

# GROWING SPIRITUALLY

“Becoming More Like Christ”



Prepared for the Equipping the Saints, Ministry of the Word  
by Pastor David Braden

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## GROWING SPIRITUALLY

In this booklet, I want to address a subject that is important to all of us...growing in our spiritual life, becoming more like Christ.

The first thing that I should say is that growth in our spiritual lives is a part of God's salvation provision for us.

There is much more to "getting saved" than getting a free ticket to heaven and some day you'll have wings, get to sit on a cloud and play a harp. I don't know where people get this kind of idea...or maybe I do, because the enemy of our souls doesn't want us to have the big picture. And if you do get saved, he'd be content if you just sat around and did nothing, thinking: "Is this all there is to being saved?"

But God didn't save us to a life of idleness. God has important plans for each of us. And if you will set your heart to pursue and to serve God, in just a short time you will be amazed at the changes that He will work in your life.

When we receive Christ, God brings us into His kingdom, His family. He receives us just as we are. But, at the moment in time when we are born again, God begins to make significant changes in our lives to prepare us for service in His kingdom.

The world doesn't prepare us to serve God. It prepares us to serve self and the idols of the world.

Nevertheless, God has made provisions for our spiritual growth so we can be effective and prosperous in our life with Him.

### **The New Birth**

When we are saved, something happens within us. We are given new life from above and we are given the Holy Spirit to be our guide, counselor and helper. This new life is a spiritual life. The Greek word is "zoe" which means a new quality of life. It means the highest and best of life which is Christ Himself. It is indestructible. It comes from God. And it is formed in His likeness.

God calls this a birth for good reason. For we are now a new child in the family of God. The NT scriptures have numerous passages that refer to new Christians as "babes in Christ."

John, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of his first letter, talks about children – young men – and fathers. In this, we see a progression. Our new existence has a childlike beginning. From there, it is expected that we will grow and mature to adulthood and the accompanying responsibilities.

Everyone loves and adores a new baby. People rejoice at a new birth. (We seem to be having an influx of “new life” at CCW at this time.) But if the baby remains as a child, then we think something is wrong. Our rejoicing turns to concern because the appropriate growth is not occurring. This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be.

It’s the same way in the Spirit. It is not God’s plan that you stay a babe in Christ. There are certainly qualities about a child that are desirable, (e.g. innocence, trusting, eager to learn, inquisitive) but to remain a child and immature is not in God’s plan.

God does have a plan for our lives. He has had a plan for our lives since the very beginning. He knows that, as a new babe in Christ, we need to grow, to mature, to become adults in the Spirit. And He does have a process for how this growth is to occur. He has made full provision for our spiritual growth process by inputting several things into our lives.

That is my purpose in this study, to show from Scripture, God’s plan for our own personal, spiritual growth.

## **The Holy Spirit**

At our new birth, God gives us His Holy Spirit to counsel, comfort and help us. He is called the helper and we sure need His help because we still have issues. The old man, although crucified on the cross, rears its ugly head when we sin and tries to re-establish its dominion over us. It wants to control our flesh-life the way it did before we were born again.

God gives us His Holy Spirit as a part of the cure for the wrestlings we have with the old nature.

**Rom. 8:13**     *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

God also gives us His spirit to reveal our inner needs and to bring change.

**Eph. 3:16-17** Paul prays: *“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,”*

From these verses, we see that this growing process comes by the Spirit.

**Col. 1:10**     *“that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing [Him], being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;”*

Increasing in knowledge is another indication that growth needs to occur.

One of the things the Spirit also does is to acquaint us with a deep sense of our need. He does it in such a way that we can't bear not to get relief from the distress we see and feel within us.

An Example: A trial or temptation comes (someone pushes one of our instant response buttons) and we get all out of whack. We get angry, lose our temper, argue, fuss, fight, our inner peace is disrupted...and then we wonder "What happened?" This isn't the new man. The new man is peaceable, loving, kind and longsuffering. These responses don't come from the new creation.

What happened is that the Holy Spirit is showing us an area of our life that needs healing or restoration or renewal. So we come before God, admit that we've got issues, repent for losing our temper and ask God to help us...change our heart, make this part of my inner man new.

You might pray: "God, I see that bad attitude. I repent of it. I don't want it. Help me to change."

Another thing the Spirit does is to stir up desires within the new creation within us for its own preservation, increase and improvement.

As you continue walking with God, you will feel a growing desire to be more like Christ, to know God better, to lead a holy life. Your prayer at this point might be for something more. I need meat not milk.

And you'll become more sensitive to the evil in the world. You will grow in your discernment of good and evil. Your longings for God will intensify. You may find yourself praying: "Lord Jesus, come quickly" or "I want to know Him better."

These are good signs. This is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit within your life.

Rom. 8:26 says the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. This word can also be translated sicknesses.

Verse 23 talks about the "firstfruits of the Spirit." Firstfruits means there is more to come. And that gives me hope. We only have the first installment. (downpayment ~ 10-20 %. therefore >80% still to come.)

So, another part of God's provision for our growth is to put the Holy Spirit within our hearts to help us.

## **Trials and Temptations**

The next thing God does to facilitate our growth in the Spirit is to allow trials and temptations to come into our lives.

James 1 is a remarkable chapter.

1:1 greeting = “chairo” means “rejoice” = “the first thing we are to do”

1:2 rejoice exceedingly – be very glad when testings come your way

“peirami” – includes both trials and temptations

trials - tests, circumstances of life that surround us, to help us grow and work patience in us

patience - the ability to abide under, stay under the difficulties of the test

It means you have the inner character to withstand and not surrender to the circumstances of a difficult situation.

The test is: Will you stay under or leave?

Will you abide in Christ or will you pack your bags and go looking for a “more spiritual” church?

Verse 1:4 says we are to allow patience to complete its work so we may be full and complete. By implication, this again shows us that we are not perfected yet, we are not fully mature.

The key to the rejoicing James exhorts us to in chapter 1 is knowing that God is working something important into our lives, something strongly needed in our character. We are to allow the work to continue because it’s going to produce in us godliness, qualities of the kingdom of God that Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> kind of testing is temptations.

Temptations come from three different sources:

- the world – the flesh – and the devil

The world tempts us to embrace its morality and its ethical system.

It’s Ok to take a baby’s life while it’s still in the womb.  
It’s Ok to have sex with someone you’re not married to.

The world tells you: "You can be all you want to be." This is one of marketing's great lies. It's only true if your heart and will are aligned with God's heart and will.

Why can't I be anything I want to be?

Well, let's ask some questions:

1. Who was there forming and designing you when you were in your mother's womb? See Ps. 139
2. Who knew you before you were born and had already scheduled every day of your life before you came into being? God, of course.

If these things are true, then it makes sense that he designed and equipped you for the things He had in mind for you.

As a child, I wanted to be a professional baseball player. I really wanted it. I practiced and then I practiced some more. I became reasonably skilled. But that wasn't God's plan and I didn't and still don't have the ability to be a baseball player even if I still badly want it.

Why can't I be anything I want to be? Because God equips us to be what He wants us to be. So...we need to discover what God wants us to be.

The commercial I really disliked was the one advertising liquid refreshment with the guys out in the woods around a campfire at night. You hear an authoritative sounding voice that says: "It doesn't get any better than this."

That's pathetic. That's hopeless if that's the best that life has to offer.

It does get better than that, a whole lot better, in Jesus Christ. Pray that you can be all that God wants you to be.

He is the answer.

He has always been the answer.

He will always be the answer to life's questions.

A second area of temptations is the flesh:

The flesh tempts us to give in to desire. But desire leads to sin which leads to death and destruction. We need to consider ourselves dead to sin, dead to the desires of the old nature since our old man was put to death on the cross.

The third area of temptations is the devil.

The devil and his agents tempt us to disbelieve God. “Did God really say that? (Gen. 3:1)

It’s his favorite line. It’s his first recorded words in the scripture. When he first appeared to Eve in the garden, he didn’t even greet Eve with a “Hi, how are you doing?” He jumps right in with his sword of deceit. From the very beginning, he is shown to be a liar and a deceiver.

He also likes to say:

God doesn’t really love you.  
You can’t really believe the Bible.  
He doesn’t hear you.  
He’s not going to answer your prayer.

He will also say:

You’re wasting your time, or  
Did He really say that was wrong?

With the devil we need to resist him and use the sword of the Spirit, just like Jesus did when he was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And when we do, we learn how to do spiritual warfare.

### **Scriptural Disciplines**

But there is still another source of help if we are willing to embrace it...the spiritual disciplines which we discover by examining the lives of God’s holy saints in the Scriptures. They too, were not born perfect, and as we search the Scriptures, we see that God was at work in them, shaping and transforming them, molding godly character in them. (e.g. Joseph, Jacob)

I Tim. 4:7 says we are to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

Discipline is the Greek word: “gumnazo” – the word that gives us our word gymnasium.

It means to practice, to train.

Paul uses metaphors in scripture to describe the Christian’s training:

- athlete preparing to run a race
- a soldier preparing for war

In II Pet. 1:5-7, Peter says to “make every effort”

This is something we do.

Note: pim = **p**resent **i**mperative which can be a command or a strong exhortation to do something

Why do we need to make every effort? because this is important to your spiritual life and growth and ultimately for the kingdom of God.

Phil. 2:12-13 tells us to ... "work out our salvation with fear and trembling"

This is not the salvation of the new birth; it's the salvation of sanctification which is the shaping and transforming of us into the likeness of Christ.

Examples from Scripture:

- Jesus – who learned obedience from the things He suffered  
practiced silence and solitude
- Paul – silence and solitude - 14 years in the desert to be alone and work through his new faith
- Joseph – serving: wherever he was taken and to whomever he was a servant, he served faithfully, diligently and with wisdom.
- David - was a worshipper
- Bereans - study – Acts 17:1 says that they searched the Scriptures daily
- Nehemiah – prayer and fasting, e.g. 3 months of prayer and fasting when he heard of the demise of Jerusalem;

And, you can't help but notice a number of Nehemiah's prayers in his book while he was working on rebuilding the wall and leading the people in a spiritual reformation.

The spiritual disciplines are like a farmer who clears the land, plows the field, plants the seed, pulls weeds, fertilizes and then waits for God to cause the crops to grow.

He does what he knows to do and then he trusts God to do what only God can do.

What happens if he doesn't clear the land, plow the field and plant the seed? He gets nothing, nada, zip, zero.

In the same way, we do what we can do and trust the growth to God.

The spiritual disciplines have no power to change us but what they do is to position us before God so He can make the changes. The spiritual disciplines present us to God as a living sacrifice. And then God works with the vessel that has been submitted to Him.

One of the things I recommend is that you take some time to learn about the disciplines and then pray and ask God to show you one that is well suited to what He has designed

you to be and do. I have a couple of excellent books that I recommend that will give you more information on the spiritual disciplines.

Be sure to start small.

Don't commit to the world all at once but take baby steps.

Example: If you want to memorize scripture (which is one way to study and meditate on Scripture) select a short Psalm as a starting point. Then, if you find this discipline works for you, take on something a little larger.

So, let's take a look at the complete spiritual growth picture. (See chart at end of this study.)

We have 4 major areas where we grow in the spirit.

- the new birth
- the help of the Holy Spirit
- trials and temptations that God allows into our lives
- the spiritual disciplines

The reward is "the crown of life." (Ja. 1:12)

What is this?

In the early Olympic contests, it was a wreath of leaves that was given to the victor. The victor would wear this wreath in public and get admiration and congratulations from the people. That was his reward.

But God gives us something of much greater value than a wreath of dying leaves and the short-lived congratulations of the public.

I think it is what it says it is, a crown of life.

It means that my reward is life itself, a new and improved life here on earth.

So, every time I endure a trial or resist a temptation successfully, I receive in my spirit the changes that these tests work in me. The result is that I'm on a path of an ever-increasing, improving life style while here on earth because I am becoming like Christ.

James said that when you've let patience do its work, you will be perfect, full and complete. You will not be disjointed, fragmented, confused, without direction and hope in your life, unqualified for service in God's kingdom.

You will be perfect, complete, not lacking anything.

That's pretty incredible. Now that's a reward worth enduring for.

Aren't these the things that are best?

Seeking God, enduring trials and resisting temptations, and the spiritual disciplines are the gateways to improved, ever growing, ever strengthening life until we become mature and complete, not lacking anything.

### Growing Spiritually - Application

The chart below provides a summary of the application stage.

<b>GROWING SPIRITUALLY - Applications</b>		
<b>1</b> Changes at new birth	Enter into the kingdom by grace through faith	
<b>2</b> Holy Spirit	Acknowledge need, repent, ask H.S. for help to change	<b>“The Crown of Life”</b>
<b>3</b> Trials/Testings Temptations	Trials: rejoice, endure, stay under circumstances temptations: resist, confess, leave the “old” Use the sword of the Spirit	Mature, full and complete, lacking nothing (Ja. 1:12)
<b>4</b> Christian Disciplines	Learn about disciplines, ask H.S. to lead you to a discipline “start small”	

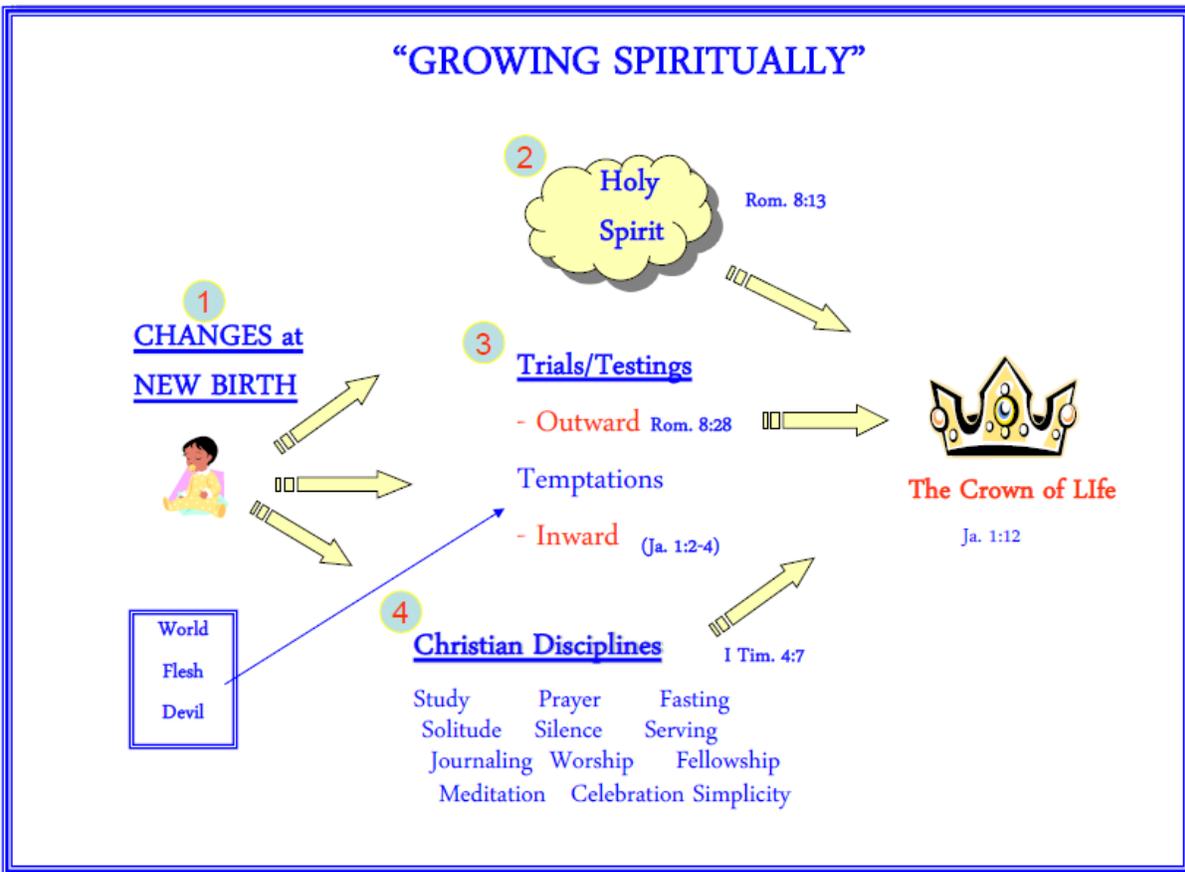
To summarize: God has made full provision for our spiritual growth.

But spiritual growth is not automatic. It requires our effort, our application in cooperation with God's Spirit.

Consider: Where are you today in your spiritual life?  
Where will you be or want to be in 1 year, 2 years, in 5 years?

What will you do to work with God in achieving your goals?

# "GROWING SPIRITUALLY"



## ABOUT PASTOR DAVID

I grew up in Illinois; my wife, Brenda, in Oregon. It was a path of many twists and turns to get the two of us connected in California! We entered into our marriage covenant in 1986 after she had agreed to my proposal for a life of adventure. Brenda claims that she scarcely comprehended the adventure that our life would be simply by saying those two little words (I do).



We had both been Christians for a number of years and determined to make God the center of our marriage. In order to make a good beginning, we structured our wedding vows around the instructions of Scripture. We are convinced that this is the reason for our successful, growing relationship.

I received my BS in Civil Engineering in 1966 from the University of Missouri. Having taken ROTC in college, I next served as an officer in the U.S. Army, stationed in Germany.

After returning home to the states, I attended Golden Gate Seminary in California and received a Master of Divinity in 1972.

I worked for three Engineering companies before settling in with GE Nuclear Energy in San Jose, California. I finished my engineering career with 25 years of service at GE.

I was ordained a minister of the gospel in 1991.

Brenda is blessed with musical gifts and has played numerous instruments, e.g. bassoon, flute, guitar, piano, bass. She taught piano to children for 14 years until our move to Wilmington, NC. I also had some musical inclinations, growing up in a musical family in which everyone played at least one instrument. Brenda also has a heart for and is involved in a local "Special Touch" ministry, a ministry to people with disabilities.

Several years ago, we began attending Calvary Chapel San Jose, CA where Don McClure was pastoring. The emphasis on God's Word and the presence of God's Spirit in the worship kept us coming back until we felt confident that this was to be our church home.

Brenda became involved with the Praise team playing flute and singing. She also led the worship for two Women's Bible studies. I became involved in the teaching ministry working principally with the mature adults class (ages around 50-95, they called themselves the "Sonshiners") and also a young married couples class.

Even though we felt like we were settling into the San Jose Fellowship, in early 2004 we were presented with a company relocation, and we began to feel that God was leading us to a significant change, relocating from the West Coast to the East Coast. Little did we know what was in store for us in Wilmington, NC.

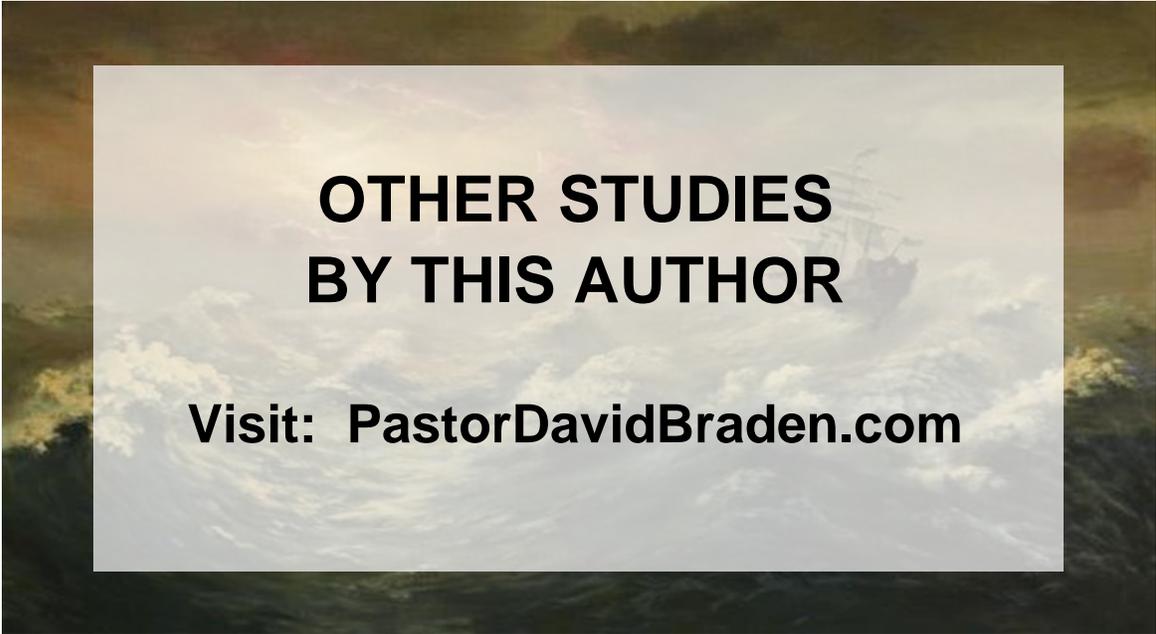
We often felt like Abraham who was told to leave his homeland but was given no information regarding what he would encounter when he arrived at his destination.

The next very shocking surprise was my early retirement, something we had not even considered when planning the move to the east coast. Nevertheless, God made it very clear that my engineering career of 37 years was soon to be ended. The retirement occurred almost 5 years in advance of my plan. But God had a bigger (and better) plan. One of my reoccurring supplications to God has been that I would rather be expending the main energy of my life teaching the Word of God than pouring it into the management of engineering projects and writing technical engineering reports. Now, God was giving me the desire of my heart.

I eventually came on staff with a local church and served for 7½ years as an associate pastor teaching Bible studies and ministering principally in the Equipping the Saints ministry. Brenda was involved in several ministries... Praise Team, Special Touch, hospitality/helps, Home Fellowships, to mention a few.

After a 1-year sabbatical in 2014, God has led us to begin a new fellowship which is called Safe Haven Berean Fellowship. Our focus is principally on the Word of God, with both Bible book studies and doctrinal teachings in progress at this time. Principal focuses are on the assurance of salvation, knowing what God in Christ has done for us, learning to live in a way that honors and glorifies God, and a continual focus upon our End Times preparations for our coming King.

Looking back now over the years that led us to this place in life, we are amazed at the Sovereignty of God and how he has orchestrated the events that have brought us to this place in this time. His loving and merciful hand has been seen time and again as he has opened doors and brought us quickly to where He wants us to be. He is, without question, an awesome God.



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BY THIS AUTHOR**

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