

## 11. Objectives for Spiritual Growth for New Christians

In Exodus 18:20, we have a very profound statement about how to help others experience healthy spiritual growth. Jethro told Moses, “And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.” In this verse, we see that Moses was to help the people grow spiritually in three ways:

1. He was to teach the people ordinances and laws - growth in the Word of God
2. He was to show the people the way to walk - growth in character and attitude
3. He was to show the people the work to do - growth in ministry

We are to help people grow in these same three ways if we want to see them become healthy reproducing Christians. One of the things we notice is that two of the three areas of growth mentioned here are taught by example rather than word. To help others begin their spiritual growth, we also want them to grow in:

- ◆ Godly character and attitude - they will learn how to grow from our example
- ◆ Knowledge of the Word of God - they will learn the Word as we teach them the Word, teach them how to feed themselves and show them how to obey what they learn
- ◆ Growth in ministry - they will learn to serve from our example

First, we see that we want to show people how to grow in godly character and attitude. In order for this to happen our first goal is to see them transformed in their spirit. At the moment a person places his or her trust in Christ, the Holy Spirit comes into the human spirit. This does not automatically transform their spirit because it is very easy to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30-32) and quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Instead, new Christians need to be shown how to become strong in spirit.

1. Our spirit is being transformed as we learn to submit to the righteousness of God. Romans 6 tells us the following things about how we submit to the righteousness of God:

- We know that our old man is crucified with Christ - Romans 6:6
- We reckon (act) on the fact that we are now dead to sin - Romans 6:11
- We yield ourselves to the righteousness of God - Romans 6:13, 16

The new Christian needs a mature Christian to walk beside him and show him what it means to yield the human spirit to the Holy Spirit on a moment-by-moment basis. As we spend time with the new Christian, we are showing him by our example what it means to yield to the Holy Spirit (This assumes that we are making it a habit to yield our spirit to the Holy Spirit as we deal with the different situations that we face in our life).

2. Our spirit is being transformed as we move from fear to love. 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” As we mentioned in earlier topics, the non-Christian is motivated by separation from God, fear, guilt and shame within and blame in his relationship with others. As a Christian begins to take root in the love of Christ (Ephesians 4:17-19), his human spirit is becoming more and more controlled by the love of Christ instead of fear. As 2 Corinthians 5:14-

15 tell us, it is this love that begins to become the motivating force in his or her life. This growth in godly character and attitude affects that person. It also affects those around him because others are seeing a more loving attitude develop in the life of that person.

3. Our spirit is being transformed as we learn to live by faith. Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Spiritual growth causes a Christian to learn to depend on Christ more and more, because he is learning to have faith in Christ instead of faith in himself.

Learning to live by faith is shown by a maturity of prayer life that includes both more prayer and also a change in the types of things about which the person prays. A spiritual toddler tends to focus his prayer on “My needs and my problems.” A person who is learning to live by faith will begin to pray more for others. In addition, the prayer life will become more focused on spiritual needs and not just physical needs.

4. Our spirit is being transformed as we learn to walk in the Spirit. Galatians 5:13-16 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” In these verses, we see that at least three things happen as we learn to walk in the Spirit. We:

- Understand that we have been set free
- Realize that we are not to use our freedom to sin
- Realize that we have been given power to walk in the Spirit

New Christians, and spiritual toddlers, are beginning to change from the inside out as they learn to yield their spirit to the Holy Spirit. These changes produce some dramatic differences in character and attitude as this transforms the fear, guilt, and shame that has controlled them since birth. In addition to growing strong in spirit, we also want to help new Christians grow in their knowledge of the Word of God. This will result in a transformed soul (mind, emotions and will).

The mind of a new Christian is being transformed as he or she learns the Word of God. Romans 12:1-2 says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” We renew our mind as we grow in our knowledge of the Word of God. We want to show new Christians each of the five ways we grow in our knowledge of the Word of God so they can grow in the same five ways. That means that we spend time talking with the new Christian and discussing how we are continuing to learn the Word of God. We want to help them see that we are continuing to grow in our knowledge of the Word of God because we focus on:

\* Hearing the Word of God - Romans 10:17

- \* Reading the Word of God - Revelation 1:3
- \* Studying the Word of God - 2 Timothy 2:15
- \* Memorizing the Word of God - Psalm 119:11
- \* Meditating on the Word of God - Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3

The emotions of a new Christian are being transformed as he learns to take root in the love of God. Paul gives us a model of how to pray for the new Christian in Ephesians 3:16-19 when he prayed, “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” In these verses, we see that Paul gives us an example of praying for five spiritual needs of a new Christian:

- ◆ That they would be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man
- ◆ That Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith
- ◆ That they would be rooted and grounded in love
- ◆ That they would know the love of Christ which passes knowledge
- ◆ That they would be filled with all the fullness of God

As we pray these things for the new Christian, 1 John 4:10-11 tells us two things that will happen in the life of a growing Christian, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” The growing Christian will:

- Take root in the love of God
- Grow in experiencing the love of God

The will of the new Christian is being transformed as he learns to submit his will to the will of God. Christ is our perfect example of submitting our will to the will of God. In Matthew 26:39 Christ prayed, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*.” As we see the example of Christ, we see that He chose to do the will of the Father. We want to help the new Christian learn that he is now free to choose the will of the Father which will have eternal benefits rather than choosing his own will which will only have temporary results. The Christian who is growing strong in spirit, transforming his mind through the Word of God, and transforming his emotions as he takes root in the love of Christ will have a greater and greater desire to do the will of God because his focus is changing from immediate pleasure to eternal rewards (Hebrews 11:24-26).

The Lord wants to use you to help new Christians grow and mature by helping them grow in character and attitude as well as grow in knowledge. In our next topic, we will focus on helping them grow in ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you help new Christians grow strong in spirit and then be transformed in their souls (mind, emotions and will).