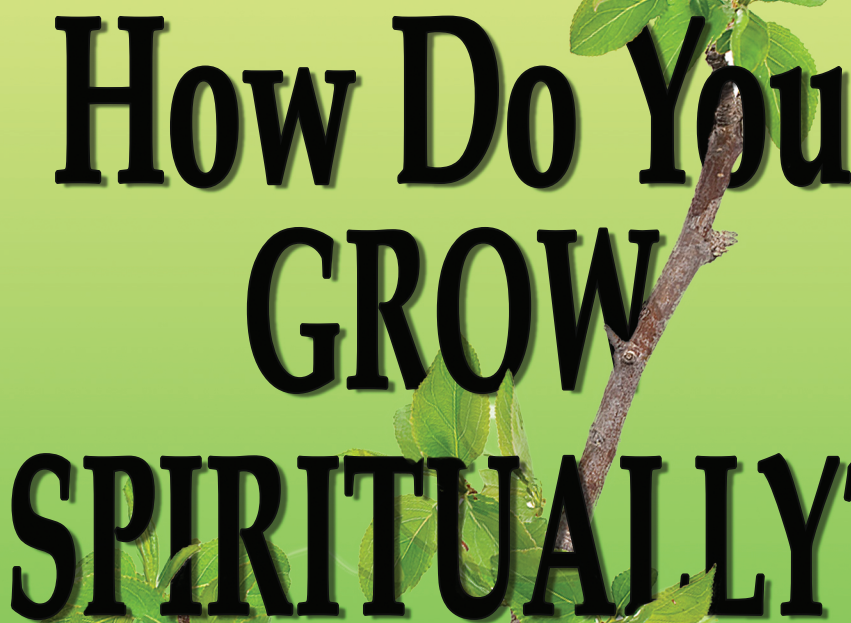


*Having been born again,...  
through the word of God  
which lives and abides forever.*

**1 Peter 1:23**



# **How Do You GROW SPIRITUALLY?**

*As newborn babes, desire the  
pure milk of the word,  
that you may grow thereby.*

**1 Peter 2:2**

**Dennis M. Rokser**

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**Growing in Grace  
in Your Christian Life**

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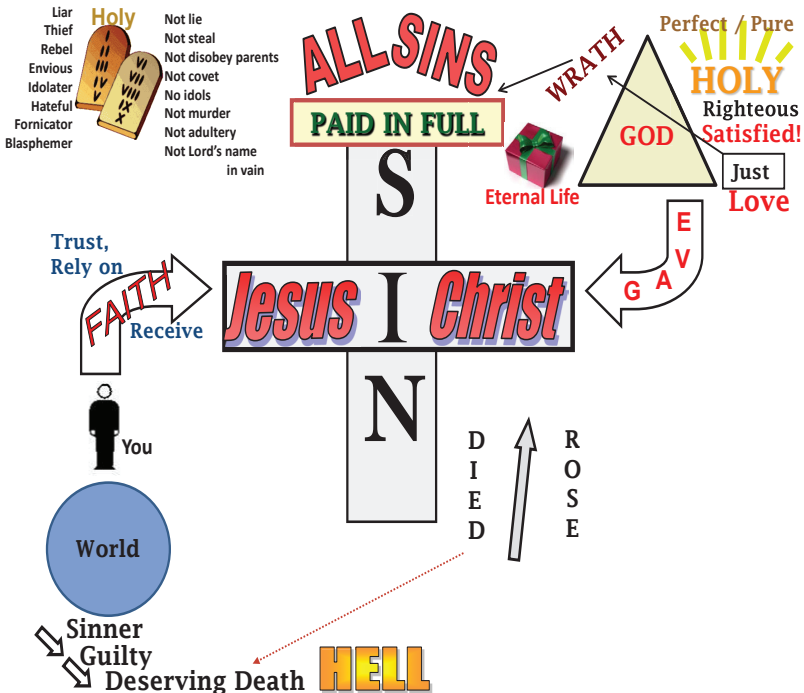
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the Word, that you may grow thereby.*

1 Peter 2:2

## WELCOME TO THE FAMILY OF GOD!

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you have been born again by God's grace. You have entered the spiritual family of God as Jesus Christ emphatically stated, "Most assuredly, I say to you, *unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). Welcome to the forgiven and forever family of God! But I can almost hear you saying, "I'm saved! I'm forgiven! I'm going to Heaven! Now what?"

As you have now come to understand from the Scriptures, the first issue between you and God was not a change in your behavior, as needed as that might be. Instead it was an issue of spiritual birth and a change in your eternal destiny, being born again into the family of God and being guaranteed a home in Heaven. These spiritual blessings became yours through faith alone in Jesus Christ – when you believed that He is God who became a man and died for your sins and was raised again to give you eternal life as a free gift. This main message of the Bible is capsulized in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."



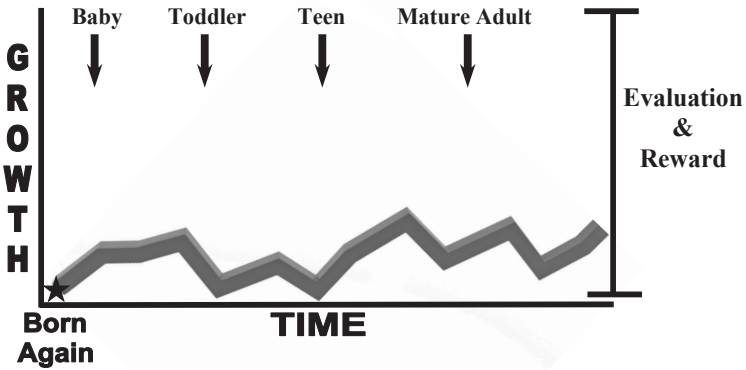
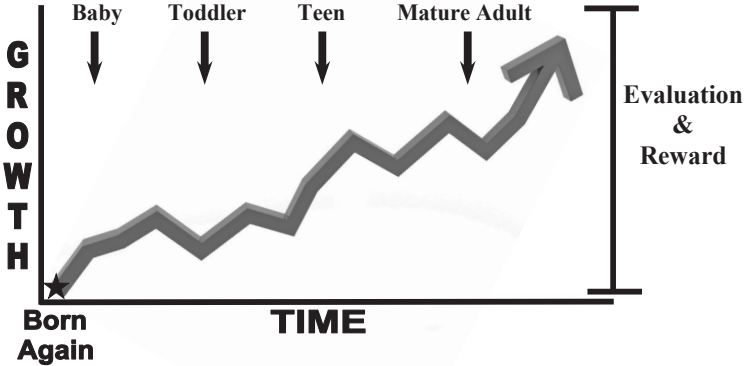
No amount of good works or religious rituals could ever save you from a Hell you deserve to a Heaven you don't, since "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). This is why the Gospel of salvation states that Jesus "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This indeed is good news from God for hopeless, helpless, Hell-bound sinners who desperately need the only Savior God ever provided – Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:4-6)! The fact that God raised His Son from the dead is proof that God's holy punishment for your sins has been forever met and satisfied with Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. He cried out on the cross, "IT IS FINISHED" (John 19:30) as all your sins were "paid in full" forever. No wonder the apostle Paul clearly writes, "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Gal. 2:21). Yes, dear friend, if you could go to Heaven because of your good, religious works or rituals, then Christ died for nothing! But the truth is that "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

While spiritual birth must precede spiritual growth, God now wants you to grow in grace and become more and more like His Son, Jesus Christ. This is what progressive sanctification and spiritual growth is all about.

*Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Peter 1:23 – 2:3)*

Spiritual birth should result in spiritual growth as the believer progresses from Christian babyhood, to spiritual adolescence, to becoming a mature believer in the faith (1 John 2:13-14). Since you have already tasted that the Lord is gracious when you believed the Gospel and were born again, why not desire now the pure milk of the Word to grow by further tasting and understanding God's amazing grace?

While there is nothing wrong with being a babe in Christ (since we all begin there!), there is definitely something wrong if you remain a babe in your growth (1 Cor. 3:1-2) or later regress back into spiritual immaturity after you have grown in your knowledge of God's Word and in personal faith, hope, and love (Heb. 5:11-12).



But this raises an important question, namely, how does a believer grow spiritually? Like with your salvation from sin's penalty, God has provided everything necessary by His grace for you to grow as a child of God, except for the faith that you must learn to exercise in daily dependence upon Him and His promises. So, what is involved in God's grace-design for your spiritual growth?

### **1. Spiritual growth takes TIME. (Hebrews 5:12)**

While spiritual birth happens at a moment of time, spiritual maturity does not occur overnight; it takes time. *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food"* (Heb. 5:12).

We need to be patient when it comes to our spiritual growth. God is not in a hurry and it takes time to grow. Think of the little baby. This baby doesn't even think about growing and certainly isn't in a hurry. As the baby simply takes in proper food, and allows the parents to care for him, his growth happens automatically. The same should be true of us as believers. We need to simply enjoy the Lord, feed on His Word, and growth will occur over time, many times without us even realizing it. Remember that when God wants to produce a squash, He takes six months. But when God wants to produce a solid oak tree, He takes a hundred years. Which one do you want to be? This is important to remember because there are many adjustments God wants to make in your thinking, motives, and relationships; but He does so graciously and patiently, in love, over time.

### **2. Spiritual growth takes TRUTH. (Hebrews 5:12-13)**

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.* (Heb. 5:12-13)

The great need of your Christian life is not to do "great things for God." Instead it is to get firmly established in the Word of God through the personal reading and public teaching of the Scriptures.

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete [mature], thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

If you are going to spiritually grow, the regular intake of the milk and meat of the Word of God is essential.

### **3. Spiritual growth requires sound TEACHERS.**

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, *you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God*; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (Heb. 5:12-13)

In order to facilitate your spiritual growth through a correct understanding of the Scriptures God has given to you *the Holy Spirit* as your inner and ultimate teacher. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

It is through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit that the believer can understand God’s Word. The Lord wants you to know the truth and He is willing to personally teach you through His Spirit who indwells you. So before you begin to read the Scriptures, pray for spiritual understanding and enlightenment like the Psalmist who uttered, “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Ps. 119:18).

In addition, God has also provided *human teachers* as grace-gifts to the Church.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to



the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, [by] speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ. (Eph. 4:11-15)

Though apostles and prophets were only needed to act as a foundation for the early church and have since passed off the scene (Eph. 2:20), God still uses “evangelists” to preach the Gospel, plant churches, and train others to do so, along with using “pastors and teachers” to spiritually equip believers with sound doctrine. Unfortunately, there is a lot of false teaching in churches today so that the Gospel is not preached in its clarity and verse-by-verse exposition of the Scriptures has been replaced with an emphasis on musical performances and entertainment. The apostle Paul explained the need for biblical preaching and the anticipated replacement of sound teaching in churches when he wrote,

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim. 4:2-4)

These verses emphasize the importance of hearing the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. However, this passage also prophetically predicts what we see happening in many churches today, namely, giving ear-tickling sermons based on what people want and what will stroke their flesh rather than preaching the Word of God which will meet people’s real spiritual needs. It stands to reason that if a church cannot present the Gospel to you clearly enough so that you can be saved, it will not provide you with the sound biblical doctrine you need to grow. So always begin by finding out what a church believes about the Gospel and how to be saved.

Though I highly recommend that you be a part of a local church where the Gospel of grace is clearly preached and where the Bible is clearly taught, such churches are also increasingly becoming few and far between. A good place to begin your search for a sound local church would be to contact the person, or attend the local church, that gave you this booklet. If this isn't possible, you are always welcome and invited to watch a live webcast or download various studies from God's Word from our church's website ([www.duluthbible.org](http://www.duluthbible.org)), or contact us at the phone number listed at the back of this booklet. But if you do find a sound Bible-teaching church in your area, be sure to take to heart the following encouragement: "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching*" (Heb. 10:24-25).

Furthermore, spiritual instruction and encouragement from other believers that are farther along in their understanding of the Word of God will prove to be very beneficial in your own spiritual growth. But let me caution you to always compare and confirm everything that is taught with the Word of God to discern whether it lines up with the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-12).

#### **4. Spiritual growth requires TRIALS. (James 1:2-4)**

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is *unskilled in the word of righteousness*, for he is a babe. (Heb. 5:12-13)

The word "unskilled" in verse 13 literally means "without experience" or "no trial." It could be used of someone who audits a class, meaning that they simply sit through the class but aren't required to take any tests. Tests do something very important for a student. They force the student to study and know the material if they want to pass the test. As a teacher, if you never gave any tests, guess what your students would do. NOTHING! In the same way, God provides "tests" for believers to give us opportunities to apply His word. Without these tests, we would fall asleep and not see the need for Him and His Word.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (Jam. 1:2-4)

Why does God allow trials in your life? He is testing your faith and seeking to produce "patience" in your life (v. 3). It is only when you "know" this (v. 3) that you can accept by faith God's purpose for your trials and therefore "count it all joy." Why does God allow trials in your life? It is for the purpose of you becoming "perfect and complete" or spiritually balanced and mature (v. 4). God is more interested in your spiritual growth than He is in your personal comfort. Now some people think that difficulties and trials are a sign of God's displeasure in their lives. Yes, some trials and suffering are self-induced because of bad choices we have made (Gal. 6:7-8). Other trials and suffering are simply the result of the fact that we live in a physical body that is under the curse of disease and death stemming from Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12; 8:17-25). But many trials that believers face are designed to get our attention and teach us to trust the Lord and His promises instead of relying on our own wisdom and strength. This refining of your faith is invaluable to your spiritual maturation.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:3-7)

God allows trials in your life to keep you dependent on Him and growing in grace in order to make you more like His Son. This reminds me of the story about codfish, where, in the northeastern United States, these fish are not only delectable but are a big commercial business. At one point, the supply of such fish could not keep pace with the demand, especially the demand for fresh cod. At first, suppliers would freeze the fish and ship them to various places, but the freezing process took away much of the flavor. So they experimented with shipping the fish alive in tanks of seawater, but this proved to be even worse since it was not only very expensive but by the time of the cod arrived, they were soft and mushy. Finally, one creative person solved the problem with an innovative idea. The codfish were placed into a tank of water along with their natural enemy – the catfish. From the time the cod left the East Coast until they arrived at their western destinations, the catfish chased the cod all over the tank so that the cod were as fresh as they were when they were first caught! There was no loss of flavor and their texture was not adversely affected. If anything, the cod were better than before.

Could it be that God has allowed a catfish in your tank to keep you turning in faith to the Lord and growing spiritually, instead of getting soft, mushy, and flavorless? Can you name the catfish in your tank? Perhaps you live with one of them? Or it is someone you work with whose irritating presence drives you to your knees every day? Isn't it time to stop the griping, complaining, and pity-party, and start thanking God for the catfish in your tank and how "all things are working together for good" (Rom. 8:28) in your life? Yes, you may ask the Lord to remove your "thorn in the flesh" – Paul did three times (2 Cor. 12:7-8). But be prepared for the Lord to say in essence to you, "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness." Someone has said that a Christian is like a teabag; he's not of much use until he's been through some hot water.

### **5. Spiritual growth requires TRUST. (Hebrews 11:6)**

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb. 11:6)

Faith is the only response that pleases God. Any other response involves human wisdom or human good, and those emanate from the flesh and do not give God the glory. The men and women in the Bible who pleased God over the centuries (several are mentioned in Hebrews 11) did so because they trusted in the Lord and His Word. In contrast, those who did not please the Lord did not respond by faith in God's provisions or promises. They made the foolish mistake of thinking, "I can handle it."

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; *but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.* (Heb. 4:1-2)

Notice that the message of God's rest for us as believers does not profit us unless it is mixed with faith. Like water must be mixed with cement to form concrete, so your willingness to daily trust in God's unfailing person, principles, or promises is needed to enter the spiritual rest that God makes available to you in your Christian life. You can hear God's Word, memorize God's Word, and know God's Word to the point of being a walking, talking Bible encyclopedia, but it won't profit you personally unless you believe God's promises. The past Exodus generation of Jews did not please God because of their unbelief, but He still offers His daily faith-rest life to you and me today.

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. (Heb. 4:9-11)

How does a person enter into this spiritual rest of inner tranquility and peace that God desires His people to enjoy daily? It is by believing God's Word and resting by faith in His promises to us amidst the trials and tribulations of life. We must cease

from our works and efforts in trying to help God out (v. 10) and rest daily by faith in God's plan and promises to us.

We can only apply God's Word when we believe His Word. If we want to grow, we need to respond to God's Word by faith, and through His Spirit apply the truth in our lives. The "unskilled" believer of Hebrews 5:13 is contrasted with the believer who "by reason of use" (5:14) has applied the truth and has received some spiritual "exercise." And according to verse 14, an evidence of spiritual growth is that the believer can "discern both good and evil" and therefore not be "tossed to and fro" with false doctrine.

Consider the following promises from God that you can learn and believe each day in the trials and decisions of life.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren. (Rom. 8:28-29)

If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (2 Tim. 2:13)

But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. (Job 23:10)

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength. (Isa. 26:3-4)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Prov. 3:5-6)

If you would like a more complete listing of God's promises, let me encourage you to read the booklet, *The Promises of God for the Child of God*.<sup>1</sup>

So how do you grow spiritually? Spiritual growth requires TIME, TRUTH, TEACHERS, TRIALS, and TRUST. Are you willing to let God bring you through the process of spiritual growth stage-by-stage to make you more and more like His Son? You will be glad you did!

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17)

I would love to expand further on some key truths of your position/identity in Christ and how to faith-rest in Christ as your Life through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6-8), but space does not permit me to do so in this booklet. So when you have finished this booklet, be sure to get the next booklet in this series titled, *I'm Saved but Still Struggling with Sin! Is Victory Available?*<sup>2</sup>

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1. [www.duluthbible.org/gracegospelpress/booklets/booklets-listing](http://www.duluthbible.org/gracegospelpress/booklets/booklets-listing)  
2. [www.duluthbible.org/gracegospelpress/booklets](http://www.duluthbible.org/gracegospelpress/booklets)

Dear child of God, you are a new creation in Christ with a wonderful new life to live and a new future to look forward to. May God be free to personally lead and guide you day by day as you learn to walk by faith and yield to the Lord, living in light of your new position in Christ. But let me also warn you that you can still choose to live a miserable life that dishonors the Lord, ruins your testimony for Christ, robs you of real inner joy and peace, and wastes your opportunities to serve Jesus Christ. Which will it be?

After I came to trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior, I was grateful for God's grace in saving me from a Hell I deserved to a Heaven that I didn't. I was absolutely sure of my eternal destiny. I knew Christ's finished work on the cross and resurrection from the grave was not only necessary but enough to save me. I was even willing to converse about spiritual things with others. But in my fleshly carnality, I still thought, "I'm glad I'm saved and going to Heaven, but I will take it from here Lord. I have my plans and objectives for life, and I can handle it." How foolish I was to think that I needed Jesus Christ to change only my eternal destiny but I didn't really need Him to direct my life from day to day. In my pride I thought I was sufficient in myself to tackle the trials and decisions of life. In my arrogance I thought I knew what was best for my life. But the Holy Spirit inside of me was convicting me as a believer of my stubbornness and rebellion. I was miserable and drowning my misery in various forms of escapism. The things of the world did not satisfy the yearnings of my soul as I had now tasted the grace of God (1 Peter 2:3) and fellowship with the Lord (1 John 1:3-4). As a child of God, my Heavenly Father lovingly disciplined me as promised (Heb. 12:5-11) largely by letting me just reap what I had sown by making a mess of my life. I felt like a fish out of water. I really didn't fit in any longer with my unsaved friends as I was a new creation in Christ. Yet, because of my carnality, I also didn't fit in with spiritual believers who wanted to live for Jesus Christ as I still wanted to live for the world (1 John 2:15-17). I was a consistently carnal believer for several months who was aimless and miserable, though on my way to Heaven—by God's grace.

But thank God that the Lord still loved me, accepted me in Christ, and manifested His grace to me by letting me, just like the prodigal son, come to the end of myself (Luke 15:17).



And when I confessed my sins and finally yielded to the Lord to do His will one night, there was finally peace, joy, and real purpose in my heart – to live for Jesus Christ.

Finally wanting to live for the Lord who redeemed me, I had no idea how to proceed or progress spiritually. Being raised in a kind and moral, but religious, home where the Gospel was not preached and the Word of God was not taught, my knowledge of the Scriptures was almost nonexistent. But God can work with a willing heart (which I now had). He graciously allowed me to have a Christian friend who also wanted to live for Jesus Christ and was farther along spiritually than myself. I greatly needed this since my unsaved friends soon forsook me as we were going in totally different directions in life (though I sought to maintain some contact with them and to give them the Gospel). In His grace, God also provided for me a Christ-centered, Bible-believing local church where I could hear the Gospel clearly, be fed the Word of God verse-by-verse, learn sound doctrine, and enjoy fellowship with other believers around the Lord. This was invaluable to my spiritual growth. I had so much to learn and so much for God to change, but He graciously kept bringing me along spiritually (Ps. 23:1-3).

Frankly, I had no plans or personal agenda to ever become a pastor. I was so unworthy to be used of the Lord in any way. With the love of Christ compelling me, I just wanted to learn the Word of God and let my life now count for Jesus Christ. But God, in His grace (who also has a sense of humor), continued to spiritually mature me (remember the five “T”s of spiritual growth) and eventually called and prepared me years later to be used of Him in pastoral ministry. What a joy and privilege it has been! Yet for years I have sensed the need for a book or booklet of some kind to put into the hands of new or immature believers to personally encourage and doctrinally establish them in the wonderful truths of grace in all three tenses of salvation.

Thus, may God be pleased by His grace to use the Word of God as presented in this booklet to accomplish these divine purposes in your life for your good and His glory (Rom. 8:28-29). If this occurs in your life, give God the glory!