

Keys to Spiritual Growth - Part 4

by John MacArthur

Spiritual growth is the process of glorifying God, and it can be done by trusting in Him and being fruitful.

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Scripture: Psalm 86:12, Psalm 92:1

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Maturity In Christ"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth by focusing on glorifying God through praise, fruitfulness, trust, and thanksgiving. It highlights the transformation that occurs when our lives are aligned with God's attributes and works, leading to maturity in Christ.

Transcript

We come now to our fourth study of the theme of spiritual growth and we've been having an exciting time as we've been covering the basic principles of what it really means to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A very basic truth, a very basic part of Christian living. Since we are alive in Christ and one of the characteristics of life is growth, we should be maturing and growing to be more like Jesus Christ.

And so we've been looking at exactly what that means. And the basic thought that we have been following is this, that growing in Christ is a matter of giving God glory. As we focus on the glory of God, we ascend as it were from one level of glory to the next, moving more and more to be like Jesus Christ.

So spiritual growth then is the process of glorifying God. And as I live my life to the glory of God, I will be pulled along by a divine power in a progressive way to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ. So synonymous really with spiritual growth is living to the glory of God.

And I told you in our last lesson that if you do not live to the glory of God, you do not grow. If you're not living to God's glory, you're living to the glory of your own self. And that retards immediately spiritual maturity.

But as our lives are abandoned to the glory of God, through His causes, to His honor, to His praise, then we progress along the line of growth. Now if that's true, if glorifying God is the way we grow, then it is absolutely essential that we know what it means to glorify God. That is not just a foggy concept, not some vague mystical thought, but glorifying God is a very concrete, practical truth.

In fact, I've shared with you already three keys to spiritual growth, three key areas in which we glorify God. Number one, we glorify God by confessing Jesus as Lord, Philippians 2. Number two, we glorify God by aiming our life at that purpose, 1 Corinthians 10:31. In our last study, we saw that we glorify God by confessing our sin.

As Joshua 7:19 says, give glory unto the God of Israel, make confession of your sin. Now I want us to come to a fourth principle for glorifying God, and it is this. We glorify God by trusting in Him.

Now this seems a very basic thing, and indeed it is. It's very essential for us to realize that glorifying God is simple. It's not complex.

Some of us have seen the stained-glass windows and the massive cathedrals and all of the grandeur and the embellishment of religions that are supposedly doing all of this to the glory of God, when in fact glorifying God is a very basic and simple thing. In fact, it is as simple as trusting Him. Let me show you an illustration that points this out.

Look with me in your Bibles to Romans chapter 4 and verse 20. This great portion of the Word of God deals with the life of Abraham, and in Romans chapter 4, Paul the Apostle is speaking about Abraham and his relationship to faith. Abraham was saved not by law, but by faith, as is any man in any age.

And in verse 19, it says regarding Abraham, and being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. Now, that tells us a little about the circumstance. Abraham and Sarah had never had children.

They had never had children because Sarah's womb was dead. She could not produce. By this time, Abraham is 100 years old, and Sarah is nearly 100 years old, maybe four years younger, 96 or so.

They have never been able to have a child. God comes to them and says, you're going to have a child. Now, you know well enough the story to remember that Abraham at first did not believe God.

But after a while, he began to be confident of God's Word and did not any longer disbelieve that a hundred-year-old man and a 96-year-old woman, neither of whom had known a child, could bring forth a son. And so says Paul, he was not weak in faith, but rather, verse 20, and here's the key, he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith. Now, notice the last phrase, giving glory to God.

What glorified God in Abraham's life was that Abraham believed God. God said, Abraham, I know it sounds ridiculous, and by the way, they even named the child Isaac, and that means laughter, because it started out as such a joke. But the point is, Abraham is here believing God, and that gives God glory.

What it's saying is, God, if you say it, I believe it. And what that means is, God, I trust your word, and that gives him glory. Now, when God says something and you don't believe it, you're dragging him down.

You're saying, well, I know, God, you just, you have a good thought in mind. I really appreciate the offer and the thought, God, but you just don't understand the circumstances. You know, it's kind of like, people say, well, you know, the Bible says, my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches by Christ Jesus.

Oh, what a wonderful truth it is. God can supply all our needs, we know that. And then as soon as they get into dire straits, they begin to worry, they get anxious, they don't know where their resources are, they panic, they begin to wonder whether God can do it, they begin to question God, they roll into psychological trauma, and then people say to them, say, aren't you the one who goes around saying, my God shall supply all your needs? Either you believe it or you don't.

If you say you believe it but you don't manifest that you believe it, then you're really doubting God, and doubting God is to say that God doesn't really live up to his reputation. Now, that dishonors God. In 1 John 5.10, there's a very simple word that ought to be a rather shocking one to many people, and it's this, he that believeth not makes God a what? A liar.

You see, disbelieving God says he's a liar. I'll give you an illustration. The Bible says that we should give our money to the Lord.

It says that we should give sacrificially, abundantly, never let the right hand know what the left hand does. We should give, and in turn, God will give back to us. Now, we have fine time understanding the principle, it's right there in the Bible, but when it comes to giving, we have this problem with our hands, or with our pens.

They just don't go above a certain figure. We just can't quite crank it up. We say we believe that God meant what he said, but we really don't believe it unless it's pragmatic, right? Unless it changes the way we act.

We say, I believe that when I die, I'm going to go to heaven, and yet some people are so anxious about death that they're distraught about it. They're more anxious about dying than they will be when they die. The pain is greater in the anticipation than it is in the reality.

It's like going to the dentist, and the fact of the matter is, even though God supplies all we need at the point of death, we just really aren't too sure that's going to happen the way he says it is. You see, most of us really honestly have to face the fact that we're a little thin in this area of really believing God. Abraham staggered not at the promise of God.

God said, walk this way, and he walked it. He came to the place where Isaac was a young man, and God said to him, alright Abraham, I gave you your son. In the loins of that child is the promise of the Abrahamic covenant.

Out of his loins will come this great nation, and Abraham, I'm telling you, this is the fulfillment of my promise. Now take him up on a mountain and kill him. You know what Abraham did? He just took off with Isaac, strapped on him a bundle of sticks, and off they went up to the mountain, laid him on the altar, tied him down, took a knife, and was ready to plunge it into his heart.

He never flinched, never stopped until he heard a ram and a thicket, and he knew God had provided a way out. But the point of the story is this. Abraham was willing to go the full route to kill the very thing that was the fulfillment of God's promise in his life.

He was absolutely confident that if God said to do something, you do it. You never stagger, and God will provide. He could have said, well God, how in the world can you possibly say there's going to be an Abrahamic covenant fulfilled with people as the sands of the sea, as the stars of the heaven, if I'm going to kill the only one there is? But he didn't argue.

He believed God would keep his word even if he had to kill his son. Personally, I think he may well have believed that Isaac would be raised from the dead, even though in his experience that had never happened. That's how much he believed God.

That's the issue. To believe God gives him glory. You see, God's glory is the sum of all of his attributes, the fullness of all of his majesty, and if he is who he says he is, then he is a God to be believed.

Now, you're going to grow spiritually when you live a life that functionally trusts God. When you say, if your word says it, I'm going to do it. If your word promises it, I'm going to claim it.

If your word commands it, I'm going to obey it. We greatly dishonor God when we claim to believe in him, and yet we can't cope with life. Let me give you an illustration.

Turn with me in your Bible to Daniel chapter 3. Daniel chapter 3. In Daniel, in the third chapter, we find this fascinating incident of the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar, in a rage and a fury, in verse 13, commands that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before the king. That's himself.

Because they will not acquiesce to his rules. They will not worship the image. They only worship the true God.

So he brings them in, and he says in verse 14, is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Is it true that you won't cooperate with the religious system extant in the country? Now, if you'd be ready that at that time that you hear the sound of the hornpipe, lyre, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music to fall down and worship the image which I have made? Well, but if you worship not, you shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace, and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hand? Now, this is a pretty dire situation if you happen to be Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It's not too tough for us tonight, right? We're fairly far removed. But he says to them, either you worship or else, and then what God is going to deliver you out of my hand.

So he immediately puts to test their faith. Do they believe their God can handle Nebuchadnezzar or not? They can't see their God. He's invisible.

Nebuchadnezzar is visible. They can't see the hosts of their God. They can see the hosts of Nebuchadnezzar.

He has a formidable army. They can see the power. They can see the punitive pressure applied to them in the system because they are right there in it.

But what do they do? Verse 19 or 16, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we're not concerned to answer you in this manner. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us. We know God can deliver us from the fiery furnace, deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up, even if he doesn't. We're still not going to worship because our God will deliver us anyway. One way or another, if not out of the fire, he'll deliver us to his righteous kingdom because we've been true to him.

Well, Nebuchadnezzar was so angry in verse 19, it says the form of his visage was changed. It means he screwed up his face. He was so mad.

And he spoke and he commanded they heat the furnace seven times hotter. And so they pumped up the fire till it was seven times hotter than normal, and of course the guys who threw them in burned to death it was so hot. And they threw in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Well, what's so wonderful about this is that they really did believe God. Now, you and I may say, oh yes, and that's the way I believe God, but standing on the edge of the fiery furnace would be a different deal. Well, they were about to pitch you in.

I mean, there's no human way you're going to escape that, but they believed God. You see, faith in God knows no impossibilities. You'll hear sometimes a wife will come in and she'll say in the counseling situation, oh, she'll say, Pastor, there's no way we can get along in our marriage.

No way. I'll say, well, is your husband a Christian? Yes. Are you a Christian? Yes.

I mean, there's no way two Christians can get along. Well, you don't understand. We're not compatible.

Does the Holy Spirit dwell in both of you? Yes. You both have Christ living in you? Yes. You think Christ is compatible with himself? Well, yes.

But you just don't understand. No, you don't understand. You don't believe God.

You don't believe God that if God be pleased to keep a marriage together and if God be powerful to make it so, if you just get your life lined up in the right direction, it'll all happen. But don't disbelieve the power of God. You know, it's like the lady who came to see her pastor and said, my husband rubs me the wrong way, to which the pastor replied, well, turn around you old cat and everything will be fine.

The solution to the problem is to get yourself right, not to disbelieve God's power. You see, God can do it, if you're in the right position. And the simplest things in life, we need to believe God.

I guess the greatest challenge to faith that I know of in human history is the story of Noah. God said to Noah, build a boat, and it didn't make sense because he wasn't near any water. In fact, he was in the middle of the desert.

In fact, it may be that he never saw any water to speak of. And God told him to build the boat so big that it was inconceivable. It was about the size of the Queen Mary, which is a fairly large boat for a guy to build, especially when there were no lumber yards.

And you had to chop down your own trees and hew out of those trees your own planks. So here's a guy in the middle of the desert, in the middle of a pagan society, and God says to build a ship, a massive thing, just massive ship. And so he begins.

Well, it took him a hundred and twenty years to build the boat. Now, I can imagine myself ordering the lumber, and I can imagine myself, you know, doing a few things at the beginning, but a hundred and twenty years later, finally getting the door hung. No chance.

I'd have been long gone. And if God had told me what he told him, because it's going to rain, that wouldn't have helped anyway, because there'd never been rain. He didn't even know what rain was.

And of course, for a hundred and twenty years, everybody laughed at him. I mean, they would laugh at him like a guy in your neighborhood who started to build the Queen Mary in his backyard, saying there was going to come a great flood and we're all going to float away in this. You have the same reaction that they would have had to him.

He's nuts. It's out of his mind. Only you have one advantage.

You've seen rain. They'd never seen that. But the Bible says Noah was a man of great faith.

Folks, that is putting it mildly. Hebrews 11, 7. By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not yet seen. Stuff nobody ever knew about.

Moved with a sense of awe. Prepared an ark for the saving of his house. Listen.

By which he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Blessed that man's heart, he believed God. In the midst of a ridiculous situation.

A hundred and twenty years of faith. Oh, what glory he gave to God. What glory he gave to God.

Now, in your life and my life, do we do that? Do we glorify God by believing him? You know, when you live in a state of faith, you grow. The Bible says that we walk, not by sight, but by what? By faith. And that again is a picture of Christian progress.

A picture of maturing. We walk, we We move along toward God's perfect likeness. We move along in spiritual progression as we step by faith, not by sight.

As soon as you try to analyze everything by what you see, you're going to get into trouble. You're going to get like the people in the land of Canaan when the Jewish people came into the land to establish their nation, and they sent the spies, and the spies came back and said, Ah, we don't want to go in there. We were like grasshoppers, there are giants in there.

And they had what I like to call the grasshopper complex. They walked by sight. They're too big, they're too formidable.

Joshua and Caleb came back and said, God's on our side, let's go. Two walked by faith, and ten walked by sight. Ten dishonored God, said God can't handle the circumstances.

Two said, God is bigger than the circumstances. What do you say? Do you live by faith? As you live by faith, you're like Abraham who staggered not at the promise of God, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. You want to live to His glory? Believe Him in everything that happens, everything that He says, every promise He gives, and walk by faith, and that is the progress of spiritual maturity.

Let's go on to a fifth principle. We glorify God fifthly, and this is a tremendously important truth, by fruitfulness. We glorify God by fruitfulness.

Now this is a subject that we could spend a lot of time talking about. I want to try to kind of boil it down a little bit for our study in this session. But in John chapter 15 is our key text in verse 8. In John 15, the Lord is talking about how He is the vine and we are the branches.

In other words, His life pulses through us. We are spiritually one organism with Him, organically connected, so that the flow of His life proceeds through us. And as the flow of His life proceeds through us, it produces fruitfulness.

Now, verse 8 tells us what it is that fruitfulness accomplishes. It says this, In this is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit. Now that's the point.

Fruitfulness glorifies God. Spiritual growth, again, is glorifying God. And glorifying God is bearing fruit.

Why? Because that is allowing God's power to be productive in our lives. As we have received Christ, aim it as glory, deal with sin in our lives, walk by faith, God produces in us fruitfulness. Now it dishonors God when you have little fruit.

I don't think there is any such thing as a no-fruit Christian. There are just fruits, little fruits, and much fruit. Because if you're a Christian at all, you're going to have at least a few dried grapes hanging somewhere.

Because Jesus said, By their fruits you shall what? You'll know them. So, I mean, you may have to look a long time. We have a peach tree in our backyard.

This year that peach tree went wild. That peach tree was the greatest illustration of a productive Christian I've ever seen. I mean, there was so much fruit there, it could have fed the neighborhood.

But last year we looked long and hard to find a little, tiny, shriveled up, useless peach. But at least there was one there which proved to us that it wasn't an apple tree. There are a lot of Christians like that.

I mean, you look long and hard, at least you find something that says they belong to God. But that's not what glorifies the Father. What glorifies the Father is much fruit, much fruit.

And as a believer, spiritual growth is the process of production, of producing fruit. Now, it's very important that you produce fruit because that's how you manifest your character. How do people know that you're a believer and that you belong to God if they don't see any product, right? How do they know you're an apple tree if you don't have an apple? How do they know you're a peach tree if you don't have a peach? I mean, how are they going to know you're an orange tree if you don't have an orange? How can they tell what you are unless there's a manifestation? And so that the character of God is at stake.

God wants to produce something that radiates Himself in your life. He wants to do more than what your flesh can do, more than what the world can do. This is important.

That's what Paul meant when he wrote to Titus and said, you are to live to adorn the doctrine of God. There ought to be something of the nature of God hanging on you so that it's evident that He's at work in your life. In Romans 2, verse 24, a most interesting statement is made by the Apostle Paul to Israel.

He says, for the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. Instead of you showing the world what God is like, you claim to belong to God and you show them something that God isn't like at all. In fact, Jesus said to the leaders of Israel, you're of your father the devil.

The product of your life is not the product of God. What a terrible thing that people should think it is. In Matthew, chapter 5, verse 16, Jesus said, let your light so shine before men that they may see your what? Your good works and do what? Glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus is saying the product of your living is the manifestation of God. And if it isn't there, then God isn't visible. And so God will be glorified when we are productive Christians, when something is happening, when the flow through the vine and the branches produces some luscious grapes that are useful to bless somebody else.

In fact, in 1 Corinthians 9, 7, Paul says, who plants a vineyard and doesn't eat the fruit of it? It's a pretty fair question. I mean, who plants a vineyard and doesn't eat the fruit of it? You think God went to all of this trouble to pour His very life in you, His very eternal life that He made you one who was a recipient of the very power of Christ to produce nothing? Not at all. We are to be fruitful.

Now, somebody might say, well, that's all well and good, John, you keep talking about the fact that we're to be fruitful, but what's fruit? What do you mean? Well, I'm glad you asked, because that's very important. What do we mean by fruit? Philippians 1, 11, a good place to start, listen to this, being filled, not just here and there, but filled with the fruits of righteousness, now listen to this, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God. When you produce, God is glorified.

That's such a great thing. And what is it? The fruits of righteousness. What is fruit in your life? I'll tell you, very simple, righteousness.

Righteousness. What is righteousness? That's right as opposed to wrong. Righteousness is just a long way of saying doing right.

When you do right, that glorifies God. When you do wrong, that dishonors God. So, if you're to have fruit, that means you're to have visible righteousness.

Visibly, you do what's right. That's really all righteousness means, doing what is right. There are some other scriptures that will help to fill out our understanding.

2 Thessalonians 1, 11 says, wherefore, also, we pray always for you. What do you pray? This, said Paul, that our God would count you worthy of this calling and, listen, fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power. In other words, he wants to produce in you all of his goodness and the power of his arm be displayed and the goodness of his grace be manifest.

He wants a product. Why? That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you. See, now we're right back to Christ in you, the hope of glory again.

If God is to be glorified, it's in our fruitfulness. People should be able to look at your life and say, you know, your life is different. You affect people differently than others.

You have a certain attitude that's different. Your behavior is different. Your influence is different.

Your effect on things is different. There's a product to your life that's unlike any other life. Ah, that's fruit.

Now, let me get real specific. There are two kinds of fruit in the Bible. The first is called action fruit.

Action fruit, that's called action fruit by me, not by the Bible, just a category. What is action fruit? Listen, and I'll show you. Romans 1.13 says it.

Now, I would not have you ignorant, brethren, but oftentimes, Paul says, I purpose to come unto you. In other words, a lot of times I wanted to come to you in Rome, but was prevented. Why did you want to

come, Paul? In order that, that's a Hinnah purpose clause, I might have some fruit among you, even as among other Gentiles.

Now, what's he referring to here? What is fruit here? Converts, right? I wanted to come and win some people to Christ. Fruit then, action fruit, is winning someone to Christ. Do you have that product in your life? You want to know something? I think the most natural thing for a believer to do is to win other people to Christ, because one of the products of life is reproduction.

Why Paul said to Timothy, the things that I've committed to you, commit the faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. Keep the process going. Jesus said, go into all the world and make disciples, reproduce yourself.

That's one of the qualities that life carries, the ability to reproduce. So he says, I wish I could come and have some fruit like I've had in other places. Fruit is converts to Christ.

Now, as a believer, if you are involved in reproduction, you are growing. You're growing because life is at work in you. But that's not all.

There are other things that are also fruit. Philippians chapter 4, verse 17, and in this section, just to give you a little background, the Philippians had sent Paul a rather magnanimous gift. They were very generous, and they had sent him a love offering.

But he says to them, in effect, you know, I really appreciate your gift, I just want you to know that I don't need it. But even though I don't need it, I'm so glad you sent it. Why? Verse 17, not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

In other words, the great thing about your gift was that it was fruit, not that I needed it, but that you produced it, you see? Now, if you're sitting around waiting for somebody to have a huge, big need before you act, you've missed the point. Maybe you ought to give to somebody who doesn't have that great of a need, but because it's fruit, because it's fruit in your life. When your life is filled with the power of God, and when you are totally committed to glorifying the Lord, you will find yourself giving, because giving is fruit, an act of giving.

So what is fruit? It is winning someone to Christ. It is giving, even a monetary gift, even when there isn't a specifically great need. You give because it's in your heart to give.

My father used to always say, you can give without loving, but you can never love without giving. And if you love, and if you're lost in the glory of God, you're going to give and give and give, even as God gives. And by the way, God never gives us just what we need.

He always gives us more, doesn't He? Ephesians says He gives according to His riches, not out of His riches, but according to. And there's a big difference. If I gave you out of my riches, and you came to me, let's say I was a millionaire, just for the sake of illustration, and you said to me, I have a great need, and so forth and so forth, and I said, well, that's wonderful, out of all my riches, here's a check for ten dollars.

Send it wisely. You'd say, wait a minute, fella, you didn't give according to your riches, you gave out of. If I wrote you a check for ten thousand or a hundred thousand, you'd say, you gave according to.

And when God gives, it's never out of, it's always according to, because that's the nature of a giving heart, and that's fruit in your life, as you give. Another thing that we could consider fruit is in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 15. It says there, by Him, therefore, that is by Christ, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.

Now watch, the fruit of our lips giving thanks. Did you know that saying thanks to God is fruit? That's right. That's a product of God's working in your life.

Fruitfulness is winning people to Christ, giving a gift, and saying thanks. How about Colossians 1.10? Colossians 1.10 says this, that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. Now get this, being fruitful in every good work.

Now do you see how encompassing that is? Any good work is fruit. It could be winning someone to Christ, giving a gift, thanking the Lord with your lips, or doing any good work. It's all fruit.

And people, that's what God wants to see in your life. And what I'm saying is this, productive Christians are growing Christians. If you're just around and there's no real fulfillment in your life, there's no manifestation of ministry, there isn't some product, there aren't some great big luscious grapes hanging on your life, then you're not really growing.

You're not moving. You're just there, and you're not productive. Spiritual growth will always be manifest in fruitfulness.

Now I told you there are two kinds of fruit, that's action fruit. What you do, you win someone to Christ, you make a gift, you praise the Lord, you do a good work. But there's a different category altogether, and I call it attitude fruit.

Now if you look with me for a minute at Galatians chapter 5, you'll see that particular kind of fruit. Verse 22, it says, "...but the fruit of the Spirit is," and here you don't have action at all, you have attitude, "...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." Now here the Apostle Paul lists attitudes. He's not talking about action, he's talking about attitude.

Love is an attitude. Joy is an attitude. Peace is an attitude.

Longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, or humility. They're all attitudes. But now watch.

On the one hand you have action fruit, on the other hand you have attitude fruit. Now listen to me. If you have action fruit without attitude fruit, that's legalism.

You see? You're just cranking it out like the Pharisees. Oh, there are plenty of people going around, you know, telling people about Jesus, but their attitude isn't right. They're just doing it out of duty, obligation, fear.

There are people who give their money, they put it in the offering grudgingly and of necessity. There are people who, you know, they don't do certain things, you know, boy they don't do this and they don't do that and they don't do the other and they don't do this and they got rotten attitude all the time and they wish like mad they could do every one of them. They're doing the right action, but they don't have the right attitude.

On the other hand, if you have the right attitude, you'll automatically have the action and that's true spirituality. You see, action fruit without attitude fruit is legalism. Attitude fruit will produce action fruit and

that's true spirituality.

If you walk in the Spirit, that's a spiritual concept of yieldedness. If you walk in the Spirit, the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control, and as He produces those attitudes, those attitudes will produce the right action. But there are plenty of phonies in the world doing the action without the attitude.

Witness the words of Jesus when some say unto Him, We've done many wonderful works in Your name and He says, Depart from Me, what? I never even knew you, you weren't even in the family. So that we will glorify God when we are fruitful, and that means the right attitudes and the right action. And people, the attitudes are very important.

You say, well, John, how do you get those right attitudes? How do you have a heart full of love? How do you have a heart full of joy and peace? How do you have a heart full of longsuffering and so forth? Well, Galatians 5, I think, really helps us to see that, because it says in verse 25, If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. It is a matter of yielding the control of our life to the Holy Spirit. As the branch yields to the vine, the flow of right attitude coming through the nature of God in the Holy Spirit permeates our lives all the way out to the point where we produce fruit.

What have we seen there? We glorify God by our fruitfulness. Now, let's go to a sixth principle. In growing, maturing, unlocking the keys, as it were, or the locks of spiritual growth, there's another key, and that is this.

We glorify God, and we hinted at it last time, by praising Him. I don't believe that a Christian can grow unless he's characterized by a life of praise. Praise again puts us in the flow of growth.

Let me give you a simple and wonderful verse. Psalm 50, verse 23, says this, Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me. Oh, what a great statement.

You want to glorify God? Then offer praise. Offer praise. You see, another very simple, very practical thing.

It isn't stained-glass windows and organ music. It is simply fruitfulness. It is simply the humility of faith and trusting.

It is the humility of confession. It is the humility of bowing to the Lordship of Christ at any cost. And it is the humility, again, of praise that puts us in the path of growth.

I really believe that proud people don't praise God. They're too busy praising themselves. Humble people do.

People who are in awe of God, people whose focus is on God, and in their humility they pour out of their hearts praise. Now, this is so much a part of God's pattern for His people that He literally gave them a hymn book filled with praise that we call the Psalms. The Psalms were those great hymns that were really sung and said by the people of Israel, and God wanted them known and said because they are constantly offering praise to Him, and that is as it should be, for He is worthy.

For example, in Psalm, and I'll just show you a couple of examples, Psalm 86, first of all, and verse 9, Great statement, just great. Verse 12, I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify

thy name forevermore. Praising Him is equated with giving Him glory.

Praising God, very important. Psalm 89, rather 86. Look again at Psalm 92, just the first two verses here.

This is just a simple statement. It is a good thing to praise the Lord in the morning and at night, and thus to set the pace for the whole day. In Nehemiah chapter 8, in verse 6, it says, There was a sense of awe, there was a sense of respect, there was a sense of humility in the light of the majesty of the infinite character of God.

By the way, the word in Hebrew to create is the word bara, and the word to praise is barak, very similar. For we are to praise God who is the God, the source of all that is created. Now what does it mean to praise? If I said to a typical group of people, now I want you on the count of three to praise the Lord, what would you think they'd do? Well, some might sing a song, praise the Lord or whatever.

Some might say, praise the Lord, hallelujah. Some might wave their hands around. Some might silently in their heart pray a prayer.

What is the right answer? How do we praise the Lord? What does it mean? Is it more than just saying, praise the Lord? That's become a little deal. At PTL, you know, we can't be bothered praising Him, and even when we do praise Him, we abbreviate it just to get it over with. PTL, wait a minute.

What does it mean to praise? Is it just a little formula we sort of slip out of our lips every once in a while as sort of a Christian cliché? No. True praise involves three things biblically. Number one, true praise means you recite God's attributes.

You recite God's attributes. You see, praise is the expression of the character of God, who He really is. Oh, it's a great thing.

True praise recites the attributes of God. Now, people say to me very often, well, you know, I don't really study the Old Testament too much because it's the New Testament, you know, that matters, and this is the mystery kingdom and the mysteries have been revealed. We need to study that.

And the Old Testament's kind of passé. Listen, there are many reasons to study the Old Testament, one of which is that it reveals so much of the character of God, and you ought to know those things that are true of God's nature if for no other reason than that you could praise Him for that very thing. For example, Habakkuk in chapter 1 starts praising God for His character.

He praises Him that He's holy. He praises Him that He's almighty. He praises Him that He is eternal.

He praises Him that He is a covenant-keeping God. And in that very exercise of praise, He solves a great problem in His own heart, because He didn't understand why God was going to judge Israel. He didn't understand why God would send that bitter and hasty nation, the Chaldeans, who were worse than the Israelites, and let them judge Israel.

He was saying, God, revive Your people, oh, bring a great revival, God, bring a great restoration. But on the other hand, God says, I'm going to wipe them out, and I'm going to use a worse bunch to do it. And Habakkuk's response to that was, God, how in the world could You ever do that? And in the middle of his confusion, he just starts remembering, God is holy.

He doesn't make mistakes. God is a covenant-keeping God. He doesn't break His promises.

God is eternal. He's outside the flux of history. God is almighty.

He's not a victim of the Chaldeans. And by the time he gets done, he says, the just shall live by faith. I feel real good now, Lord.

Even though his circumstances hadn't changed. He was in the very same circumstance. You see David, and he's beating a path out of town, and he's running around in the bushes in the middle of the desert, and he's panting like mad, and he's hidden in a bush.

And you ask him, David, what are you doing? And he says, my son Absalom is after me. And then David sits down, and he starts thinking about God. And he says, God, You're all-powerful, God, You're almighty, God, You're all-forgiving, God, You're holy, God, You're going to win in the end, God, You're sovereign.

And he comes out of his bush and stands up straight. Now, Absalom is still after him. He's just redefined God, and that makes a lot of difference.

And so when you recite the character of God, you are exalting his virtue, and you are putting a backbone into the midst of your weakness. The backache problem never got any better, it got worse, but as God defined, was strong enough to handle his circumstances. I know in my own life, this is a very important thing, to have these little things in your life, and you've got some problem that you can't solve, and instead of saying, Oh, what a terrible problem, how are we going to get this done? We just don't seem to have the resources, Lord, we need this thing, you know, we don't have any money or whatever it is.

And then you stop and say, Lord, You are bigger than history, Lord, You own everything in the entire universe, God, You can do anything You want to do, God, You said You loved us and You promised we'd never be without the things we need, that You'd take care of us if You'd take care of the grass or the field, God, You are one who has promised that Your character is at our disposal, Your power is amassed in our behalf, etc., etc. You see how much better you're going to feel, and you're going to glorify God. That's the first element.

The second one is this, glorifying God and praising God is not only a matter of reciting His attributes, but reciting His works as well, for His attributes are on display in His works. And true praise is that. That's why you see so many times in the Psalms, you hear a repetition of what God has done.

Oh, God, You're the God who parted the Red Sea, Oh, God, You're the God who brought the people out of Egypt, God, You're the God who parted the river, You're the God who made the water flow from the rock, You're the God who fed us with manna in the wilderness, You're the God who destroyed the enemies and made the walls of Jericho fall, and etc., and etc., and etc. You see, this is lifting up and exalting God. That's what praise is all about.

That's what Habakkuk did in the third chapter. In the third chapter, he's kind of re-evaluating his problems, and he starts off in 3.3, and he just starts moving, God, You did this, and You did that, and You did this, and You did that, and he gets to verse 16, and he says, Man, when I think about what God did, my knees are knocking together and my bones are shaking, I'm quivering all the way down to my toes, but I'll tell you one thing, I am so confident in my God that if everything goes wacky, if the fig trees fail, and they don't fail, by the way, when you cut a fig tree down, or rather an olive tree, when you cut an olive tree down in Israel, you've got to let it sit 40 years before you can carve it, it's got so much oil in it, they don't fail, folks, they're around a long time. But if all of the trees fail, if the animals die on the hillside, if nature goes wacky, he

says, I'll trust God.

Why? Because he has such a great track record, he's proven. That's why the Old Testament is loaded with history, so that we'll know that God is proven faithful. Now, what is it to praise, then, it is to do that, recite his attributes and his works.

You know, if you've got a problem facing you, maybe you've got a crisis situation at your work or at school or whatever it is, and you say, Oh, Lord, how am I going to get through this? Just remember, you can praise God and it'll help you an awful lot. Lord, you're the God who stepped out one day on the edge of nothing and spun the space into space, the stars and the planets. You're the God who formed this little ball of earth, and in the midst of the chaos of this world, you've planted a beautiful earth and separated it from the sea, and then you made everything that is, and then when man fell, you set about to redeem him, and you're the God who carved out a nation for himself, and you're the God who preserved that nation through history.

You're the God who did wonder after wonder. You're the God who smote with a finger on the side of a mountain the law in the tablets of stone. You're the God who enabled your people to walk out of Egypt, and you drowned Pharaoh's army.

You're the God who came into this world in human form and raised Jesus from the dead. Now, Lord, I have this little problem. It really kind of pales, doesn't it? You see, basically, we struggle a lot in our lives because we don't truly define our God, and we don't record for our own edification the record of His performance in the past.

And that's what praise is, so that praise is not only glorifying to God for its own value because it speaks truth about Him, but it is glorifying to God because it affirms our confidence in Him. And thus do we glorify God, first of all, by reciting His attributes, secondly, by reciting His works, and then thirdly, by saying thanks for both. I believe in the midst of praise, and at the very heart of it is a thankful expression.

Let me illustrate that to you by having you look with me to Luke chapter 17, verse 11. Luke chapter 17 and verse 11. Listen to the story, and we'll close our lesson with this.

It came to pass as He went to Jerusalem, He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

Now, the lepers, of course, are calling to Jesus. They had heard about His power. And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go, show yourselves unto the priests.

Now it was required of a leper that if that leper were to enter back into society because he had had some remission of his disease, that he would have had to show himself to the priest, and the priest would have had to verify that he had a right to enter into society because they believed the disease to be so contagious. So it came to pass that as they went, they were cleansed. They had to take a step of faith first based on what they had heard about Jesus.

They did it, and along the way, these ten men were cleansed. Verse 15. Now watch.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back and with a loud voice did what? Glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks. Now, you see the point? He was a

Samaritan. He was a half-breed, outcast.

Only one glorified God, and how did he do it? By giving him thanks. Thanks for your power. Thanks for what you've done.

Thanks for the attribute that allows you to heal, and thanks that you've done it for me. For the attribute and the act, he says thanks, and that's the sum of praise. So that praise, now, what I'm saying is, praise is not only distant, it is not only God, that's who you are, oh, praise your name.

God, that's what you've done, oh, praise your name, but thanks that you are that and you've done that in my life. See? It brings praise right down to where we live. And then he says, were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? There are not found that return to give glory to God, except this stranger.

And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee well. Now, I believe that what he meant by that was that he was spiritually saved. I believe all ten were healed, only one was saved, only one was redeemed, the one who came back and said thanks.

But God is glorified when we express the realization that his power and his acts have been in our behalf. Oh, what a great truth that is. In 1 Corinthians 15.10, the Apostle Paul said, But by the grace of God I am what I am.

And his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me. He says what's so wonderful about God and his power is that it touched my life. Now, friends, God is glorified when we say thanks, when we express thanks for his deeds and his power in our behalf.

In 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 11, it says this, If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man serve, let him do it as the ability which God gives, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. In other words, remember this, that if you speak the oracles of God, if you serve in the ministry of God, it's because of him, and he gets all the glory.

Someone has said, Like a silkworm, when she weaves her work, hides herself under the silk and is never seen, so when we have done anything worthy of praise, we remain hidden and pass the praise on to God. Praising God gives him glory. And no matter what happens in our lives, we are to recognize that it was his attribute, it was his gracious work, and express our thanks to him.

Now, what have we learned? Spiritual growth is a matter of glorifying God. We will grow when our lives are filled with praise. We will grow when our lives are filled with fruit and fruitfulness, and we will grow when our lives are characterized by trusting God.

As we live this way, focusing on his glory, we are changed from one level of glory to the next, moving toward the very image of Christ. There's much more to share in our next session, and we'll do it at that time, but let's pray. As we close, our Father, we thank you for again giving us insight into these very basic and practical realities of living to your glory that we may be growing to spiritual maturity.

May we take these keys and unlock the storehouse of blessing provided for us, for Jesus' sake, in his glory alone we pray, amen.

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