

Session 1.4: The Spiritual Self

Objectives:

1. to make the participants understand what it means to live according to the Spirit
2. to help the participants learn how to develop their spiritual life
3. to make the participants appreciate the importance of maintaining their spiritual growth

Introduction

As Christians, we are called to live in this world following the footsteps of Jesus. It is his Spirit who stills guide and leads us to the truth, and we can 'gauge' how spiritual we are by how much we listen to the Word of God and act upon them in order to lead a spiritual life. We cannot deny our spiritual self if we are a Christian. By the nature of our discipleship in Christ, we all share his Spirit. Therefore we cannot ignore our spirituality, the way we live out our calling, and we have to continue to ensure that we work at sustaining our life in the Spirit.

The Spiritual Life

*The spiritual life of any person is the path that a person chooses to follow in response to the God within. The spiritual life is a "path." It is more than doctrine or belief. It is the conscious choosing of a direction. The English word, "belief" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word which means, "by-life." It is an understanding that "belief" is a way of life. The spiritual life is also a "response." In the Christian tradition, this is called a conversion. It means that we set off on the spiritual path in response to something greater than ourselves. It may be a sudden and dramatic experience. It may be a long, slow process. But something happens to set us on the path. The "something" that happens to us is "God." The only way that we can experience God is **within**. All religious experience is an **inner** experience. The English word "spiritual" has its roots in Greek thought, and it implies a split between the material world and the realm of the spirit, because the opposite of spiritual is material. By definition, in English, spirituality seems to invite the spiritual seeker to exit this everyday, material world to attain some higher spiritual level.*

A New Creation

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17)! When we come to faith in Jesus Christ we are born again (see John 3:3), which means we are re-born spiritually. Does that mean that we immediately become perfect Christians? No, because we were born sinners (see Romans 3:23), we still have our sinful nature to deal with. Jesus' death delivered us from the overall reign of sin in our lives, but we still have to deal with indwelling sin in our flesh (the apostle Paul calls it our "mortal body") (see Romans 6:1-14). Spiritual growth is the continued transformation of our moral and spiritual character daily until our physical death.

Spiritual growth is not optional, spiritual re-birth must be followed by growth. God commands us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18). The expected growth of a Christian is evident when comparing how we used to live (old self) to how we are called to live (new self). The apostle Paul writes about the old self versus new self "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self,

which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24). (old self vs. new self see [Ephesians 4:17-5:21](#); [Colossians 3:1-17](#))

The Christian life is accepted as a dynamic relationship with God, self, others, and the world. Because of the belief that God has given a share of his Spirit, this relationship with God is spelt out in our everyday life. It is often described in terms of a pilgrimage, since we ever journey on toward more mature faith. We live with our hearts "set on the pilgrim ways" (cf. Psalm 84:5), continually being transformed from "one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Such an understanding of the Christian life sets before the church, corporately and as individuals, the necessity of ongoing spiritual formation and thus the necessity of lifelong learning.

Defining *spiritual formation* is no easy task and yet an important one. Those who use the term either fail to define it adequately or define it in entirely personal ways. Its meaning is frequently based in anything from Christian theology to New Age messiness. Definitions are important since they give boundaries and shape to what is intended, thus helping us limit our task and better understand what we are about.

Spiritual/spirituality

Spirituality, however defined, has to do with the practice of living out the Christian faith. In other words, spirituality requires both theological and practical understanding. The term *spirituality*, is "a broad concept" that includes a variety of elements, conscious and unconscious, formal and informal. While the term today is very popular, its meaning continues to be elusive and ambiguous; spirituality has been defined as broadly as the entire "Christian lifestyle" and as narrowly as "the disciplined life of prayer." The term, as used by some, is largely amorphous, lacking definitional precision, and it often refers vaguely to some interior state or heightened awareness or perhaps to participation in a project, however conceived, greater than oneself. None of this encourages us in the task of definition; however, it does point to an urgency to define this term that describes the way of living the Christian life.

A Christian understanding of spirituality must begin with a biblical perspective. In Pauline theology, 'Spirit' and 'spiritual' are not contrasted with 'physical' or 'material,' but rather the contrast is "between two ways of life or attitudes to life. The 'spiritual' is what is under the influence of, or is a manifestation of, the Spirit of God. For Paul the opposition is not between the incorporeal or nonmaterial and the corporeal or material, but between two ways of life. The 'spiritual' person (*pneumatikos, spiritualis*) is one whose life is guided by the Spirit of God; the 'carnal' person (*arkikos, carnalis*) is one whose life is opposed to the working and guidance of the Spirit of God. This leads to essential truths that require careful consideration when defining Christian spirituality.

The role of God's Spirit in Spirituality

Central to a Christian understanding of spirituality is the role of the Spirit of God. Salvation begins with regeneration and baptism of the Spirit. It

continues through the ongoing process of sanctification, in which the believer becomes more like Jesus. While requiring human effort, sanctification is always a work of the Spirit of God within the person, and thus is a gift of God's grace. Without the gift of God's Spirit animating our lives, there is no Christian spirituality. The spiritual life for the Christian is a life lived, in Paul's words, "in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:24). The Spirit of God animates people's lives, making them more sensitive to divine realities. For this reason, the first condition of true spirituality is then that 'we grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption' (Ephesians 4:30)." The second important and related truth concerns the understanding that, in its essence, spirituality is about a growing relationship with the Triune God. The divine reality central to Christian well-being is the ever-deepening love-relationship with God. The primary ministry of the Spirit in the world today is to mediate the presence of God in the lives of Christians so that God is known and experienced in ever deepening and more personal ways. According to Paul, it is only through the Spirit within that the Christian is assured of being a child of God and empowered to experience an ever-growing love-relationship with God in Christ (see Romans 8:14ff, Galatians 4:4ff). Therefore, Christian spirituality can be defined in terms of relationships—with self and others, but first and foremost with God. Spirituality can be described as "a consciously lived relationship with God in Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit, in the context of a Christian community of faith in the midst of the world. All of the practices that sustain and deepen a consciously lived relationship with God in Christ can be regarded as part and parcel of a Christian spirituality. As Christians have always known and constantly taught, relationship with God is lived out in experience through our relationship with one another. Jesus taught that the entire command of God is fulfilled in, first, the command to love God with our entire being, and, second, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). Henri Nouwen, in his book *Reaching Out*, describes the spiritual life as involving three movements: 1) a movement toward God, growing in relationship with the Triune God, 2) a movement toward self, growing in relationship with yourself, and 3) the movement outward toward the world, building relationships with members of our faith community and also with the world in which we live. The term *movement* highlights the fact that spirituality is dynamic, not static. It is about constant transformation. Hence the necessity for lifelong learning.

Because spirituality has to do with relationships, it is essentially practical in nature. Thus, when we consider defining the term, we are really considering what it means to live out the Christian faith, or how to live now in this world and in relationship with the Triune God. This living is not aimless. There is the goal of perfection, that is, becoming more like Christ, toward which we move. Through the ongoing process of sanctification, we are being "conformed to the image of [God's] Son," for which we were predestined (Romans 8:29). Because this is a process, pressing on is necessary, since we all can confess, as Paul did, "Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ has made me his own" (Philippians 3:12). Thus Paul exhorted the church to "press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14) and claimed that his goal for those among whom he ministered was to "present everyone mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28).

Spirituality is a term that refers to the practices that help us move toward this goal of perfection. Thus, spirituality is the pattern by which we shape our lives in response to our experience of God as a very real presence in and around us.

Spiritual Formation

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *formation* as “the action or process of forming; a putting or coming into form. The manner in which a thing is formed with respect to the disposition of its parts; formal structure, conformation.” In other words, formation is about the process of becoming. The word *formation* “suggests that the inner being of a person is radically altered so that he or she is no longer the same.” Formation, therefore, has to do with radical change in being. Along with the more frequently used term *transformation*, both a process and a contrast are suggested. Christians are in the *process* of becoming persons who stand in *contrast* to what they once were. Neither the contrast nor the process has anything to do with material versus nonmaterial, but it is a contrast of ways we live in this world. Either we live by “walking with the Spirit,” bearing “the fruit of the Spirit,” or we live in ways that ignore the Spirit’s authority over our lives. Therefore Paul urged the church at Rome to “be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Romans 12:2) rather than being “conformed to this world.” Spiritual formation involves an ongoing inner transformation. The primordial concern of spiritual formation is with the issue of *becoming*. Formation is a way to talk about the everyday continuities of becoming Christian, whereas transformation is more of a way to talk about the discontinuities, or the ‘big events.’ Spiritual formation refers to “an intentional, multifaceted process which promotes the transformation by which Christ is formed in us so that we can become his continually maturing disciples.” This stands in sharp contrast to an educational method that focuses on the accumulation of information as mere facts and interesting data. Our pursuit and concern is with formation, rather than *information*, since formation is about that which transforms and forms us into the likeness of Christ, both a process and a contrast, relating to the ongoing need for sanctification. The term *transformation* more clearly points toward the goal—being changed from one degree of glory to another; becoming more like Christ; living more God-like in the world; holiness of living; ever-deepening relationship with God. The goal implies the strong spiritual nature of the formation.

Definition: spiritual formation

Thus, spiritual formation can be defined as the never-ending inner work of the Spirit transforming believers into the perfect image of Christ. It is entirely a free gift of grace which is claimed through the church’s commitment to lifelong learning that nurtures spiritual formation.

Spiritual Formation: Goals and Means

An important distinction to keep in mind when discussing spiritual formation is the difference between the goals and the means of spiritual formation. The goals are what one hopes to accomplish; the means are the way by which one gets there.

The antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount present the ethics of the kingdom, which can only be attained through internal change in the inner person.

In Philippians 1:9-11 Paul prays that the believers would be changed in their

inner person so that they would ultimately bring praise to God.

In Philippians 3:8-12 Paul describes his own paradigm shift in which he no longer pursues things of this world but single-mindedly pursues knowing Christ.

In 2 Peter 1:3-8 Peter shows that transformation of the inner person to the character of God is secured by God's provision and enacted by intentional application of the individual believer.

These passages are very clear on the goals of spiritual formation but noticeably silent on the means by which those goals will be achieved. The ways in which spiritual formation is accomplished usually differs to some extent. Appropriate spiritual formation is defined in three ways: As long as (1) the goal is biblical, (2) clearly biblical means are emphasized, and (3) other means are not unbiblical, then the particular expression of spiritual formation has merit.

(1) The most important element of spiritual formation is its goal. Without a proper focus upon the sanctification of the individual with the character of Christ as the ultimate goal, spiritual formation cannot claim any value for the believer.

(2) Any expression of spiritual formation must emphasize clearly biblical means for growth, such as prayer, Bible knowledge, and fellowship with other believers. These have been hallmarks of the Christian life for centuries, and they should never be brushed aside or de-emphasized.

(3) If other means encouraged within a particular expression of spiritual formation are not unbiblical, they can have merit as potential paths toward growth. Let me clarify this third point with some examples. A large emphasis within the Christian tradition of my youth was a daily "quiet time." Believers were encouraged to spend daily, private time in prayer and Bible reading. On the one hand, there is no specific biblical mandate that believers have a daily quiet time, so there is no obligation upon the believer to do this. On the other hand, this practice is not unbiblical, as it emphasizes Bible study and prayer. This then could be a valuable means for spiritual growth in some believers. In a somewhat different vein, many contemporary approaches to spiritual formation emphasize stepping out of one's comfort zone in order to experience growth in a new way. It may be that a believer's prayer life is rich, but they have never been exposed to written prayers of saints from history past. Studying and praying these prayers could be a profitable way to commune with the Lord and seek his face. It may be that a believer never records their thoughts, prayers, and experiences in written form. Keeping a journal could be a beneficial spiritual exercise, even though that is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible as a means for spiritual growth. Meditating on written prayers and journaling are not unbiblical, so they could be valuable means of spiritual formation for certain believers.

Second, spiritual formation should be multifaceted. This is especially true when considering matters related to the spiritual life. Development of inner character is not attained simply through addressing what one might call matters of the heart. Philippians 1:9: "*that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight*" mean that our love for God should grow in correct knowledge of him and insight into spiritual matters which ultimately reflect upon him. This means that knowledge of God himself must be part of our spiritual formation. It is not sufficient only to address inner growth and character transformation. Side by side with this must be growth in knowledge and understanding of God. This historically is addressed in the

Church through a variety of means, for example, knowledge of the Bible, knowledge of theology, and knowledge of Church history. Emphasis only on the spiritual life could devolve into glorified navel gazing in which the individual becomes the center of attention when that place should only be held by our Lord. Spiritual formation must address the whole person, including the heart and the mind, as the scripture indicates that knowledge of God can lead to proper development of the inner person.

Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is essential to every Christian. Our spiritual journey begins the moment we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. The gradual, life-long process of working out our salvation involves changing our lives to reflect God's holiness (see 1 Peter 1:13-16). Our walk with God will be joyful and satisfying when we stay focused on eternal life instead of temporal things that we often occupy ourselves with (see 1 Peter 1:3-9).

Spiritual Growth - a practical process

Spiritual growth is very practical. Any believer can grow to maturity if he or she will develop the habits necessary for spiritual growth. Paul often compared training for the Christian life to the way athletes prepare themselves and stay in shape, (1 Timothy 4:7) "Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit." The path to spiritual fitness is as practical as the way you become physically fit. It involves personal discipline. Anyone can become physically fit if he or she will regularly do certain exercises and practice good health habits. Likewise, spiritual fitness is no mystery. It is simply a matter of learning certain spiritual exercises and being disciplined to do them until they become habits. Character is shaped by the habits we develop. Though these habits will include time spent with God, prayer, Bible reading and obedience to what He reveals to you, there is no particular formula for when you do these things and how much time you spend.

Spiritual Growth – a gradual process

There is no such thing as instant spiritual maturity. The truth is, spiritual growth is a gradual process of development. There are no shortcuts to maturity. It takes time. Ephesians 4:13 says, "... we arrive at real maturity - that measure of development which is meant by 'the fullness of Christ'." Maturity is a destination we arrive at. That implies a journey, a journey that will last a life time. Although God could instantly and miraculously change us into mature believers, he has chosen to develop us slowly and teach us one lesson at a time. God uses a gradual process of change to develop us into the image of Christ. Not to say there aren't tools that will help along the way, but different things work for different people. The important thing to remember besides its gradual process is that spiritual growth is a relationship. You cannot grow spiritually without growing closer to Christ. These are not rote disciplines we put ourselves through but a relationship we remain faithful to, and God has promised to lead us along the way as we stay faithful to Him. He will be with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Spiritual Growth - What is it?

Spiritual growth is detailed in 2 Peter 1:3-8, *"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and*

precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." So, spiritual growth includes: (1) increasing in your knowledge and understanding of God's Word, (2) decreasing in your frequency and severity of sin, (3) increasing in your practice of Christ-like qualities, and (4) increasing in your faith and trust in God. Perhaps the best summary of spiritual growth is becoming more like Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of what it truly means to be spiritual.

Spiritual Growth - How is it done?

In order for spiritual growth to occur, you first need to make sure you possess a true spiritual life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. *"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life"* (1 John 5:11-12). When you believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit lives inside of you (John 14:16-17) and you are a new creation in Christ! 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* Your old nature, which is dominated by sin, is replaced with a new nature that is under the influence of God's Spirit (Romans 6-7). Spiritual growth can only occur in a person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. Learning how to grow spiritually is a life-long journey which occurs as you read and apply God's Word to your life. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches us, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* In order for spiritual growth to occur, we must be taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained by God's Word. Then we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work. This is the essence of spiritual growth. Another key to Christian growth is walking in the Spirit. Galatians 5:16-18, 24-26 explains, *"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law...Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."* Walking in the Spirit is allowing Him to fill you (Ephesians 5:18), control you, and guide you. This is brought about by consciously choosing by faith to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide you in thought, word, and deed (Romans 6:11-14). Failure to rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance will result in a believer not living up to the calling and standing that salvation provides. Ephesians 4:1 says, *"...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*

Spiritual Growth - What are the results?

Spiritual growth is a life-long process of manifesting the acts of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) less and less and producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) more and more. Notice that it is the Holy Spirit who

produces the fruit in us. Yes, we must submit ourselves to the Spirit's leading, but it is the Spirit who produces the fruit of spiritual growth in our lives. What does spiritual growth look like? Galatians 5:22-23 has the answer, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."* If you are becoming more loving, more joyful, more kind, more self-controlled, etc., then you can rest assured that spiritual growth is genuinely occurring in your life. God works in different people in different ways. Some people grow rapidly, while others grow slowly, but steadily. Our focus should not be on comparing ourselves with others, but on comparing ourselves with God's Word. The Scriptures are the mirror to show us what we are like spiritually and to shine light on the areas that need to experience and learn spiritual growth. James 1:23-25 declares, *"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does."*

Spiritual Growth - Studying God's Word

Through His Word, God provides us all the spiritual resources we need to grow. *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Word is living, it is truth and it is sufficient for any and every situation or trial that we may experience in our lives (see 1 Peter 1:22-25; Psalms 19:7-14).

Spiritual growth will not take place unless we frequently spend time studying God's Word. We not only need to study the Word, but meditate on it, memorize it, and apply it to our lives (see James 1:22-25). Scripture exposes our sin and teaches us how to live like Christ. The Word of God must be active on our minds (see [Romans 12:1-2](#); [Ephesians 4:23](#)). The Word of God must be active on our behavior (see [Romans 6:12-13](#); [1 Timothy 4:7](#)). The apostle Peter compares our desiring of God's Word to a newborn baby, *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation"* (1 Peter 2:2). Christians should have the same intense craving for God's Word.

Spiritual Growth - Living By The Holy Spirit

As we strive to become more Christ-like, God is actively working in us (see Philippians 2:12; Philippians 1:6). He has given us His Holy Spirit to live within us (see Romans 8:9-11). The Holy Spirit strengthens us to holiness first by enabling us to see our need of holiness. He enlightens our understanding so that we begin to see God's standard of holiness. Then he causes us to become aware of our specific areas of sin. One of Satan's most powerful weapons is making us spiritually blind – unable to see our sinful character. The Bible says, *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). No one can understand it and expose it except the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to understand God's Word and apply it to our lives (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-16). As we faithfully study the Word, God through the Holy Spirit conforms us to His character (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:16-17). Living by the Spirit is submitting to God’s Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. When we do this, the Spirit produces fruit in our lives. The process of spiritual growth is not only getting rid of sin in our lives, but possessing Christ-like qualities. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other” (Galatians 5:22-26).

Spiritual Growth - Our Effort

God has given us the resources to grow. However, our part takes tremendous effort. The apostle Paul writes about the battle with sin *“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Romans 7:21-23).* Paul is describing the battle that we face daily, our old self vs. new self (flesh vs. spirit). If we understand this teaching, then we understand the daily battle that we face requires us to *“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:11).* (See 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:6-7)

Spiritual growth requires us to evaluate our lives according to God’s Word. There is no such thing as instant holiness. It is a gradual, life-long process that takes discipline. In Luke 9:23, Jesus calls us to deny ourselves daily *“Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

Since God has made you this way, with the capacity for living according to habit, you must consciously take a hard look at your life. You must make conscious – and carefully examine your unconscious – responses. You must become aware of your life patterns and evaluate them by the Word of God. What you learned to do as a child you may be continuing to do as an adult. Pattern by pattern you must analyze and determine whether it has developed from practice in doing God’s will or whether it has developed as a sinful response. There is only one way to become a godly person, to orient one’s life toward godliness, and that means, pattern by pattern. The old sinful ways, as they are discovered, must be replaced by new patterns from God’s Word. That is the meaning of disciplined living. Discipline first requires self-examination, then it means crucifixion of the old sinful ways (saying “no” daily), and lastly, practice in following Jesus Christ in new ways by the guidance and strength that the Holy Spirit provides through His Word. The biblical way to godliness is not easy or simple, but it is the solid way.

Spiritual Growth - Faithful in Prayer

Before we study the Word, we should pray and ask God to give us wisdom and understanding. We need to ask God to search our hearts to reveal sin that is hindering our spiritual growth. *“Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word” (Psalm 119:33-37).*

(see Psalm 139:23-24).

Spiritual Growth - Great Joy

Spiritual growth takes time and effort and requires a change to take place in our lives. We don't always like change. We may even be tempted to give up or think that it is too hard. Remember the fruit of the Spirit? Each day, as we deny ourselves and live in the Spirit, He produces fruit in us. As we overcome sin and grow closer to God, we will experience peace and joy in our hearts. Temporary joy can come from things like a promotion at work or the home town team winning a championship. But true joy only comes from abiding in Christ daily. We are encouraged by Jesus in John 15:10-11, *"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."*