INTRODUCTION

We don’t hear much about spiritual growth these days. Many Christians in our society have been diverted by various teachings that promise power, spiritual energy, and success without the process of growth into spiritual maturity. They look for dramatic experiences, climactic turning points, instant solutions to their spiritual problems; but real, lasting victory doesn’t come through those means. God’s design is that we be seasoned to maturity through a continual process of growth.

The contemporary church’s de-emphasis of spiritual growth has reaped a bitter harvest. Millions of professing Christians suffer from arrested development. Churches are filled with people who are spiritually immature, undiscerning, weak, and fragile. Spiritual underdevelopment is the rule, no longer an exception. Thousands—perhaps millions—are now addicted to “therapy,” evidently preferring the dependency of a counseling relationship to the rigors of true discipleship and growth in grace.

This is a severe threat to the church. Frankly, it may be a sign that something is terribly wrong, for growth is one of the essential signs of life—in both the physical and the spiritual realms. Where there is no growth, no true life exists. Where there is no spiritual growth, there is good reason to question whether spiritual life exists.

Are you growing? If you are not, or if you are not satisfied with your rate of growth, this book is for you!

Be sure of this: God intends every Christian to grow into spiritual maturity. His Word commands us, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). That’s our obligation—and our privilege. Each day we can progress in our spiritual life toward a fuller, higher, personal, experiential
knowledge of God and Christ. We can go past His Word to the God who wrote it and know Him more personally.

I find that many people entertain mistaken ideas about what spiritual maturity involves. They’re not growing as rapidly as they could, or they’re caught on a level far below where they should be, because they misunderstand what spiritual maturity is and how one grows in grace. Here are a few reminders to help keep us on track.

_Spiritual growth has nothing to do with our position in Christ._ God sees us in His Son as already perfect. We are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). We have everything we need pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). We are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Positionally we are perfect. Practically, however, we fall far short. Growth is the process by which that which is true of us positionally becomes more and more a reality in practice as well.

_Spiritual growth has nothing to do with God’s favor._ God doesn’t like us better the more spiritual we become. Sometimes parents threaten their children, “If you don’t behave, the Lord won’t like you.” How ridiculous! God’s love for us is not conditional upon our behavior. Even when we were “helpless,” “ungodly,” “sinners,” and “enemies” (see Romans 5:6-10), God showed His great love for us by sending His Son to die for our sins. God cannot love us more just because we grow.

_Spiritual growth has nothing to do with time._ Maturity in the spiritual realm is not measured by the calendar. It is possible for a person to be a Christian for half a century and yet remain a spiritual infant. Several years ago I saw a report in _Time_ magazine about a Bible quiz given to high-school students. According to the students, Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers; the Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John; Eve was created from an apple; and Jezebel was Ahab’s jackass! Don’t think those high-school students were unusual. I know some retired persons who might do even worse!

_Spiritual growth has nothing to do with knowledge._ Facts, data, information, and intelligence cannot be equated with spiritual matu-
rity. You might score perfectly on Time magazine’s quiz, but unless your knowledge results in conforming you to Christ, it is useless. Truth that fails to change your life and behavior may in fact be hurtful, hardening you instead of bringing you to maturity.

_Spiritual growth has nothing to do with activity._ Some people make the mistake of assuming that the most mature Christians are always the busiest ones. But busyness doesn’t necessarily bring maturity, nor can it be substituted for maturity. Excessive activity may, in fact, even hinder what is really vital and important in the Christian life. Matthew 7:21-23 tells us of a group who will plead acceptance with Christ on the basis of their many wonderful works, but He will cast them out. Busyness can’t earn salvation, let alone bring about spiritual maturity.

_Spiritual growth has nothing to do with prosperity._ “Well, look how the Lord has blessed me,” some people exclaim. “I have so much money, and I have a wonderful house and a nice car and a secure job. See how God has blessed me because I’ve honored Him?” Don’t believe it. God may have allowed you to prosper, but that is not a mark of spiritual growth. (See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.) Some people so dedicate themselves to the pursuit of prosperity that they neglect everything else. That is not spiritual maturity, but just the opposite.

Spiritual growth, as we have noted, is simply matching up our practice with our position. Our position in Christ is majestic. God has “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). Our position could not be more lofty. Positionally, we are perfect. Now God wants us to reflect that position in our progressive experience. That’s what growth is all about.

_Spiritual growth is critical._ Call it what you will: pursuing righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11), being transformed (Romans 12:2), “perfecting holiness” (2 Corinthians 7:1), pressing toward the goal (Philippians 3:14), or being built up in the faith (Colossians 2:7). The goal is the same for every Christian: to be “. . . transformed into [the Lord’s] image . . .” (2 Corinthians 3:18).
Spiritual growth is not mystical, sentimental, devotional, psychological, or the result of clever secrets. It comes through understanding and practicing the principles that are given in the Word of God. Its boundless blessings are in a divine vault that is easily unlocked by a series of unique keys. Those keys are the theme of this book. Get ready to unlock the riches of God in Christ Jesus!