



Youth Venture Varsity

GOING FORWARD

Written by Mark Hoffman

Lesson 1	Going Forward	page 3
Lesson 2	On Your Way	page 9
Lesson 3	Alive and Growing, Part 1	page 16
Lesson 4	Alive and Growing, Part 2	page 24

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Varsity Course 1-4
“Going Forward”
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Symbols used in this text:



Lesson Keys

If you remember one thing, remember this!



Check Up

Questions or activities to check for comprehension.



Bible Verse

What God says in His Word about the lesson.

1

Going Forward

When a person gives their life to Jesus and becomes a Christian, their life begins to change in many wonderful ways. Today let's look at five of these wonderful changes.

1. First, as a Christian you get a clean, fresh start. Nobody would like to step up to the plate to bat and have two strikes against them. You want a new count every



time you come up to bat. In life, many people feel like they are already behind in the count. Perhaps because of some bad things that have happened to them, or because of mistakes they have made they feel like they already have two strikes against them. However, when we give our lives to Jesus and invite Him to be Master of our lives, we get a new, fresh start. Having Jesus in your life changes everything. It changes how you feel and think. It changes how you treat people. You may have failed at things in the past (like school or getting along with family members) but now with Jesus' help it can be different. You are a new person—the past is finished and gone. You have a new count. You're at bat with no strikes against you in the game of life. Some of the greatest heroes of the Bible were wicked men, terrible failures, and giant screw-ups until they tried again with Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is still the same today. Every church is full of people who had terrible problems and got a fresh start with Jesus.

2. Second, a Christian's life is full of hope! Many kids feel lost, unsure of what they should do with their future. Many even feel like their lives are out of control and they don't know how to get it together. Perhaps this is why so many kids have suicidal thoughts. They have lost hope for success. But the Bible gives every Christian this promise: *"Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."* (Philippians 1:6.)



"If anyone is in Christ, he becomes a new person altogether—the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new."
– 2 Corinthians 5:17



When we give our lives to Jesus and invite Him to be Master of our lives, we get a new, fresh start.

God began a good work in your life when you were born again. But He will keep working in your heart and life until He brings about His finished product in you as long as you follow Him. Even when you don't know where you are going—God does. You can trust God. Even when things get bad, the Christian knows that ultimately God is in control. If we will be obedient to God's word, and be patient, God will bring good out of even the worst things that can happen to us. God promises us this in the Bible: *“And we know that everything that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into His plans.” (Romans 8:28.)*

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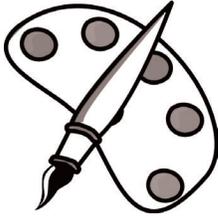
1. What does this verse (Romans 8:28) mean?

2. Has some bad event or circumstance happened in your life?

3. Can you stop worrying about it and trust God to bring good out of it?



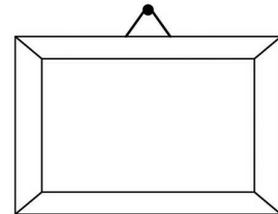
Even when you don't know where you are going—God does.



3. A Christian has great confidence. Many people suffer from low self-image and are unsure about their future. But coming to Christ gives us a great confidence. Lots of young people lack confidence because they feel that there is something wrong with them, thinking they are flawed or messed up. They believe that somehow they just don't measure up. However, we learn in the

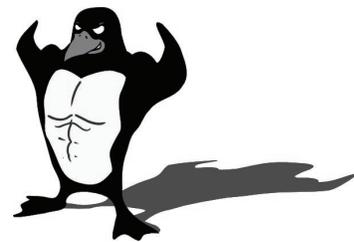
Bible that each of us is a unique work of art designed by God. *"For we are God's workmanship [the Greek word is poiema; it means work of art] created in Christ Jesus for good works."* (Ephesians 2:10.) Or, as someone has said, "God made me and God don't make junk." All of us have special gifts and talents given to us by God. God has an important place and an important plan for each of us. That doesn't change just because people say mean things about us. **Trusting God means being patient until God shows us our special gifts and the plans He has for us.** Many people are worried or unhappy about their physical appearance. Most people have things about their appearance they wish they could change. Remember, however, that you are a work of art that God is creating.

The outward appearance is only a "frame" around the inward qualities that are the real work of art. When a picture is completed, the primary focus is on the picture itself, not on the frame. The frame blends into the picture and in a unique way enhances the quality of the picture.



A Christian has confidence. He is not afraid to try. He knows that through Christ he will eventually know success. All he has to do is keep on trying.

4. A Christian is strong. When we invite Christ into our lives and make a daily choice to obey Him, we release His power and help into our lives, and because of that we can overcome any obstacle. A toothpick is not very strong. It is easy to break. But if you tape it to a baseball bat it is almost impossible to break. Being attached to the bat makes it strong. So it is with a Christian. He has Jesus in his life, and so he has all the strength of God available to him. What he could never do on his own, he can do through Christ who gives him His strength. One of the most exciting discoveries you can make is what God can do working through you.



**"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
– Philippians 4:13**

5. A Christian is a part of a new family. By accepting Jesus as your Savior, you become an adopted son or daughter of God. Obviously, all the people who have the same father are brothers and sisters. They are a family in the same way all the people who have become adopted children of God are in a family. *“God’s Spirit makes us sure [in our hearts] that we are His children.” (Romans 8:16.)*

A Family Resemblance. Every family bears a family resemblance. The children also learn behaviors from the parents. A boy may pick up a good sense of humor or a love for sports from his father. Likewise, all of God’s sons and daughters should begin to bear a resemblance to their heavenly Father in their words and actions. The Bible tells us: *“Therefore be imitators of God as His beloved children.” (Ephesians 5:1.)* Another translation puts it this way: *“Since you are God’s dear children, you must try to be like Him.” (Ephesians 5:1.)* It is the Christian’s ambition to be like his or her heavenly Father—a chip off the old block, so to speak.

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1. What are some ways that a Christian could begin to act like his Heavenly Father? What are some qualities he could develop?

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The Power of Love. Christ’s love in our hearts also binds former enemies together. No prejudice is strong enough to stop it. Christ’s love, which He demonstrated when He died on the cross for us, is strong enough to break down the highest walls of hatred and prejudice between any two groups of people or any two individuals. Often we see violence and hatred based on racial differences. Sometimes it almost seems like people from different groups will never get along. However, Christ’s love—in the hearts of His followers—gives us great reason for hope. God’s love in Christ Jesus breaks down all former walls and divisions.

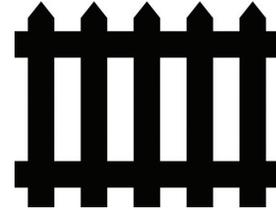


“So then you ... are no longer foreigners or strangers; you are the fellow citizens with God’s people and members of the family of God.”
– Ephesians 2:19

Only God’s Love can bring people together and overcome prejudice. God’s love has turned millions of bitter enemies into brothers and sisters.

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In World War II, some US soldiers took the body of a buddy to a local cemetery. A priest stopped them and said, “Sorry, boys, you can’t bury your friend here if he’s not a Catholic.” Though discouraged, the soldiers decided to bury their friend outside the cemetery fence. The next morning when they went to pay their last respects at the grave, they couldn’t find it. After looking for a while, they asked the priest about it. He explained, “Well, the first part of the night I stayed awake, sorry for what I had told you. The second part of the night I spent moving the fence. Christ’s love in my heart would let me do no less.” (Copyright © 2003–2007. Thomas Coop and Santa Teresa Hills Presbyterian Church.)



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Followers of Jesus Christ come into a special relationship with one another. They should treat each other as family members, showing one another love and respect.

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- 1. **Look up James 2:14-16** in a Bible. It shows the special responsibility that Christians must have for one another. According to this what is the Christian’s responsibility toward other Christians?



“... Let us do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith.” – Galatians 6:10

Yes, becoming a Christian opens the door to a whole new exciting life with God. However, these wonderful changes will only happen as we:

- Make God most important in our lives.
 - Make the Bible the final authority in our lives.
 - Invite God's Spirit to change us from the inside.
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God commands us to be different from the world in attitudes, values, and behavior. Respond to these statements with all honesty:

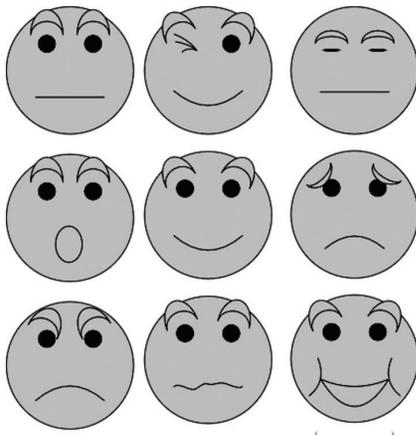
1. I am willing to let God change me.
a. Yes b. No c. Not sure
2. I will trust and obey the Bible.
a. Yes b. No c. Not sure
3. I will surrender my life to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit.
a. Yes b. No c. Not sure

Close in prayer.

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On Your Way

Congratulations! If you have mastered Junior Varsity 1-3 and Varsity Lesson 1, then you are on your way to true Christianity and lasting success. In this Varsity Course we will deal with two Key Areas you must constantly grow in. How you respond to these two Key Areas will determine just how far you go!



You And Your Feelings

Feelings can seem pretty overwhelming at times. Many people always act on the basis of feelings. However, you cannot be a strong Christian or achieve success if you cannot overcome acting according to feelings. A sure recipe for failure and heartbreak is to always do what you feel like or to never do the right thing unless you feel like it. Facts are more important than feelings. Any lasting growth must come from a commitment to

live based on true facts rather than your changing feelings. Truth never deceives us, whereas our feelings often do.

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Karen Carpenter was a famous pop singer and movie star. She was rich, famous, and beautiful. However, she felt that she was fat. She dieted recklessly and became anorexic. No matter how skinny she got, she still felt fat. Finally, although she was rich, she died of heart failure due to the stress of starvation and malnutrition. Karen is a powerful illustration of the fact that often our feelings can be wrong and not in accordance to the facts.

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Many other people's lives are like Karen's. They let the way they *feel* dictate the way they live. For instance, maybe they *feel* unwanted or hopeless. However, God tells us in the Bible that no one is hopeless or unwanted or powerless. The *fact* is



Any lasting growth must come from a commitment to live based on true facts rather than your changing feelings.

that God loves and has a plan for every person. He is willing to help anyone who sincerely asks Him. To grow, one must be able to put *facts* before *feelings*. Many young people get into trouble because they do whatever they feel would be fun and don't think about the consequences.

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1. What are some destructive or dumb things people do when they just follow their feelings?

2. Where can we find the truth on which to base our actions?

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Do Not Depend Upon Feelings! The truth of God's Word—not our feelings—must be our guide. The Christian lives by faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God and His Word. This train shows how *facts* are more important than *feelings*. It also shows us the place faith must have in our life. For this train to get anywhere it must be driven by the engine (it must follow the engine). The engine must be God's Word. The Bible gives us the *facts* on which to build our life. **Our faith is the measure of our trust in God and His Word.** When we put our faith in God's Word (that is follow it, just like the middle car follows the engine) then the right *feelings* (the caboose) will come also. We will have joy, peace, and feel secure. The train will run with or without the caboose. That means we can follow God's Word in faith even when we

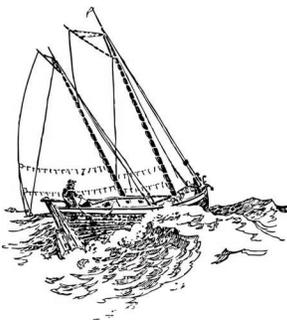


The Christian lives by faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God and His Word.

don't feel like it. However, it would be useless to attempt to pull the train by the caboose. In the same way, we, as Christians, do not depend on feelings or emotions, but we place our faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God and the promises of His Word.



Remember: All Storms Pass Away. Feelings are like the weather—constantly changing. But facts are like the climate of a region. Although the weather may be different on any given day, the overall climate remains unchanged. Even though a cold front blows into Hawaii, no one throws away their summer clothes and stocks up their closets with snow gear. They know that if they are patient, the warm weather will eventually return. Even so, the Christian knows that sometimes he must ignore his *feelings* and act on true *facts*. For the Christian, the climate is good because God is for us even though we may have periods of bad weather. God's Word sets the climate for our life, not our feelings.



Plan To Succeed. If you want to have success, then you must know the Bible so you can be sure of the true facts to always guide your life. You must read the Bible, attend Bible Studies, and even memorize parts of it. Otherwise, you will be like so many other people who are like a ship out in a storm-tossed ocean without a rudder. The changing winds of their feelings constantly blows them off course from disaster to disaster.



“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”
– Psalms 119:10



“Those who love Your way have great peace and nothing causes them to stumble.” – Psalm 119:165

You And Your Problems

Many kids feel like they are being crushed by problems. Only when we build our life on *facts* (God's Word), rather than *feelings*, are we ready to solve our problems with God's help.

First, remember problems are not all bad. Problems stretch people and cause them to grow. Overcoming problems brings out the very best in people. In fact, overcoming obstacles proves to be the road to growth and success. The people who were the most successful and the most important throughout our history have been the people who first had to overcome problems, setbacks, and deficiencies in their own lives.

A study of three hundred highly successful people, among them presidents, scientists, and world leaders—like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Helen Keller, Winston Churchill, Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi, and Albert Einstein—reveals that 1/4 had handicaps, such as blindness, deafness, or crippled limbs. Three-fourths had either been born in poverty, came from broken homes, or at least came from exceedingly tense or disturbed situations. It is in facing and overcoming the problems that we face today that we are prepared to succeed in the opportunities that await us in the future.

Second, problems make us turn to God. They help us to discover just what God is able to accomplish through us. Our problems and challenges usually drive us to God. It is when we feel we're in over our heads that we reach out to God and make the exciting discovery of God's supernatural help and power. The Apostle Paul wrote: *"[God said,] 'My grace [or help] is enough for you, for when you are weak [or in need] my power is shown more completely.' Therefore, I have cheerfully made up my mind to be proud of my weaknesses [problems] because they mean a deeper experience of the power of Christ."* (2 Corinthians 12:9.) Most people pray that their problems would shrink and go away by themselves. However, God often answers our prayers by causing us to grow and become bigger than our problems.



**"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."
– Philippians 4: 13**



God often answers our prayers by causing us to grow and become bigger than our problems.



Sir Edmund Hillary failed at his first attempt to climb Mt. Everest, and it cost the life of one of his climbing party. Upon his return to London, there was a tickertape parade and a hero’s welcome. That first night of his return there was a banquet held in his honor, and those who were with him, even though they had failed. Behind Hillary, as he addressed the crowd, was a huge picture of Mt. Everest. Midway through his speech Edmund

Hillary stopped, turned around and faced the huge picture of Mt. Everest, raised his clenched right fist and said (in a loud voice): “Mt. Everest ... you have beaten me. But I will return and will beat you. For you cannot get any bigger, but I can.” (Un sourced, wikiquote.org)

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Remember, the size of the person is more important than the size of the problem!
There is all the difference in the world between a person who has a big problem and a person who makes their problems seem bigger than they are.

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1. What are some problems you are facing in your life?



Remember, the size of the person is more important than the size of the problem!

It is important to be able to tell the difference between problems and facts of life:

Problems: I can do something about them.

Facts Of Life: They are beyond my control. I must adjust to them and go on.

Many people spend their energies worrying and fretting about facts of life which they cannot change, and don't spend any energy working on solutions to their real problems. For instance:

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James thought he had two major "problems". Number one: His parents had divorced one year before, and would hardly speak to one another. He would often become depressed or angry thinking about it. He spent much time daydreaming that his parents would get together. Number two: His second "problem" was his schoolwork. He frequently flunked courses and fell further behind.

One of the main reasons was that he used up all his energy worrying about his parents' divorce. In reality, James had it backwards. He should have invested his energy in his schoolwork and solved this problem. His parents' divorce was a fact of life, about which he could do nothing. God expects us to know the difference between problems which we can do something about and facts of life which we must accept.

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Here Is A Two-step Formula For Success:

<p>Step 1: God wants us to work hard to solve our problems. We know that with God's help we can overcome every problem.</p> <p>"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." – Philippians 4: 13</p>	<p>Step 2: God wants us to trust Him with the FACTS of life, those things we cannot change. Only God can make these situations work out for good. Only He is big enough.</p> <p>"And we know that everything that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into His plans." – Romans 8:28</p>
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Lesson Quiz

1. Do the following exercise:

What is a *problem* and what is a *fact of life*? (Share whether you think each of the following is a problem or a fact of life.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| _____ Parents' divorce | _____ Your height |
| _____ Low grades | _____ Being overweight |
| _____ Who your parents are | _____ Having a bad attitude |
| _____ Not having many friends | |

2. Share some *facts of life* for you that you cannot change.

3. Share a list of *problems* you can do something about.

4. Are you wasting your energy worrying about things you can't control instead of trusting God with them and working to solve the problems you can control? Remember, life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. How can you apply the truth of the above statement to your life?

End in prayer. Pray that God would help you to live by faith instead of feelings. Pray he would help you to trust Him to help you with your problems. Pray for some of your problems together.

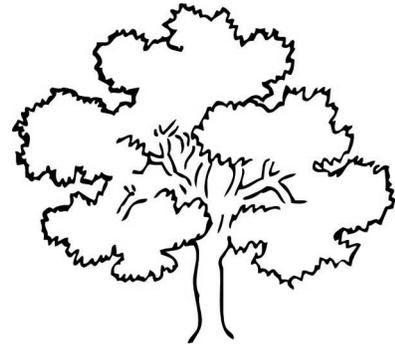
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Alive and Growing, Part I

Congratulations on reaching the Varsity 3 lesson! Obviously, you are sincere about getting to know your Creator and growing up as a follower of Jesus Christ. This lesson will help you achieve your goal.

Country Clubs & Fashion Shows? Some people think that becoming a Christian is like joining a club, where you sign up once and then maybe send in your dues every year. Others think it is like a fashion accessory you put on or take off depending upon who you are with. But Christianity is not a club or something you do only in the right crowd. Becoming a Christian means starting a new life. The focus of all new life is growth. Every new birth must be followed by growth. It is the way God made the world. In fact, when something stops growing it begins to die. A sprout grows into a sapling, and then into a full tree. A foal grows into a colt and continues to grow into a full-grown horse. A baby grows into a child, a teen, and finally, an adult. In the same way, once a person becomes born again as a Christian, that new life inside must grow. Asking Christ into your life must begin a process of growing spiritually. If you do not actively pursue spiritual growth your spiritual life will begin to die.

Great, But How Does One Grow? Think about it—our spiritual life is a lot like our physical life. Both need certain elements to maintain health and grow. Our physical bodies need food, water, and oxygen. These are necessities, not options, if we are to live and grow.



“Any person who is in Christ is a new creature; all the old things are passed away. See, everything has become new.” – 2 Corinthians 5:17



Becoming a Christian means starting a new life. The focus of all new life is growth.



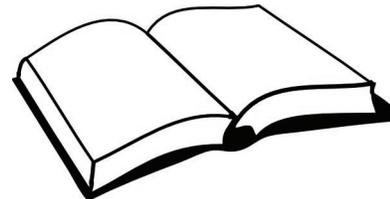
1. **Can you think** of some ingredients that are necessary for your own spiritual growth in Christ Jesus?

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The Bible tells us the key ingredients we must regularly make part of our life if we want to grow as a Christian.

First Key To Growth: The Bible

The Bible is God’s words to us. It is a love letter to us. God wrote it to tell us of His great love for us and to show us how to live in His love. It is also our owners’ manual to life. Everything complicated comes with an owners’ manual to show you how to operate it without breaking it. Life is the most complicated thing you will ever receive. God has given us the Bible to show us how life works. Have you ever put together a complicated jigsaw puzzle? It is very hard to do without having the box top to look at. But once you have the top you can begin to make sense of it. Trying to figure out how to put your life together without knowing what the Bible says is like trying to put together that jigsaw puzzle without having the picture on the box top to look at. One cannot grow as a Christian if one ignores the Bible. In fact, the Word of God (the Bible) is as necessary to a Christian as milk is to a newborn infant. Just like an infant cannot grow without regular feedings, likewise a young Christian must regularly “feed” on God’s Word.



“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”
– 1 Peter 2:2 NIV



God has given the Bible to show us how life works.



1. **What would happen** to a newborn baby who did not receive regular feedings of milk or formula?

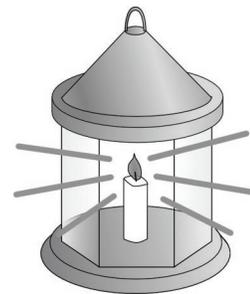
2. **What happens to** Christians who do not regularly read or get taught from the Bible?

3. **How often** do you feel it is necessary for a person to read or hear the Bible in order for him/her to grow as a Christian?

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The Bible is God’s Word to us. It is always true. It never needs to be corrected or changed. Philosophies, ideas, fads, and fashions may come and go but God’s Word always remains rock-solid and eternally true.

Turn on the Light. God’s Word is given to us as His beloved children so we might have the wisdom to live life. Trying to make your way through life without relying on the Bible is like trying to find your way in the pitch dark without a light. In either case, you will probably get lost or fall in a hole. Even when we are off track and lost, the Bible can get us back on the right path and back on track. Without knowing what the Bible teaches, you can never really be ready and prepared to succeed in life. It’s like trying to play a game when no one has ever explained the rules to you. Since God’s Word is always true and trustworthy, the wise person obeys and follows it. Jesus said that we should build our entire lives on following His Word.



“All men are like grass and all their glory (or boasting) is like the flowers of the fields. The grass withers, and the flowers fall but the word of the Lord stands forever.” – 1 Peter 1:24-25



“What You say goes God, and stays, as permanent as the heavens. Your truth never goes out of fashion.” – Psalm 119:89

You Have To Live in the House You Build. Jesus told an interesting story in Matthew 7:24-27:

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Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.



Read it and discuss the following questions:

1. In the story what do you think the house could symbolize?

2. What do you think these symbolized:

- a. The rock the wise man built on?
- b. The sand the foolish man built on?
- c. The wind, rains, and floods?

3. Do you own a Bible you can read and understand?



“Everything in the Scriptures is God’s Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live, so that the follower of God may be complete, trained and made ready for every good work.” – II Timothy 3:16



“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and light for my path.” – Psalm 119:105

A Second Key To Growth Is Obedience

It is by knowing and following Jesus' directions that we come to deepen our understanding and relationship with Him. Jesus said, *"Whoever loves me will obey my teachings. My Father [God] will love him and my Father and I will come to him and live with him."* (John 14:23.) It is as we walk honestly through life with Jesus and respond to His direction that we truly come to know Him. Obeying Jesus is our proof of loyalty to Jesus and trust in Him. If we truly trust Him as our Savior, we will trust His direction to us. The Bible will be our source for most of God's guidance to us. If you want to know Jesus, the best way is to begin studying about Him by reading His story in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the New Testament.

Is There a Doctor in the House? Imagine if you went to a doctor to help you overcome a deadly disease and become healthy. The doctor could not help you unless you completely trusted him and followed all his directions—not just the ones that were easy. The doctor could not save you if you picked and chose which of his directions to obey and which directions to ignore. He could not cure you unless you take the medicine he prescribed. In the same way Jesus cannot bring His salvation and blessing into our lives unless we completely follow His loving and wise direction for our lives. We must know His teachings and commandments and then follow them. When people don't know or follow God's Word, they fail.



Play By The Rules Or Get Kicked Out Of The Game. We cannot call ourselves Christians and say that Jesus is our Savior and Lord if we insist on making up our own rules instead of following what Jesus says. Only true Christians will spend eternity in heaven with God.

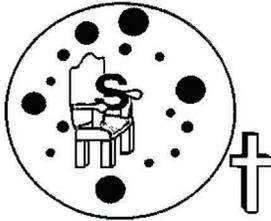


"And why do you call me 'Lord' and yet you do not do what I say?"
– Luke 6:46



"My people are destroyed by refusing to obey." – Hosea 4:6

Who Is In The Driver’s Seat? A Christian can be defined as a person who has put Christ onto the throne or the driver’s seat of his or her life. Everyone has to have someone sitting on the throne of his life calling the shots—either himself, or God.



Self-Filled Life

S Self is on the throne.

+ Christ is outside the person’s life.

- Decisions and actions are directed by self, often resulting in trouble and fights with others.

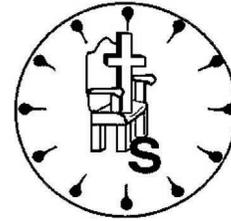


Double-Minded Christian

S Selfishness is in conflict with Christ.

+ Christ is in the person’s life.

- Decisions and actions are sometimes directed by self, sometimes directed by Christ, resulting in confusion.



Spirit-Filled Christian

S Self-confidence has given way to Christ, allowing the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

+ Christ is on the throne. He is the Lord of this person’s life.

- Decisions and actions are directed by Christ, resulting in God’s blessing.

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Which one most closely describes your life today?

The Third Essential Key To Growth Is Prayer

Prayer is talking to God and listening to Him. It is a conversation between two who love each other—you and God who created you. Prayer includes:

- Thanking God for His help and the blessings in your life.
- Praising Him for His kindness, goodness, and greatness.
- Asking for help for specific needs in your life.
- Praying for the needs of others.
- Confessing your faults and asking for His forgiveness.
- Praying for God to direct you and make His will come to pass in your life.

God Looks Forward to Your Prayer. *God desires* that we care enough about Him to make prayer a priority in our life. *God delights* in talking with us, listening to us, and being with us. As we spend time in prayer to God we come to know and experience Him, and we are changed from the inside out. God changes our heart and fills it with His love as we pray to Him. God wants us to learn to trust Him for all we want and need. We should not lie, fight, argue, and steal to get what we want. We need to learn to ask God and then be patient. The good things God wants to do in our lives do not just happen automatically. We have to ask God in prayer for them and then wait for them in faith. Many people miss out simply because they do not pray.

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Read Matthew 7:7-11. What is the main point? How often do you pray?



“The prayer of the righteous is a delight to God.” – Proverbs 15:8



“You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and even kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it so you fight to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it.” – James 4:2



We need to learn to ask God and then be patient.



Lesson Quiz – Take A Short Spiritual Check-Up

1. I would rate myself in the following essential keys to Christian growth (circle a number; 1 is lowest, 10 is highest):

- a. Bible Study 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- b. Prayer. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- c. Putting Christ first and obeying Him 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. After taking a look at the above “Essential Keys to Christian Growth” checklist (in question 1) I conclude:

- a. I am growing quickly as a Christian and my life is full of the essential elements to Christian growth.
- b. My spiritual growth is going in the right direction, but I need to give more attention to the following essential elements (please share):

- c. I am stagnant as a Christian. I am not growing at all and will soon find myself sliding back.

Close this session in prayer.

4

Alive and Growing, Part 2

Last time we looked at three key areas that would help you to grow as a Christian. We saw that they are ingredients that go into a recipe for Christian growth. These three were:

1. **Learning what the Bible says.**
2. **Learning to obey Jesus in all things.**
3. **Developing a prayer life with God.**

How are you doing in these areas? Are you making progress? Today we are going to look at some more areas that can help you grow as a Christian. Jesus came because He loved us and wanted us to have His joy, peace, and love—to have the life only God could give to us. Jesus said:

*“These things I have spoken to you so that **my joy** may be in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11.)*

*“Peace I leave with you, **my peace** I give to you.” (John 14:27.)*

*In the same way that the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you, therefore continuously live in **my love**.” (John 15:9.)*

Jesus wants to put *his joy, his peace, and his love* inside us. He wants us to enjoy these things every day of our lives. Jesus takes the loneliness, sadness, and emptiness that people sometimes feel and replaces it with the Love of God.



Jesus said: “I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.” – John 10:10



“...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” – Romans 5:5



Jesus came because He loved us and wanted us to have His joy, peace, and love—to have the life only God could give to us.

The biggest lie the devil has ever tried to sell people is that Jesus wants to take away their happiness and rob them of the joys of life. Jesus came for just the opposite reason. The key to having all this is to learn how to live close to Jesus and have Him fill us with his life. In order to do this we must grow in our Christian life. We are going to look at three more gifts (essential keys) that Jesus has given us to help us to grow stronger and enjoy Him more.

A Fourth Key Area To Growth Is What We Call Fellowship

Fellowship refers to Christians sharing and growing together. It often involves Bible study, worship, prayer, and encouraging one another. Fellowship can take place whenever Christians get together, but church and youth group are especially designed to help us have fellowship. Participating regularly in fellowship is important since it strengthens and encourages every Christian. Without regular fellowship, Christians can become distracted, discouraged, and get tripped up. The following story illustrates how important fellowship is to being a Christian:



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A man was once offended by someone in his church, so he stopped attending church and decided to try and serve God on his own. After several months of such isolation, one winter evening the pastor came to visit. Without saying a word, the pastor went to the fireplace and raked a lone coal out of the embers and onto the cold hearth. Then he sat down by the man. Together they watched silently as the coal went out, and then the pastor left, without any comment. The loner had learned his lesson; he was back at church the next Sunday.



“Let us think of one another and how we can encourage one another to love and to do good deeds, and let us not miss out on Christian meeting as some are in the habit of doing. Let us do all we can to help one another’s faith.” – Hebrews 10:24-25



God desires every believer to be in fellowship with a church, which is really a family of believers.



1. **Do you agree** that having fellowship with other Christians makes you a better Christian?

2. **Where are you** getting fellowship with other Christians? How often are you having fellowship with other believers?

The Christian life is a life of giving and receiving, sharing and caring. Love is to mark the lives of Jesus' followers.

3. **Read John 13:34-35.** How can people tell if someone is really a follower of Jesus?

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The Friends We Pick Are Important, Too. The truth is that the people who surround us have a very powerful effect on us. In fact, we soon become like the people we hang around with. If you want to know what you will be like in a year, look at the people who you spend the most time with. You will become like them. Every day you are becoming more like them. Think of the people who you hang with.

- Are they people you respect?
- Are they people you want to be like?
- Are you trying to spend more time with people you respect?



“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” – John 13:34-35



We soon become like the people we hang around with.

Another Key Area Is Baptism

Jesus said: “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.” (Mark 16:16.) Jesus wants us to accept His wonderful gift of salvation by becoming baptized. Jesus directs every Christian to get baptized. Jesus told His followers that wherever they went, they were to baptize people who wanted to become His followers. *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19.)*

Why is it so important to Jesus that every Christian becomes baptized? Think about this: baptism is a symbol of what happens when we become a Christian.

- 1. Baptism signifies the forgiveness and washing away of your sin.** Sin separates us from God and makes us feel dirty (unrighteous) inside. But God promises to forgive us and wash us clean inside. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9.)* It’s like a spiritual bath that makes you clean inside. You no longer need to feel dirty or ashamed before God. You feel clean and new.
- 2. Baptism means a brand-new start.** When we are born again everything changes. Everything is now new. Having God in your life changes every thing. You have a new life. The biggest change a person can ever make is to accept Jesus as their Savior and be born again. The person you were before Jesus is gone, and you have become a new person. Baptism shows this. Going down into the water is like being laid down in the grave (like Jesus was). It signifies that you are dying to your old way of thinking and acting (the way you thought and acted before Jesus). Being raised up out of the water shows that you are being resurrected to a new life with Jesus. Now Jesus is joined to you.
- 3. Baptism makes us members of Jesus’ Church which is His Spiritual Body.** You can’t baptize yourself. Only the church can baptize you. It’s how you become a part of the church. It’s your public witness before angels, demons, and everyone else saying, “I belong to Jesus and from



**“We were buried in baptism as Christ was buried in death. As Christ was raised from the dead by the great power of God, so we have new life also.”
– Romans 6:3-4 NLV**

now on I am going to live for Him as a Christian. I want to be part of His church.” Being baptized is like being born into a new family. When you come up out of the water, the first thing you see is your new church family. Everyone is cheering and clapping because they are glad to have you as part of their family now!

A Sixth Key: You And The Holy Spirit

The secret to overcoming problems and gaining the joy and love of Jesus is to discover the source of your strength. God enables us to overcome problems and have a new life, not just by giving us directions in His word but by actually giving us the power through His Holy Spirit. Although God is not physically present with us as He was when Jesus was here, He is here among us and in us in the form of His Spirit. God promises His Holy Spirit to all who accept Jesus as Savior.



“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38.) The Holy Spirit brings the ability and power of God into our lives even when we feel weak and powerless. *Sometimes ...*

We want to change our attitudes ... but are unable.

We want to do better ... but we don't.

We want to overcome our problems ... but continue to be defeated.

We want to help change the world ... but we feel powerless.

God's Holy Spirit is the answer! He gives us His power and ability! Many people struggle through life without being aware that God's power, through His Spirit, is available to them. They are not aware of the great power their Creator has for them.



“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into the One Body [i.e., of Christ].” – I Corinthians 12:13



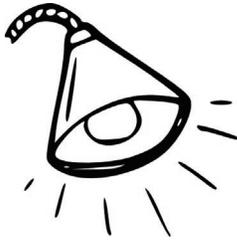
“All of you are part of the same body. There is only One Spirit of God, just as you were given one hope when you were chosen to be God's people. We have only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.” – Ephesians 4:4-5



The Holy Spirit brings the ability and power of God into our lives even when we feel weak and powerless.

The Bible promises us strength and power through the Holy Spirit of God. In Acts 1:8 it reads, *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”* In Ephesians 3:16, Paul prays for Christians, *“... That He [God] would grant you ... to be strengthened with power by His Spirit in your inner self.”* (Ephesians 3:16.)

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Norway has the cheapest electricity in the world. It is so cheap that people never bother turning lights off. They let them shine night and day. The many rivers and waterfalls in their country generate their cheap electricity. The Vikings lived in the same country years ago, but they used candles. In the same way, many of us are like the ancient Vikings.

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We don't use the power that God puts all around us because we don't know how. God's power is available for you if you understand and obey God's directions. God directs us to be filled with His Spirit. Jesus promised that if we came to Him and asked, He would fill us with the Holy Spirit. Jesus stood up and said aloud, *“Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink. As the scripture says, whosoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from His heart.”* (John 7:37-38.) Jesus said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in Him were going to receive. The effective Christian life is a life of learning to live directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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Read Galatians 5:16-21. In your own words, describe the difference between being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit and human nature?



“Be filled with the Spirit.” – Ephesians 5:18



God's power is available for you if you understand and obey God's directions.

God promises to freely share his spirit with us. Since the Holy Spirit is God's Spirit, He will only give you strength to do things that are godly and pleasing to Him. He will be a constant source of help and strength to guide you into God's plan for you. Remember, God's Spirit is called the Holy Spirit. That means when we live sinfully we will actually lose the presence and help of the Holy Spirit. If we sin, we must confess our sin to God and ask for forgiveness so that we can once again enjoy His Holy Spirit.



*“Forgive me of my sin ... Do not take your Holy Spirit from me ...
Restore to me the joy of your Holy Spirit.” (Psalm 51:9-12.)*

Learning to walk in (or live by) the Holy Spirit is a wonderful daily adventure of learning to trust and obey Jesus.



**“Do not make God's Holy Spirit have sadness for the way you live.”
– Ephesians 4:30**



**“For God has not called us to live in sin. He has called us to live a holy life. The one who turns away from this teaching does not turn away from man, but from God. It is God who has given us His Holy Spirit.”
– I Thessalonians 4:7-8**

Close: Pray asking God to fill you with the power of the Holy Spirit.

