

Growing in Christ

By A. G. Wagar

Looking back over the years many things have happened that causes one to rejoice in the Lord. At the various meetings held during the year, such as Young Peoples' Gatherings, Feast of Pentecost and the summer camps as well as local church meetings people have accepted Christ as their personal saviour. Others who were backsliders and those walking afar off came back to the Lord and rededicated their lives to Him. We rejoice with you all in this stand you have made. There is before you a new and wonderful way in which God has planned for you to walk in. There is a glorious goal you may attain, because you are now a part of the family of God. 1 John 3:1-3 "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons (children) of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." This is the goal that God has set out before you that you as a child of God may grow up in Christ as a mature son like Him. In His Image and likeness when He shall appear or be manifest or unveiled, Paul teaches us this also in Col. 3:4. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." God's plan for his children is that we all grow up into the very image and likeness of Christ. Rom. 8:28-29, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to this purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many Brethren." 2 Cor. 3:17,18, "Now the Lord is that Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same Image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

When you repented of your sins and asked Jesus to come into your heart a tremendous thing took place. By a divine act of God your sins were forgiven and washed away by the blood of Christ. Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Rev. 1:5, "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." This opened up to you a door to enter into a new way with Christ that will lead you from where you are today right into that glorious celestial realm to be seated with Christ. Eph. 2:5-6, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." In the book of Proverbs we read that the path of the just is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. (Prov. 4:18) It is always a joy to see people answer the call and accept the Christ, to pray with the repentive sinner at the altar. This is all so wonderful but this joy in our hearts is soon changed to sadness if these dear ones fail to walk with Jesus and grow in their experience. John said he had no greater joy than to hear that his children were walking in the truth. (3 John 4) Peter also had this same desire and exhorts us in 2 Peter 3:18 to, "grow in Grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

This is also the desire of our hearts for you all. Those of you that are new in the way or those that have been struggling I trust I can give you some help by this writing to help you grow in grace, in the knowledge of Christ.

The bible does not present the Christian life as one of ease but one with much opposition from the world, the flesh and the devil. It pictures this life as one of struggle and suffering but gives us wonderful promises of victory. There are three things that are very important in us growing in grace, getting to know God better and have rich communion and fellowship with Him. They are reading God's word, prayer and meditation. Our experience in Christ has all come about by faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:8-9) Rom. 5:1 tells us we are justified by faith and Hab. 2:4, Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11 and Heb. 10:38 all tell us that the just shall live by faith. They that are justified by faith must continue walking in the faith in order to please God like the saints of old did as we have record of in Heb. 11. This faith is not of ourselves but as we have already quoted from Eph. 2:8 is the gift of God. It is that substance that causes us to believe for the unseen. Heb. 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It comes by the hearing of the word of God. (Rom. 10:17) It is only as we base our faith and trust in God's word that it will produce results. When one gets saved his first experience is generally a great feeling of relief, of love, of joy and peace. These feelings can change under temptation and attacks from the devil, and one cannot depend on his emotions or feelings to whether he is really saved or not. He can however be convinced and stand firm on what God's word says. This was the way Jesus defeated the devil when he tempted him in the wilderness. He quoted the word of God and said it is written (Matt. 4:1:11) When Satan tells you that you are not saved; that it is all emotional, you can have confidence in what God's word says. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord SHALL be saved." (Acts 2:21) If we CONFESS OUR SINS HE IS FAITHFUL and JUST TO FORGIVE us our sins, and to CLEANSE us from ALL righteousness. Then there is Rom. 10:9-10 and many more scriptures you can quote that tell us if we repent, confess our sin, call on Him, believe on Him, we shall be saved.

When you know what God's word says about your experience you can use it against the devil, and against your own carnal thoughts. God's word is truth and has power to sanctify (set apart and make holy) us for Himself. (John 17:17) The devil is the father of lies and a world ruled by him is steeped in falsehood. Truth will bring to light all that is false and give us the victory. The word of God is a powerful weapon for the child of God. Heb. 4:12, "For the word of God is quick, (living and operative) and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discernor of thoughts and intents of the heart." The word of God has cleansing power. Psalms 119:9, "wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." It has keeping power. Psalms 119:11, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." It gives confidence. Psalms 119:89, "For ever O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." It gives direction. Psalms 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word." It produces the love of God in our heart for the word and he that has spoken to us.

To grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ it is important that we read the scriptures and hide them in our hearts for Jesus said to the Jews when they were rejecting Him in John 5:38-39, "And ye have NOT HIS WORD ABIDING IN YOU for whom

He hath sent, Him ye believe not. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, for in them ye think ye have eternal life and they are they which TESTIFY OF ME." Every child of God should have a good system in reading the bible and memorizing scripture. 2 Tim. 3:15-17, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

PRAYER

Secondly, every child of God must pray if they are going to grow in the grace of God and knowledge of Christ. Webster's defines prayer as worship, the offering of supplication or thanksgiving to God. Jesus said in refusing the third temptation, "...it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 4:10) In the Old Testament we read that all the saints of the past spent much time in prayer. John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray. (Luke 11:1) In answering the request of His disciples Jesus taught them to pray. (Luke 11:1-4) In Matt. 6:9-13, Jesus also said, that men ought always to pray and not to faint. Prayer brings us into the place where we are conscious of the presence of God. Through Christ's death and resurrection we now have boldness to enter into the true holies to make our prayers and supplications known unto God. (Heb. 10:19-20) In Matt 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4, we have the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. I will not go into this beautiful prayer in this article in detail but just touch on different points. This prayer is basic for the child of God. Jesus teaches us that if we believe in Him and accept the way of salvation He has provided for us then we receive of His Spirit and God His Father becomes ours and we can address Him as such. (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-7) Isn't this marvellous? Wonders of wonders, no longer strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God. (Eph. 2:19) Members of His family. (Eph. 3:15) The Jews sought to kill Jesus because he called God his father in so doing making himself equal to God. (John 5:18) Just think of what God has done for us through the redemptive work of Christ. It makes us want to hallow his name, reverence him with Godly fear and this we must do, the righteousness of God demands it from us. To pray for the kingdom, the rule of Christ on earth, where God's will is done both in these earthen vessel of ours and also for the age of the kingdom to come upon this earth and be established. We also have the wonderful privilege of praying for our daily requirements knowing he has promised to supply all our need (not wants) according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:19)

As we have said before the Christian life is one of warfare. Eph. 6:11-12 tells us to put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. After Paul lists the armour we are to put on: your loins girded with truth, the breastplate of righteousness, your feet shod with the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. Then in verse 18 he gives us another powerful weapon, which is the believers resource. "PRAYING ALWAYS with ALL prayer and supplication in the spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." We are not just to pray for ourselves but for the whole body of saints that we are a part of through Christ. Perseverance means persistence, steadfastness, singleness of purpose. We do not pray half-heartedly but we can pray with confidence. Jesus teaches us in Mark 11:22-24 about possessing the faith of God,

that is the literal rendering of the Greek in verse 22. This faith is powerful. Prayer becomes powerful when we pray believing God hears and answers prayer. Verse 24 says, "Therefore I say unto you whatsoever things you desire when ye pray, BELIEVE and ye shall receive them and ye shall have them." In 1 John 5:13-15 John tells us he was inspired to write that we might believe on the name of the Son of God and have confidence or faith, in that if we ask anything according to the will of God He will hear us, and if He hears us we know we have the petitions we desire of Him. In all our prayers it is important that we pray according to His will, for 2 Cor. 6:1 tells us we are labourers together with Him. I would like to quote here the passage I have referred to. 1 John 5:13-15, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His Will, He heareth us. And if we know that He heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we desire of Him." Faith is a very important ingredient in prayer, it brings the answer. I was with Bro. York on one occasion when he spoke on prayer and he said God always answers prayer, sometimes He says yes, sometimes no, and sometimes He says wait awhile. This is brought out in the word of God. He has to say no sometimes because we pray according to our own carnal desires to consume it upon our lusts and not according to His will that builds for eternity. James 4:3, "Ye ask, and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts." We also have pointed out in the word of God some of the things that hinder our prayers from being answered. Daniel fasted and prayed for 21 days before he received the answer. The angel that visited him then told him his prayer was heard the first day but the princes of the air hindered his coming with the answer and war took place in the heavens. (Daniel 10:12-14)

When Jesus was teaching on the prayer of faith he said if we expect our prayers to be answered we cannot have something against someone. We must forgive if we are to be forgiven and this is all to do with our prayers being answered. I have quoted Mark 11:24, now I would like to quote verses 25 and 26 so you can see the whole picture Jesus presents here. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." Peter tells husbands they must treat their wives right or their prayers will be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered."

Paul says in 1 Thess. 5:17 to pray without ceasing, in other words always be in an attitude of prayer. In Eph. 6:18 he says praying always in the Spirit. God has given us the Holy Spirit and He is the one that helps us in our praying. Rom. 8:26-27, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

This is why it is important to be filled with the Holy Spirit and be able to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance. (Acts 2:4) 1 Cor. 14:2 tells us that he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto me but to God. And in verse 4 tells us that he edifieth (builds up) himself. We are exhorted by Jude in verse 20 to build yourselves on your most holy faith praying in the Holy Ghost. May God help you to have a rich prayer life. If you haven't

received the baptism of the Holy Spirit you should seek the Lord concerning it, He is the baptiser. One should always remember to balance their prayer life by praying in tongues and praying with the understanding also. (1 Cor. 14:15)

MEDITATION

Webster's defines to meditate, as to think deeply. Just as reading the word and praying is important to the young Christian, it is also important to think deeply upon the things of the Lord. To think deeply upon Him brings out in you that deep reverence for God and Jesus Christ, which is so important to the way we conduct our lives. The way God looks upon those that fear (reverence) Him and think upon His name is brought out in Mal. 3:16-18. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not." God wants us to grow from our childhood experience into a mature son where we can discern between the righteous and the wicked, between good and evil. (Heb. 5:14) As we have said before God wants us conformed into the image and likeness of His Son who is the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom. 8:29) The Proverbs warns us against the man with an evil eye and tells us not to eat with him. For it is not what a man says that makes him Good but as he thinketh in his heart so is he. (Prov. 23:7) It is therefore very important on where we direct our thoughts and our mind; they have a way of shaping character. Isa. 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee."

This is one of the ways we partake of the peace Jesus said He gives unto us. (John 14:15)

After Moses had died and the leadership of the children of Israel had fallen upon Joshua's shoulders the Lord spoke to Joshua, preparing him for the work God had called him to do. Joshua knew the law and was full of the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him. He had great faith in God. It was that which had qualified him to be chosen by God to go into the promised land and to be the successor of Moses. With all these qualifications there was still something else God wanted him to do and that was to meditate on all the law God had given for the children of Israel to live by. Joshua 1:8, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." It is one thing to read the word and become quite knowledgeable in it, but it must go deeper than the intellect. To know the letter of the word is not enough. To be able to instruct others in the letter of the word with enticing words and excellency of speech won't do. For the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life. Joshua had to know what God's laws meant and why it was important to keep them. It wasn't enough for him to see that Israel kept them, God wanted him to observe to do all that was written therein. God wants us to know Him and that we love Him and keep His words. Jesus said of those that do, My Father and I will come and make our abode with him. (John 14:23) One can do a lot of reading and do a lot of talking in their prayers but there is a time for one to be quiet before the Lord and listen to Him.

To meditate on what you have read and prayed about. It is then the Holy Spirit will whisper to your heart in the still small voice and make real to you what He is saying in His word. He will make His word live; He will give you a love for His word, and for Him. His presence

will become very real to you as you turn your thoughts and think upon Him as you meditate on the truths unfolded and ministered in the service by the different gifts and ministries. Truth will live. The way to walk will unfold before you. Your way and ministry will become prosperous and you will be a success in the eyes of the Lord.

The Psalmist said that the righteous man finds delight in the law of the Lord or the commandments of God and he meditates in them day and night. (Psa. 1:2) It is delightful to meditate on God's holy Word and His great plan of salvation. David also said in Psa. 104:34 that his meditation of the Lord was sweet and caused him to be glad in the Lord. Isn't it wonderful to have a place of sweetness in the midst of the bitterness that is around about filling the hearts of the men of the world, and to be glad when we have been used to sorrow and heartache in the world? As David meditated upon the Lord and the things God had shared with him they became very precious to him. (Psa. 139:17) In the time of trouble and confusion take heed to what the Lord says in Psa. 46:10. Be still and know that I am God. To bask in His presence brings confidence and rest. You may not understand all that is going on around about you but you will have a deep settled peace knowing who holds your hand. He is the one that takes care of your tomorrows.

There is much more that one could say on these truths but of course time and space does not allow us to do so in this article, but I trust this will help you who are new in the way to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. To the older ones I trust it will be a blessing to you.