

4. Christians Grow by Seeking Every Opportunity

These lessons on *Five Steps to Christian Growth* have covered three steps. In Step 1, Christian growth came from *attending services and admonishing one another to do likewise*. Step 2 illustrated Christians grow when *each one edifies and builds up the other*. In Step 3, *visiting fostered Christian growth*. Now in Step 4, *Christians grow by seeking every opportunity*. As was the case with visiting, so it is the case with seeking opportunity, Christians must look outside themselves to those in need of the gospel and good works. Christianity is not an egocentric experience.

The Father and the Lord Jesus Seek Us

Without any doing on our part, the Father and the Lord Jesus seized an opportunity to extend their grace to us. They are our example of how we are to seek every opportunity to do good to others and share the gospel with them. God's gift came through the offering of his only begotten son. John 3:16-17 teaches: "16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Rom 6:23 adds, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

For Jesus' part, he gave his life as a sacrifice for us. Peter teaches in 1 Peter 1:18-20:

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

As recipients of the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus, we now must seek every opportunity to share and to help others. Christians grow by giving to and doing for others. Jesus put the idea in perspective, as accounted by Paul in Acts 20:35:

35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

One might say, to give is to grow.

Seek Always to Give Ourselves Fully to the Work of the Lord

Christian growth depends on our emulating the Father and the Lord Jesus, seeking to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, as Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:58:

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Many so-called Christians fit the description that Thomas Paine gave to those who shrank back from their obligations as America struggled for independence. In his *Crisis* series, Paine wrote of the shirking citizens:

These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

Shirking Christians should follow Paul's direction as they seek every opportunity for Christian growth through the work of the Lord. This work is characterized in the words *stand*

firm, let nothing move you, always give, and fully to the work of the Lord. The opportunity is always before us, nothing should interfere, and our effort should be one that abounds.

The reward for this unqualified commitment to the work of the Lord is that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Therefore, steadfastly, unwaveringly, we must always abound in the Lord's work.

Seek Always to Study the Scriptures and Work to be Approved

Christian growth comes by seeking every opportunity to study God's word. According to Paul in 2 Tim 2:15, we must do our best as workmen for the Lord, "15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Further, Paul instructed, in 2 Tim 3:15, that these opportunities for study allow us to be wise, "15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Peter stated that this is how Christians grow spiritually in 1 Peter 2:2-3, "2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

The relationship between growth in the scriptures and Christian growth is undeniable in passages like 2 Tim 3:16-17:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In order to grow spiritually, Christians must take every opportunity to make their intellects one with the word of God. According to Ps 1:2, the opportunity is always – day and night:

2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

Ps 119:97-104, expresses power coming to Christians from their opportunities to grow by the word of the Lord:

97 Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.
99 I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
100 I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
101 I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
102 I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
103 How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
104 I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.

Seek Always to Do Good to All Men

Doing good to others gives occasion for Christian growth. It is as if the more good Christians do, the more they grow. Paul set the standard for good works in Gal 6:10: "10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." The Christian obligation is to the brothers and sisters and to all people. According to Paul in Col 4:5-6, the situation with outsiders requires wisdom and diligence: "5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity."

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. John 3:16-17: What did God give the world? Why?
2. Rom 6:23: What are the wages of sin? What is the gift of God?
3. 1 Peter 1:18-20: What did Christ give us?
4. Acts 20:35: What should we do to help the weak? What is more blessed?
5. 1 Cor 15:58: How should we work to the Lord?
6. 2 Tim 2:15: How should we handle the word of truth? Who is approved by God?
7. 2 Tim 3:15: What makes Christians wise unto salvation?
8. 1 Peter 2:2-3: What should Christians crave?
9. 2 Tim 3:16-17: What scriptures are God breathed? What are the scriptures good for?
10. Ps 1:2: When should a Christian meditate on the law of the Lord?
11. Ps 119:97-104: How do the scriptures make us grow?
12. Gal 6:10: To whom are we to do good? How often?