

5 Ways You Can Grow Spiritually This Year

The last words the apostle Peter wrote in the Bible are priceless. He said: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and forever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18). Peter's plea to the first disciples still screams out to us today: "Grow!"

Remember, a disciple who was up and down in his faith, wrote this exhortation. In his early years, Peter bravely confessed that Jesus was the messiah one minute and then denied Him the next. But in the end, this impetuous, fearful, insecure Peter became one of the strongest leaders of the early church.

That's because he grew in his faith.

The Greek word for "grow," "auxano," means "to increase, to become more fruitful or to become greater." This is God's will for every Christian. God does not want us to remain in the same condition year after year. He desires that we be changed from one stage of glory to the next until we are transformed into the image of Christ.

But how does that happen? How do we grow spiritually? Is there anything you can do to encourage that growth as you step into this new year? I believe you must do the following:

1. Rediscover the Bible. You need the Bible like you need food, but many Christians go for weeks or months without reading God's Word. No wonder their spiritual growth is stunted. You will never grow spiritually without soaking your mind in the inspired words of Scripture.

When Jesus told the devil, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4), He was quoting a verse from Deuteronomy that He

had memorized. If Jesus found life in Scripture, so should you.

It's not complicated. Pick a book of the Bible and begin reading one or two chapters a day. Don't just casually read it on your phone. Invest in a study Bible and pour over the words carefully as you underline key phrases. And before you read, ask the Holy Spirit to illumine the verses you need to hear. He will speak to you.

2. Restart your prayer life. British preacher Charles Spurgeon told his congregation: "As well could you expect a plant to grow without air and water as to expect your heart to grow without prayer and faith." A Christian who does not pray is weak, immature and defeated. But when you venture into the realm of the impossible and start asking God to move supernaturally in your family, your personal challenges, your workplace, your church and your nation, you will soon see His miracles.

This year, I was inspired by the movie *War Room* to make an actual prayer closet in my house. I got an old chair and a bulletin board and created my own private spiritual retreat. As you begin 2017, do something radical to make prayer a lifestyle.

3. Reconnect with God's people. I often meet Christians who tell me they've given up on church. Usually it's because they were hurt at a previous church or got bored with the way things were done. But no matter how many legitimate reasons you have for boycotting church, the truth is that God calls us to find our place in His house. You will never grow if you disconnect yourself from His corporate dwelling place.

4. Resist your sinful habits. Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, some Christians wander around in circles their entire lives and never get anywhere. That's because they never break free from habit patterns that prevent them from growing.

It's like taking the same class over and over and always failing.

Have you been stuck in a spiritual rut because of an addiction to pornography, an obsessive fear or an un-yielded attitude that ruins your relationships? It's time to break free. God has already promised "a way to escape" from any temptation that drags you down (see 1 Cor. 10:13). You will need to humble yourself and confess your sin to a mature believer, but after that, you can find deliverance from any stronghold of sin.

5. Recommit yourself to investing in others. Jesus told His disciples He wanted them to reproduce His life in other disciples. He said: "You did not chose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16a-b). That means we can't truly grow into mature disciples unless we lead others to Christ and help those younger believers mature.

Many Christians today are satisfied to take, take, take while they become spiritually obese. They receive but never give. They view church as a spiritual buffet line where they can gorge on messages from popular preachers and compare the personal benefits of their flavor-of-the-month teachings. But Christianity is not about bringing on spiritual truth for our own benefit. If your faith is focused on you, you will never grow.

In 2017, I challenge you to step out of your comfort zone and find your outlet. God has a place for you to serve. Make a quality decision that you are not going to just sit in a church chair and soak in one more sermon; no, it is time to act on what you have learned. Get up and share your faith. That is the secret of spiritual growth. {eoa}