

SEVEN WAYS TO GROW AS A CHRISTIAN

1. Lean On Your Salvation.

Salvation provides all the necessary qualities. Salvation is by **faith**, and faith is given to us by a sovereign God. A measure of faith was given to us as part of God's gift of salvation. Our salvation brings us into the true knowledge of God and of His precious Son, Jesus Christ. Salvation provides everything necessary for godly living, which we see in **2 Peter 1:3**, "**...His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness...**" It is this salvation that has enabled us to become partakers of the divine nature. **Verse 4** says: "**...having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.**" The two go together. We've become partakers of the divine nature, and God's character is manifested in us, because we have escaped the wickedness that is in the world.

The new life that you receive - *the new birth in Christ* - is a dynamic, active life, not a static, dead life. It's a life of growth, and it's to be a life of usefulness and productivity for God. We know that He gives us everything necessary for a godly life. We must have revelation that we've become partakers of His divine nature, which has allowed us to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. And for this very reason God places a strong obligation upon us. He has given us the strength to do great things, and it is our responsibility to do them. There should be no holding back in the earnestness and zeal that you apply to the task of doing God's will and maturing as a child of God.

In **Philippians 2:12**, the Apostle Paul writes, "**So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed...**" Notice how the context is our action; how we obey what God instructs us to do. It is our responsibility to work out our salvation with fear and trembling - but with eyes wide open! We are to apply all diligence in implementing and carrying out what God has done in our lives. Now note what Paul says in the next verse, "**for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**" There is the balance. You work out your salvation because it is God working in you. And therefore, you can lean on this fact! You have been saved for a reason - a great cause.

2. Motivate Yourself From Within

Now, which is it? Are you to work it out or is God going to work it out? God is going to work it out as you apply yourself with all diligence to obeying Him and doing what He instructs you to do. It can only be done in His power. It's His work in you. But you must understand that His work in you depends upon your submission and obedience to Him; otherwise, all of your failures, shortcoming and lack of growth is God's fault, not yours. Some people take the attitude that because He didn't do it, He didn't want it done. That passive attitude is not a Biblical principle. God will do it if you apply yourself totally and completely. But the idea that you sit back and God just does it is the reason there are so many Christians who are achieving less than they ought to be. They think, "*So God didn't do it... Well, I guess if He had wanted me to do it, He would have motivated me to do it.*" No. The motivation ought to be that He told you to work out your salvation. Applying all diligence!

In other words, you motivate yourself - from within. If you need motivation then listen to the Holy Spirit who is continually at work in you. He is full of inspiration and energy!

3. Provide An Abundantly Supply Faith

You are to provide and supply faith in abundance - with dedication to what God has done in your salvation. In fact, you are to apply all diligence to this effort because of your salvation. Faith is the foundation of a Christian life. Faith is the soil in which all fruits will grow. Faith is the atmosphere in which character development will take place. And faith wasn't given to be a static, dead faith. It is to be a living, active, life-transforming faith. Therefore, a vibrant faith is the root from which key spiritual attributes will grow and develop.

In the context of true faith, it requires your effort, your diligence and the complete commitment of your person to its production. However, in your personal faith, the first quality to be provided is moral excellence (**2 Peter 1:5**). *Moral excellence* in the Greek text, is the word often used in reference to Christ and translated *excellence*. It implies moral power, moral energy, vigor of soul, energy in the exercise of one's faith. The idea is for you, with all diligence and zeal, to supply the moral courage and vigor of soul that characterizes a Christian. Christians are not born again merely to be cabbages waiting for eternity. There is to be an active, dynamic quality about the believer in his pursuit of righteousness and the character of God in his life. So let your faith be energetic. Let it be vigorous. Let it be alive. Stir yourself up! See that you are alert, active and vigilant. Supplying as much faith as you can!

4. Be Enthusiastic

There is a passive indifference that characterizes much of Christianity today. So what do we do to combat it? We try to adopt the world's methods of stirring excitement by becoming pleasure seekers. We embrace the world's efforts to entertain and capture the interests of believers as well as unbelievers. But that's not what we are to do! We have a personal responsibility to supply this vigor to our service for the living God. It ought to be conspicuous. I expect my life to reflect the fact that I am a very enthusiastic Christian. Am I here today because of the passion and energy that I have for the things of God. And I believe I'm here to fulfill an assignment. My attitude is, I can't wait to get on with God's work. Time is rushing by and there are things to do! But without enthusiasm I'm going to run dry. And people do not find lack of enthusiasm very attractive. In pursuit of God we must come with a kind of energy and activity that is wholehearted and irresistible.

5. Acquire Knowledge & Understanding

Our main activity - that vigorous, energetic service for God - must be shaped by knowledge and understanding. The word *knowledge* also has a practical emphasis. It is a knowledge that is implemented to discern right and wrong, good and evil. So this would be the knowledge of God's word and God's will applied to our lives. It shapes your future and determines what you are going to do with the energy and activity that you have committed to Him. The consuming vigor of your soul in serving God needs to be framed by knowledge. That knowledge, of course, comes from His word.

We are to be continually growing in that knowledge, continually increasing in our understanding. When children do something they shouldn't have done, we sometimes say to them, "*You should have known better.*" You are not saying they didn't have the basic foundational knowledge. You're saying in that situation that they didn't properly act upon the knowledge they already had. As believers, we are to be supplying knowledge. Why do we study the word of God? So that we can *act properly* in all the circumstances and situations of life. Such knowledge allows us to direct our energy and activity properly (and to be a discerning people).

What you choose to do for God may not be considered the most enjoyable activity in the context of fun, but you do it because you are determined to apply yourself with diligence. You want to give the energy necessary to come to know more of the will of God so that you can apply it properly. When you are able to apply the knowledge and understanding of God's word, and thus God's will, to your life and to the lives of others, you will get incredible results. We are clearly responsible, and commanded of God, to be providing that kind of knowledge when ever necessary. Victorious knowledge!

6. Exercise Self-Control

Self-control - I like this word. I don't like to do it, but I like the word because it literally means having the ability to take a grip of one's self. When you see somebody who is starting to unravel, perhaps under emotional pressure, you might say, "*Get hold of yourself.*" That's this word. "*Get a grip on yourself! Get it together. Get yourself under control.*"

Self-control means controlling your passions and desires rather than being controlled by them. Understand that this is not the same kind of self-control that the world emphasizes when it talks about 'self'. Again, we have to keep the definition within the context. God has granted to us ***everything pertaining to life and godliness***. It's His power at work. We have escaped the corruption that is in the world. We are partakers of the divine nature. Therefore, we are commanded to have 'self' in control, to have ourselves under control in light of what Jesus has done.

Note the order - in your knowledge of God's word you supply self-control. That understanding of truth and God's will is now to be implemented in your life by having yourself under control. Self-control is always based on knowledge. Paul uses some athletic metaphors to portray the Christian life. In **1 Corinthians** chapter **9:24** we see a picture of the discipline that is necessary for a runner to win the race. **Verse 25:** "***Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control.***" If you are a Christian then you're in the race.

Some people don't come to the morning service because they just can't get out of bed in the morning. "*My body just doesn't get going that early,*" they say. "*I'm not a morning person.*" Well, others have to do it, so why shouldn't you? The point is, if I don't feel like doing something for God, I give my body a good, hard slap and say, "*Get on with it.*" And if I ever feel like bailing out, I give my body a good shove and say, "*Get going.*" I tell my body what to do. My body doesn't tell me what to do. That's self-control. I get a grip on myself, in light of the knowledge I have of God's word.

7. Endure Hardship

Endurance is the mark of a mature Christian. And remember, perseverance flows out of self-control. Do you know what perseverance is? This is a compound word that means to live under something, to remain under something. Self-control exercised over time produces endurance (perseverance). The mature believer does not give up in the face of difficulty.

As you build self-control into your life (by God's grace), you develop perseverance - the ability to stay with something under pressure. This is essential. Notice, little children have no perseverance. They have to develop it. But some do not. We all know of adults 40 and 50 years old who have never developed patience or endurance. They bounce around in life because when the pressure comes - and it always does - they just can't handle it. They're without direction. They have never developed any self-control. And as a result, they have never produced any endurance. One of the clear marks of a mature Christian is endurance. We know when we get into battle that some are going to bail out because they haven't been building endurance into their lives. Every one of you needs to be doing it. You cannot be mature, godly people if you don't.

The key to endurance is keeping focus. In **Hebrews 12:2** we're told that Jesus, for the joy set before Him, *endured* the cross. It's the same word - **persevere**. We as believers are to be totally focused on those precious promises of God - the hope of glory. For the joy of the promises set before us will cause us to develop *endurance* (and bring about the victory).