpose for which everything that was made was made.

David had it right in Psalm 16:8 when he said, "I have set the Lord always before me. Therefore my heart is glad." In other words, in all that I do I focus on the glory of God and He makes me joyful.

Now that's the exchange that God wants to give man. You glorify Me and I'll give you joy. "I have set the Lord in his glory before me always. Therefore my heart is glad." That's the reason we exist. That's why the Bible again and again says, "Give glory to God." That's why Chronicles, in the sixteenth chapter, it says again and again, "give glory to God, give glory to God." The Psalms, "give glory to God, give glory to God." The angels when Christ was born, "give glory to God." "Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." Ephesians 3, "That he might be glorified in the church." The book of Revelation, "glory to the Lamb, glory to God." And here again you have the benediction, "To him be glory both now and forever. Amen." That's the constant thrust of Scripture.

First Timothy 1:17, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God - ” here it comes “ - *be* honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Again the same thrust. The ultimate reason for being is to glorify God.

Now listen, when we live to God’s glory, we put ourselves in the process of spiritual maturity. As we glorify God we begin to grow. Now let me show you that by having you look at 2 Corinthians 3:18, a monumental text in the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 3:18. Now notice this. “But we all, - ” speaking here, of course, of believers “ - with an unveiled face - ” in other words, the veil that was over believers in the old economy, the veil that the law had there, the veil that the New Testament removes by its marvelous revelation, “ - with an unveiled face - ” no longer are things hidden from us. No longer do we have to search as the prophets did to understand what they wrote, but the veil is off.

“We behold as in a glass.” In other words, we focus into a clear glass, and what do we see? We see “the glory of the Lord.” Now watch this. As we “with an unveiled face - ” and the veil is taken off in the New Testament, and as we understand the New Testament and its great truths, we focus on “the glory of the Lord,” what happens? “We are changed into the same image from - ” one level of “ - glory to - ” the next level of “ - glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Now listen, the power behind spiritual growth is the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that energizes our growth. It is the Spirit that gives life, and life is growth. So, as the Spirit infuses our lives with His power, He will cause us to grow into the image of Christ, from one level of glory to the next level of glory, to the next level of glory. But the condition is as we gaze into the glory of the Lord. Now listen, summing it up, as you and I focus on God’s glory, the Spirit of God energizes the process of spiritual growth.

So the point is this. To grow spiritually, you must then focus on God’s glory. Don’t worry about what the Holy Spirit does, and some people get too preoccupied with the Holy Spirit. And don’t focus on what you do and get introspective and analytical. Focus on the glory of the Lord. That is the thrust. That is the ultimate reason for living. And that is the key, the master key to spiritual growth.

Now just to show you how important this is, I want you to see that the ultimate condemnation of man in history is because he doesn’t give God glory. Look at Romans 1:21, Romans 1:21. Now you’ll remember that the apostle Paul is indicting the human race for its defection from the truth. And in Romans 1:21 he says, “Here’s the basic problem with man.” “Because, when they knew God - ” now stop there for a minute.

What do you mean “they knew God”? You mean all of civilization and all men knew God? Yes, they did. Verse 19 says, “That which may be known of God is manifest in them.” By conscience, they knew God. Verse 20, “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen.” They knew God from creation. So man had an internal knowledge of God and an external knowledge. But,

“when they knew God - ” in that way “ - they glorified him not as God.” Now there’s the basic indictment of the human race. They failed to give God glory. Instead, verse 23, “They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” In other words, they invented idolatrous human systems of religion.

Now man then - and I want you to watch this - man then abandoned the concept of the glory of God. He abandoned it. Now when he did that, he cut himself off from spiritual life and spiritual growth. And so the history of man is a downward history, isn’t it? It is a descending history. It is a degradation. He cannot ascend, he cannot grow, because he refuses to glorify God, and glorifying God is the impetus in spiritual growth.

Now let me give you a little bit of the history of the Bible in just a nutshell. And somebody said, “If you get this in your head, you’ll have it in a nutshell.” But anyway, I want you to see how that throughout history God has endeavored to do one primary thing, just one. Throughout human history, God has endeavored to get man to see His glory, to reverse the fall, if you will; to change the reality of Romans 1; not that man should turn away from the glory of God, but that he should turn to it. And so all throughout biblical history, God is wanting men to see His glory.

Now let me show you this in a very simple way. Now you don’t have to turn to these things because we’ll move through them rather rapidly. In Genesis chapter 3, you’ll remember this, verse 8 says that Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the cool of the day. The great reality of the Garden of Eden before the fall was that Adam and Eve lived in the presence of God.

Now the Hebrews had a word for this. They had a word that meant “presence,” a word that meant “to dwell” or “to reside,” and the word was Shekinah [???]. So that Adam and Eve lived with the Shekinah [???] of God, the Shekinah [???] glory. God is a Spirit, right? John 4:24. So God didn’t have a body in the garden. How did God manifest Himself? Well, I believe God manifested Himself in a glowing, glorious, Shekinah [???] glory of light, an almost incandescent and yet gloriously brilliant kind of light. I believe that God appeared in that way because that’s the way we see Him appearing in other places in Scripture.

And so there was this glow, this representation of God’s infinite and eternal glory that dwelled in the garden with Adam and Eve, and they fellowshipped with God. But immediately when they sinned, 3:24 says they were thrown out of the garden. They were cut off from God’s glory, cut off from the Shekinah glory of God. And an angel was put at the entrance of the garden with a sword to keep them out of there.

This is the point. Fallen man cannot experience the glory of God. Fallen man cannot dwell in His presence. Fallen man cannot give God glory, cannot identify with God in His glory. And so they were cut off, and that was the tragedy of human history.

Now watch. From then on, God endeavored to get men to see His glory. And He's still doing it today. But let's see how He did it early on. Look at Exodus, chapter 33, and I do want you to turn to this, Exodus, chapter 33. Here is the Israelites, being led by a great man, Moses. Now they have come to a crisis point in their life, having left Egypt on their way to the promised land. If there's anything God wants them to believe and God wants them to know, it is that He is a God of great glory. He wants them to see His glory. He wants to go back, as it were, before the fall, and again bring His presence to them and have them acknowledge Him for who He is.

So in Exodus 33:12, God is communing with Moses. And God is saying to Moses, in effect, "Moses, lead My people. Take My people. Be their leader from here on." He already had that commission once, but this is a reiteration. And Moses is fearful and he's afraid of his own inabilities. And so he says in verse 12, "See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me." "God, You're giving me a big job and You don't even tell me who's going to help. I mean it's a little heavy for one guy." And some estimate there may have been as many as two million people.

Now he says in verse 13, "If I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee." In other words, "God, I feel You're out there and I believe, but give me a demonstration that You're going to be with me in this very difficult task." Verse 14, God says, "My presence." "My presence." Now people, that's the word we saw in Genesis. "My presence shall go *with thee*." Now what do you mean by that? What is Your presence? Well, it was clear to Moses. Verse 18, he says, "I beseech thee, show me thy - " not presence, but " - glory." The presence of God was His manifest glory. And God says, "I'll make all my goodness pass before thee, I'll proclaim the name of the Lord before thee, be gracious to whom I'll be gracious, show mercy on whom I'll show mercy."

Now notice, God says, "All right, you'll see My goodness. You'll see My name, which is the embodiment of all My attributes. You'll see My grace, and you'll see My mercy." What is the glory of God? The embodiment of all of His attributes in some blazing representation of light. Now I don't understand all of that, I'm just telling you what the Bible seems to be saying.

God has reduced His attributes to a glorious light, and He says, "Moses, I'll show it to you." And so in the rest of this little section, he tucks Moses in the cleft of a rock, verse 22. "And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, I'll put thee in the cleft of the rock, cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And slip away my hand, and you'll see my back parts: but not my face." Listen, nobody could ever see the full glory of God and live, right? So God says, I'm just going to let you see a little of My afterglow, that's all. But you'll see My glory.

And he did. And you know what happened? It got all over his face, it got all over him. He was lit up like a light bulb. And he came down the mountain to the people of Israel down there, and they were

shocked. Here was Moses, lit, just like a glowing light bulb, with the glory of God on his face.

And you know what? God was using Moses to say, “People, people of Israel, will you see My glory?” And that self-same people, do you remember as they moved into the wilderness? They were led in the daytime by a great white cloud, and they were led at night by a pillar of fire. Do you know what that was? That was nothing but the glory of God. God put the glory on the face of Moses, God put the glory in the sky in the day and the sky in the night, and what God was saying was, “See My glory, see My glory, the fullness of what I am, the fullness of My attributes and blazing light.”

The sad part of it is that even though they had seen the glory on the face of Moses, they murmured, complained, and disobeyed. Even though they saw the glory every day and every night as it led them through the wilderness, they were so unbelieving and so faithless that the whole generation died in the wilderness. And God had said, “See My glory,” and man again had turned his back.

Look at Exodus chapter 40 and we see the next time God deposited His glory in the face of men. You’ll notice at the end of the book of Exodus, 40:34, that the tabernacle had been built. And when the tabernacle was built it says, “A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

Now listen, the tabernacle was a place of worship, and the tribes all had a place around the tabernacle, and all the tribes were plotted out as a sort of a circle around the tabernacle, all facing that place. And deposited in the midst of it was the glory of God, and all these people had to focus in on it. They saw it when it was completed how the glory of God descended, and the glory of God stayed in the tabernacle when they were to camp. And when the glory of God left and went into the sky it became that cloud and that pillar that they followed. And then when God wanted them to stop, the glory came and stayed here. And there it was again as their camp met, they would be focusing on the glory of God. And so God had revealed His glory on the face of a man, in the sky, and in the midst of the tabernacle. But in each case, they murmured, and disobeyed, and complained, and griped, and never really gave God the glory He was due.

Finally they entered the promised land and God said, “I want you to build a temple.” Look with me at 1 Kings chapter 8 and see what happened. The temple was built, and what followed that? Verse 10, “It came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy *place*, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.”

Now listen, God had put His glory on the face of a man, God had put His glory in the sky, God has put His glory in a tent, and now God puts His glory in a temple, a magnificent edifice unequaled in the world, built by Solomon. And God is again saying to the people in the land, “See My glory. Focus on My glory. See who I am and give Me the proper reverence and worship.”

But you know what happened? A little while later you meet the prophet Ezekiel, and look with me for a moment at Ezekiel chapter 8. Ezekiel has a vision of the temple, and what does he see? What about this place where God's glory dwells? What about this place wherein is the Ark of the Covenant, and over it standing the glory of God in the holy of holies? What about it? Verse 7, in the vision he says, I was brought "to the door of the court; I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. He said unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. He said, Go in." And now he enters into the temple in his vision, and "I went in and I saw; behold, every form of creeping things, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, painted on the walls round about."

You know what happened? They turned the temple of God into a place of idolatry. They did exactly what Romans 1 says. Instead of worshiping God and giving Him glory, they turned the glory of God into creeping things, and animals, and corruptible things, and so forth. And it talks about those who usurp the place of priests, in verse 11. It talks about worshiping the sun in this passage, verse 16. It talks about worshiping Baal or Tammuz in verse 14. In other words, Ezekiel is saying they have turned it into a place of idolatry. And again, God had said, "Here's My glory, not on the face of a man, not in the sky, not in a tent, but in a temple," and they had refused to see His glory. And if you follow through this section to chapter 10, "ichabod," which means "the glory has departed," is written on the temple. And you see the glory of God go up over the temple, out over the gate, up into the sky, out over a mountain, and finally disappear. And God says, "If you don't give Me glory, I'll remove the opportunity."

Now you know, God has been pretty patient. Showed His glory in the garden, showed His glory in the wilderness, showed His glory in the land of Canaan. Every time they refused as a nation, really, to give Him glory. But He wasn't done. There was one more time. Look with me at John 1:14. This is a tremendous text, and John is writing here about Jesus Christ, and I want you to see how John sees Christ. John 1:14 says this. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us - " listen " - (and we beheld is glory, - " and what glory was it? " - the glory as of the only begotten of the Father)."

Listen. You know who Jesus was? Jesus was the glory of God in a body. He was the embodiment of the Shekinah [???]. And if you were to read the 9th chapter of Luke, you will find that Jesus went up into a mount, called the mount of transfiguration, and He pulled back His flesh and it says, "They saw his glory." He showed them who He really was. And one final time our gracious God said to mankind, "Here is My glory. Will you give glory to Me?"

Not in the garden, not in the face of a man, not in the sky, not in the tent, not in a building, but in Jesus Christ was His glory revealed. And what did the world say? "We will not have this man to reign over us. He is of the devil, the prince of demons, Beelzebub, crucify Him." And again they turned their back on His glory, tragically.

But there's coming a day in the future when man isn't going to have that option. Because Jesus Christ is going to return, and in Matthew 24:30 it says He's coming "with power and great glory." And there won't be any options then. And finally He will be glorified, and that's when all of creation will sing "Glory to the Lamb, glory to God." Ultimately, He will have His glory.

Now what I've tried to show you is in the past, God has endeavored to get men to see His glory. In the future, He will display His glory in a way that men really won't have any option. But what about the present? What about the present? What is the significance of the glory of God right now? And that's the thing we want to talk about. In Ephesians 3 as I quoted earlier, let me remind you of verses 19 to 21. He says, "I want you to be filled with all the fullness of God. I want you to be able to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think." Why? "Unto Him *be* glory in the church."

Now listen to this. In the Old Testament, it was in a building, it was in a tent, it was on the face of a man, it was in the sky, and it was in the garden. In the future, the glory of God will be displayed in the coming of Christ. But right now the glory of God, if it is displayed, is displayed in the church. That's why Paul said to the Colossians, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That's why Paul says to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone in our hearts, - " listen " - to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." If the glory of God in the face of Christ is to be seen, it is to shine through us.

And so the greatest calling of a believer is to glorify God. The greatest calling of a believer is what Paul said to Titus, "to adorn the doctrine of God." The greatest calling that we can have is to let the glory of Christ shine through us, 2 Corinthians 4:6. And so in this present age, God has called us to manifest His glory. And if the world is ever to see it, Christ in us is the hope of that glory made visible to them and the key to our own spiritual growth.

And I want to stress one other thing at this point and that is this. This is so important to God that's there's nothing more important than this. This is it. It is absolutely essential. In Isaiah 48:11, He says, "My glory will I not give to another." I will maintain My glory for Myself, because this is the reason everything exists, to give Me glory.

Now if a person does not give God glory, he goes cross-grain to the very intention of the universe, and he butts heads with God, very serious. Let me show you how I say that. Jeremiah, chapter 13, and we're still just introducing the concept before we get into the practical keys to spiritual growth. But in Jeremiah 13:11 we have a very interesting text. Jeremiah here is going through a little dramatization to make a point concerning the glory of God. Verse 11 at the end speaks of God's glory. And Jeremiah's very concerned about God's glory. So over in verse 15 - and we'll just look at these two verses - he says, "Hear, and give ear; - " Listen, people " - be not proud: for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God."

Now what always stands in the way of glorifying God is pride. Man seeks glory for himself, thus he cannot be free to give God the glory. And so Jeremiah says, “Look, give glory to God. Don’t be proud. Give it to God.” And then he says this, “before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and, while you look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, *and* make *it* gross darkness - ” Now that’s pretty serious stuff. What he’s saying is, “You either give God glory, or else God will cause you to fall into darkness, to stumble, and to die.”

Jeremiah isn’t real happy about that, neither is God. Verse 17 says, “And if you don’t listen, my soul shall weep in secret places for *your* pride; and mine eyes shall weep bitterly, and run down with tears.” It breaks God’s heart, and thus the heart of His prophet, when people don’t give God glory because they put themselves in the place of judgment.

I want you to notice Daniel chapter 4 again to see this same theme, Daniel 4:30. And here we find Nebuchadnezzar, who thought he had really arrived, he thought he was unequaled, not only in Babylon but anywhere else. And having accomplished some great things he says, in verse 30, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?” “How wonderful I am, how majestic I am, how powerful I am, look what I’ve done,” he says. And verse 31 says, “While the word *was* still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, *saying*, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.” That’s enough out of you. You’ve gone a little too far and you can’t compete with God. You’ve had it kind of like Uzziah, of whom the Bible says, “And when he had accomplished many great things his heart was lifted up in him.” And then God gave him leprosy and that’s the way he died.

What did God do to Nebuchadnezzar to get the message across? The word came, “And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling *shall* be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass like oxen, until you learn that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men.” Until you learn who’s really on the throne, you’re going to turn into a beast. And it did happen. Verse 33, “The same hour was the thing fulfilled on Nebuchadnezzar: he was driven from men, did eat grass like oxen, his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ *feathers*, and his nails like birds’ *claws*.” He became a raving maniac in the wilderness.

And finally, “at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him who lives for ever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation.” He finally realized you either give God glory, or else God deals very strongly with you.

In the 12th chapter of Acts - a final illustration of this point - there was a man named Herod, one of the Herods who ruled in and around the time of Christ. And it says that Herod pronounced a special day. Herod lived down at Caesarea by the seacoast, west of Jerusalem. He decided he’d have a

Herod day. And so he set a day, “arrayed in royal apparel, he sat on his throne, he made a great speech.” He really laid it on heavy. “And the people gave a shout - ” listen to this. They said, “*It is* the voice of a god, and not a man.” Isn’t he terrific? Fabulous. O Herod, there’s nothing like you. “And immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten by worms, and died.” Now you can imagine that that was a rather dull ending to Herod day. I mean that isn’t exactly what he had in mind, to be eaten by worms? And the reason is he gave not God the glory.

Now people, this is very basic. You either give God glory or pay the price. The generation that failed to see the glory of God in the face of Moses, the generation that failed to see the glory of God in the sky, the generation that failed to see the glory of God in the tabernacle was wasted in the wilderness. The generation that failed to see the glory of God in the temple was again wasted and set aside. The generation that failed to see the glory of God in Jesus Christ is cut off from the blessing of God. The generation that does not recognize the glory of God before He comes in blazing final glory will know a Christless, Godless eternity. It’s a very serious thing, because when you fail to give God glory, says Romans 1, God turns you over to “a reprobate mind.” And that’s a doomed existence. Giving God glory is essential.

Now because of its consequences, and because it is commanded, we are to glorify God. And as we do that, as in this age we focus on glorifying God, we will be changed into the image of Christ from one level of glory to the next. That is the process of spiritual growth. Now there is one other text that I want to give you in our introduction, and then we’ll move to some specific keys to spiritual growth.

First John 2:12-14, and this is a very, very essential text. Now here you have the three levels of spiritual growth, and you ought to understand these. Our Lord even similarly speaks of three. There is the seed, and then there is the corn, and then there is the full ear, three levels of maturity from an agricultural analogy. Here you have it from the analogy of human growth.

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” And here he sums up all believers under one term, “little children, offspring.” And the word for “children” here is a Greek word that simply means anybody who is born from somebody else, has nothing to do with age. This term could refer to an 85-year-old person. He is the child of somebody. It’s non-infancy related.

But then he moves to different terms. He splits the totality of the sons of God into three categories. Verse 13, “I write unto you, fathers, because you’ve known Him *that is* from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you’ve overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children - ” and here he uses a completely different word that means “babies” “ - because you have known the Father.” Then in 14 repeats a similar statement, “I have written to you, fathers, because you’ve know him *that is* from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you’re strong, the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.”

Now listen, three levels of spiritual growth: little children, young men, and fathers. What is a spiritual little child? It says, verse 13, “I have written unto you, little children, because you have known the Father.” What is the first thing a child recognizes? Parents, parental recognition, mama, dada. Unfortunately, it is usually mama and six months later it’s dada. But nonetheless, parental recognition is where it all begins. The thing about a child, they realize that they’re a child of God. That’s about all, sort of spiritual googoo, dada, mama. “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” And it never goes much further than that.

There’s a second level of spiritual growth. “I write unto you, a young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.” Who is the wicked one? Ho Poneros [???], Satan himself. How do you overcome Satan? Verse 14, “because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you’ve overcome the wicked one.”

Now notice this, a little child does not have the Word of God abiding in them strongly, they just know the basics. Consequently, they are the children of Ephesians 4, “Tossed to and fro, - ” as little children “ - carried about by every wind of doctrine.” In other words, they just know God, they just know Jesus. They don’t know Scripture very well. That’s why we say when you lead someone to Christ, what’s the first thing you want to do? Get them grounded in the Word, so they don’t get tossed around with false doctrine. A spiritual young man is one who is strong in the Word and has overcome the wicked one.

In what sense does he overcome the wicked one? Satan is a liar. Satan appears as an angel of light. Satan is the master of false religion. A spiritual young man knows the Word, is no longer a victim of false religion. In fact, I know in my own life as a spiritual young man, I know the difference between that and being a babe. When I was a spiritual babe, I couldn’t really tell what was true and what wasn’t. I was in the euphoria and the honeymoon of loving the Lord, and never really understood much theology, and was easily victimized by somebody’s whim or fancy.

But there came a time when I understood theology, when I knew the Word of God, and then false doctrine didn’t deceive me; it just made me mad. And I’ve discipled people in that situation. When they become a spiritual young man they want to go out and fight the cults, they want to straighten out the world.

But there’s even a greater level of spiritual growth than that. He says at the beginning of 13 and 14, “I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning.” Now listen. It’s one thing to know you belong to the family of God. It’s another thing to know the Word of God. But it’s another thing to know God, intimately and deeply. It’s one thing to know the Book, and it’s another thing to know the God behind the Book. It’s one thing to understand the page. It’s another thing to know the heartbeat of the One who wrote it.

Spiritual growth, then, goes from knowing you're a Christian, to knowing the Word of God, to knowing God in fullness. And listen to me. The way to really know God is to spend your life focusing on His glory. That's the thing that pulls you to that third level of spiritual growth. So that, then, becomes the focus of the believer's life, and as the believer zeroes in on this, glorifying God, understanding the fullness of His person, understanding the fullness of His glory, and gazing at that, that becomes magnetic, and draws him up past the point of only knowing to whom he belongs, to knowing what he believes, and finally to know in whom he believes, God Himself. And that becomes the thrust of all spiritual maturity.

You know, Paul put it simply this way, "All things were made by Him and for Him." He even made us for Him, to know Him in His fullness. In Romans 11:36 it says, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, *are* all things: to Whom *be* glory for ever," and ever.

Now listen, I close with this our first lesson. As you focus on the glory of God; and as you, seeing His glory, begin to give Him the glory He is due; you will find imperceptibly, as you lose yourself in that focus, you are being changed into His very image from one level of glory to the next. And that is spiritual growth. In our next study, we'll see just exactly how you put the keys in the lock and turn them to focus on the glory of God in a way that means spiritual growth.

Father, thank You for our time in this lesson. Thank You for helping us to understand this great concept of Your glory and how it relates to spiritual maturity. Help us now to move ahead, to apply this general truth in a very practical and specific way as we see exactly what You want us to do in giving You glory. But Lord, we know we have to understand the basis before we can even begin, and so we thank You for these great truths, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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