

Each One Teach One Discipleship Lessons

Part One:

FAITH THAT LOOKS UP:

Establishing your Faith in God

LESSON THREE:

GROWING FAITH

I Peter 2:2

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

II Peter 3:18

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

In *Lesson Two* we learned that "works" are not the cause of salvation. *Works* are the evidence of a life lived by **faith in Christ**. Real faith will bear real fruit! But a small crop isn't enough! In this lesson we will consider the fact that we must have **growing faith**.

Have you ever seen a "Bonsai" tree? A Bonsai gardener can create a whole forest on a table top by stunting the growth of trees that might normally grow several stories tall. Each tree is planted in very shallow soil in a container and carefully allowed only enough nutrients and moisture to live, but not to "grow up." The effect can be very stunning: perfect little doll-size miniature trees. They are alive, they look good, they serve a decorative purpose.



Unfortunately, the same can be said of many people who profess Christ. They have been made alive through Christ, they may even look good and serve a decorative purpose. But they have shallow roots, are undernourished, and are not growing up to the full stature the Lord intended.

The Church doesn't need "Bonsai Christians"!



On the other hand, have you ever planted an acorn? Given the right soil and time to grow, the tiny acorn will become one of the largest common trees, the mighty oak. An oak tree is alive, it looks good, it may even serve a decorative purpose. But its value goes far beyond that. Birds and squirrels can nest in it, its acorns provide food for many animals, it provides refreshing shade for people and animals, and it may eventually provide beautiful lumber for homes and furniture.

The church needs **growing, flourishing, maturing Christians** who can be a source of blessing to all around them. How does this growth process happen?

READ Luke 8:5-15

[Luke 8: 15]

The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who _____ the word, _____ it, and by _____ produce a crop.

[James 1:22-25]

*Do not merely _____ to the word, and so deceive yourselves. _____
_____. Anyone who listens to the word but does not _____
_____ is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself,
goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect
law that gives freedom, and continues to _____, not forgetting what he has heard, but
_____ it-- he will be blessed in what he does.*

[I Peter 1:13-16]

*Therefore, prepare your minds for _____; be _____;
set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As _____
_____, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.
But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am
holy."*

***** The word *holy* implies that someone or some thing is pure, absolutely clean, without blemish. When spoken of God, it describes **what He is**. When used of an object, an animal to be sacrificed, or a person, it also means "set apart, dedicated" for the **use of God**.

**Holiness is not just an *idea* in your mind.
Holiness is what you are to *become* also in action.**

[Romans 12:1]

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living
_____, _____ and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.*

*** Although holiness is not just "in your mind," your mind **is** where it must **begin**:

[Romans 12:2]

*Do not _____ any longer to the pattern of this world, but be _____ by the
renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing
and perfect will.*

*** **READ** Galatians 5:16-24

List nine "acts of the sinful nature":

List nine qualities of the "fruit of the Spirit":

[Galatians 6:7-10]

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please _____, from _____ will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in _____, for at the proper time we will _____ if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

As we have seen from these passages, one way a Christian maintains a **growing faith** is by allowing the Holy Spirit to cultivate holiness in his life, choosing to act upon the *Word of God* sown in his heart.

If you have a small fruit tree in your garden, you can help it grow by similar measures: you can cultivate around it, give it plenty of water, fertilize it, control the insects that would attack it. But there is a way to make it grow even better.

I am not a "farm person." I grew up in the city, and knew almost nothing about gardening. But when we purchased a home in the suburbs with a fairly large back yard, I decided to try growing a few things. Impressed by all the mail-order nursery ads, I sent away for a special apple tree ideal for small gardens. It was a dwarf variety that was never to grow too tall to pick the apples from it, and it had five different varieties of apples "grafted on" to a center root stock. When I planted it, it was about three feet tall. As the years went by I began to realize the ads were not accurate. It grew much beyond my reach. I also found that I knew nothing about insect control, and all the apples ended up wormy. Finally the tree got to be more trouble than it was worth--the ground was strewn every fall with rotting, wormy apples. So one fall, I decided to solve the problem. I would cut off most of the branches, and cut the remaining ones back to my height. That would leave just enough to be pretty when the tree bloomed in spring.

I was shocked next spring when the tree sprouted more branches than I had cut off, and they grew taller than ever. Still not catching on to what was going on, that fall I decided to cut it back more severely. I cut all the branches off, leaving only the main limbs of the five varieties as they came out of the trunk. Yes--the next spring, those limbs grew new branches, more hardy and vigorous than ever! The tree became huge.



I had independently stumbled on the principle of **pruning**. I had read that word in the scriptures before, but it never registered with me that it worked like **this!**

And this is the second principle of how you maintain **growing faith**:

[John 15:1-2]

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he _____ so that it will be more fruitful.

How does God *prune* us?

[James 1:2-4]

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face _____ of many kinds, because you know that the _____ of your faith develops _____. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be _____ and _____, not lacking anything.

[James 1:12]

Blessed is the man who _____ under _____, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

***** There is a distorted "gospel" being preached by many in our time. It insists that God never intends for His people to have any hardships. They are to live lives of ease, luxury, wealth and good times. Any hardship must be a trick of the devil to steal from us our joy, so we rebuke and resist any hardship as an attack of the enemy. But what does the scripture say?

[Hebrews 12:4-11]

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's _____, and do not lose heart when he _____ you, because the Lord _____ those he _____, and he _____ everyone he accepts as a _____." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his _____. No discipline seems _____ at the time, but painful.

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of _____ and peace for those who have been _____ by it.

***** There are so-called "Bible teachers" on TV who teach a concept they call "seed faith," which is another distortion of the teaching of scripture. Immature Christians are encouraged to "plant a seed" (usually by giving money to some TV ministry!) and expect a quick harvest of physical blessings.

But this is deceptive. That may work if you are planting annual flowers. They will sprout quickly and flower early--but in a few months they will wither and die. If you plant an acorn, it will take a while to sprout, it will grow very slowly, but your patience will yield an oak tree that may last for centuries!

We want fruit that will endure into eternity. And that will take a life lived in sacrifice to the Lord, and patient endurance through the **pruning of trial and testing**.

REVIEW:

1. A *growing faith* will produce a **transformed mind**.
2. A *growing faith* will produce a **life of holiness**.
3. A *growing faith* will produce the **fruit of the Spirit**.
4. A *growing faith* will be **pruned by the LORD**.
5. The pruning of *growing faith* will produce **patience & perseverance**.
6. A pruned *growing faith* will yield an **eternal harvest**.

MEMORY VERSES:

LESSON THREE MEMORY VERSES:

James 1:22

**Do not merely listen to the word,
and so deceive yourselves.
Do what it says.**

James 1: 2-4

**Consider it pure joy, my brothers,
whenever you face trials of many kinds,
because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.
perseverance must finish its work
so that you may be mature and complete,
not lacking anything.**

LESSON ONE MEMORY VERSES:

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

LESSON TWO MEMORY VERSES

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

James 2:26

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you **get** faith to begin with?

2. What is your part in causing that faith to begin to **grow**?

3. Could you memorize the whole Bible and still not be "holy"? Why?

4. Why can't you acquire patience without trials?

5. **Write** James 1:22 from memory:

Do not merely listen _____

6. **Write** James 1:2-4 from memory:

Consider it pure joy _____

7. **Recite** Hebrews 11:6, Ephesians 2:8-9, Ephesians 2:10, James 2:26

(And without faith...)

(For it is by grace...)

(For we are God's workmanship...)

(For as the body without the spirit...)