

#20

Growing In Christ

The Apostle James, brother of Jesus, has given us the following counsel: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you....” (James 4:8) We can't draw close to God on our own accord, he has to come to us. But when we earnestly desire to be close to God and to be more like his son Jesus Christ he respects that and comes close to us. If we have a true earnest desire, it will show in our actions. We must be willing to do what it takes to grow closer to him and we must be willing to do what God asks. While we must be willing to take action, we are not capable of growing closer to God by our own actions. God must come to us. In this study we will learn through God's own words how to grow closer to him.

God First Loved Us

1 John 4:19 – We love him, because he first loved us.

John 3:16 – For **God so loved** the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life

Roman 5:8 – But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 1:5 – Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

God Keeps His Promises

Deuteronomy 4:31 – (For the LORD thy God *is* a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.

2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not **slack** concerning his promise, as some men count **slackness**; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

2 Peter 1:9 – We have also a sure word of Prophecy...

We Shall Be Like Jesus

1 John 3:2 – ² 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.

1 John 3:10 – ¹⁰ In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

We Begin Our Christian Life As Babes

Hebrews 5:12-14 – ¹² For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³ For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

God Will Complete His Good Work In You

Philippians 1:6 – Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

God Can Do More Than We Can Imagine

Ephesians 3:20-21 – ²⁰ Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, ²¹ Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

We Are Made Perfect And Receive The Spirit Through Faith

Galatians 3:2-7 – ² This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. ⁵ He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ⁶ Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. ⁷ Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Whoever Seeks Righteousness By Works Receives Death

Note: The law is good. It is breaking the law that brings about the curse which is death. All of us are guilty of breaking the law and are therefore under a curse. Works are an important part of our conversion and spiritual growth. Our works give evidence of our conversion and salvation. James tells us: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26) Our works are obedience to God and His commandments. The only way for righteousness to come through works is for a person to live a life of perfect obedience without sin their entire life. Only Jesus has lived this life. When Abraham obeyed God, it was accounted as righteousness but it was not his works that were accounted as righteousness but his faith. When Abraham obeyed God, it was because he believed God which is faith.

Galatians 3:10-11 – ¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. ¹¹ But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall

live by faith.

Romans 4:13-16 – ¹³ For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: ¹⁵ Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

The Just Live by Faith

Galatians 5:6 – For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Galatians 2:20-21 – ²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by the faith of the Son of God**, who loved me, and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Habakkuk 2:4 – Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but **the just shall live by his faith**.

Galatians 3:11 – But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, **The just shall live by faith**.

Prayer and Fasting

The night before Jesus was crucified he was under great stress. He was under so much stress that he sweated blood. He knew that he would soon be betrayed, tried, beaten and crucified. He went to the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed. (Matthew 26:36)

Jesus fasted and prayed before He was tempted by the Satan in the wilderness. (Matthew 4:2) Some say that Jesus was tempted when He was at His weakest. This is false. Jesus was weak physically but His faith was at a peak. Jesus instructed His disciples that we need increased faith to face certain devils. He then told them that prayer fasting was the answer to their lack of faith.

Matthew 17:14-21 – ¹⁴ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, ¹⁵ Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. ¹⁶ And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, O **faithless** and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. ¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. ¹⁹ Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? ²⁰ And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have **faith** as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. ²¹ Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by **prayer** and **fasting**.

This text is often misunderstood. Jesus seems to contradict himself. First Jesus answers the

disciples question about why they could not cast out the devil. He tells them that they could not cast out the devils because of unbelief. Then He tells them that this type of devil must be cast out by prayer and fasting.

Unbelief or lack of faith was the disciples problem. Prayer and fasting was the solution to this problem. Prayer and fasting builds up our faith.

Further, Jesus said we could move a mountain with faith as small as the grain of mustard seed. Jesus was not speaking of a physical mountain, He was speaking of a seemingly insurmountable problem. Jesus revealed that we can conquer the biggest problems with faith. In this instance the problem was a man possessed by a stubborn devil. The solution to this problem was increased faith. The faith was obtainable through prayer and fasting.

We Must Be Changed

Galatians 6:15 - ¹⁵ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Philippians 4:7-9 - ⁸ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things. ⁹ Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

1 Corinthians 15:30-31 - ³⁰ And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? ³¹ I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

A Changed Person – Refrains From Evil

James 2:20 & 26 - ²⁰ But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?... ²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Hebrews 12:12-15 - ¹³ And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. ¹⁴ Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: ¹⁵ Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled;

2 Corinthians 7:1-2 - ¹ Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. ² Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.

1 Peter 3:8-12 - ⁸ Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: ⁹ Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: ¹¹ Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

Colossians 3:1-25 - ¹ If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where

Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ² Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. ⁵ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: ⁶ For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: ⁷ In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

⁸ But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. ⁹ Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; ¹⁰ And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: ¹¹ Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

¹² Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. ¹⁴ And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. ¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷ And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. ²² Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: ²³ And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; ²⁴ Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

Our Flesh Wars Against God's Spirit

Romans 8:1-2 – ¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Galatians 5:17-21 – ¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Romans 7:14-25 – ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For that which I do I allow^c not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ¹⁶ If then I do

that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. ¹⁷ Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? ²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Our flesh lusteth against the spirit and leads us into sin. But Jesus has died for our sins and freed us from the curse of the law. The important and defining question is what is our desire? Are you in agreement with God that the law is good? Is it your earnest desire to keep the law? Or do you want forgiveness but love sin and want to continue sinning? If you dislike God's law and have no desire to give up cherished sins, then you have not repented. Jesus taught that we must repent or perish (Luke 13:5, 5).

In Romans 7 the Apostle Paul explained that it is the desire of our heart that is important. He said that when he sinned, it was something he didn't want to do but what his flesh wanted to do. And when he failed to do good, he failed to do that which he desired to do. He didn't want to sin but sinned. He wanted to do good and often failed. Since Paul desired to do what was right, he said it was not him that sinned but sin that lived within his flesh. The key was that he delighted in the law of God.

Our flesh itself isn't actually sinful. Our flesh is a symbol of our carnal nature. Our flesh is inherited and is based on our genetics and we have no control over it. We can't change our genetic code. If we have a genetic flaw, we can't change it. Likewise, if we were blessed with good genes, we cannot take credit for it. Our carnal nature is the same way. We can't change our nature, we need to depend on God for help. What we can do is make a decision that we want to change and seek God's help.

But don't confuse your flesh with your actions. A man cannot change that beautiful women excite him. But a man can make a decision to avoid situations where beautiful women could lead him into sin. An alcoholic can't change the fact that they are an alcoholic. But when an alcoholic makes a decision to stay sober, they must change their behavior in order to be successful. Typically they would need to stop carrying alcohol around with them. They would need to rid their home of alcohol. They would need to stay away from bars. They may need to change friends. Likewise, when we seek to overcome any sin, we need to make conscious changes in our life.

Paul said: "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." (Romans 7:12) Paul's desires and beliefs made a difference. He was no longer under the law but under grace because he had repented and confessed his sins. He had claimed Jesus Christ as his savior and desired to do all Jesus commanded. Because of this, it was not him that sinned but his flesh. He writes: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." (Romans 7:25)

It is important to recognize that Paul was a keeper of the Ten Commandments. His failures were in the finer points of the law. This includes perfect love and perfect obedience to all of God's leading in our life each day. Only Jesus could perfectly obey God. He stated: "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that **I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things**. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." (John 8:28-29) Jesus also said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things

that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.” (John 5:19-20)

Let us desire and strive to be like our Saviour, Jesus Christ. When we truly desire to be more like Jesus, God will send His Holy Spirit to help us. As we grow in Christ, we will see where the Father is working, we will see what he is doing, we will desire to join him in what he is doing and the Holy Spirit will guide us and show us what God would have us do. Most importantly, the Holy Spirit will help us do it. We will need the Holy Spirit's help because God will ask us to do things we can not do in our own power or strength.

Jesus Has Broken The Curse of the Law

Galatians 3:13-18 – ¹³ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: ¹⁴ That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. ¹⁵ Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. ¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. ¹⁷ And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Walking In The Spirit Brings Victory

Galatians 5:16, 18, 22-26 – ¹⁶ This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.... ¹⁸ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.... ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. ²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Worship

John 4:23-24 – ²³ But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. ²⁴ God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Confession

1 John 1:9 – ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The Word

John 17:17 – [Jesus prayed:] Sanctify them through thy truth: **thy word is truth.**

Romans 10:17 – **So then faith cometh by hearing,** and hearing by **the word of God.**

Proverbs 30:5-6 – ⁵ **Every word of God is pure:** he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. ⁶ Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

Luke 3:3 – Give us day by day our daily bread. [Jesus is the word made flesh (John 1:1 & 14). Bread represents the body of Jesus (Matt 26:26). Therefore, each day we need our bread which represents the word of God.]

Luke 4:4 – And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

Acts 19:18-20 – ¹⁸ And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. ¹⁹ Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Hebrews 4:12 – ¹² For **the word of God is quick, and powerful,** and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Revelation 19:13 – And he [Jesus] was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and **his name is called The Word of God.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – ¹⁶ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

If You Read The Word You Shall Understand The Mystery of Christ

Ephesians 3:2-7 – ² If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: ³ How that **by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,** ⁴ Whereby, **when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)** ⁵ Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; ⁶ That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: ⁷ Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

The Armour of God

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 – ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴ (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and

bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; ⁶ And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

Ephesians 6:10-18 – ¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² 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. ¹³ Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth [the truth from God's word], and having on the breastplate of righteousness [the righteousness of Christ]; ¹⁵ And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace [the testimony of Christ]; ¹⁶ Above all, taking the shield of faith [our faith is God's promises], wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation [the salvation we have in Christ Jesus], and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; (Words in brackets added for clarification.)

Gifts of The Spirit

Ephesians 4:4-14 – ⁴ There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ One Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. ⁷ But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. ⁸ Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ¹⁴ That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

God has bestowed spiritual gifts on every believer. To grow in Christ, it is necessary to discover what gifts God has given us. Further, we are to seek God and have him reveal his purpose for our gifts and our lives. Finally, we are to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit as God reveals his purpose for our lives each day.

Christians have all of eternity to enjoy the blessings of God. But we have a very short time where we can work with Him in order to help Him achieve His purposes in a sinful world. When our life is ended on this earth, we will never again have the blessed opportunity to reach a lost soul and lead them to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a privilege and a blessing to serve God with the gifts he has given us.

God Is In Control

Habakkuk 1:5-6 – ⁵ Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I

will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. ⁶ For, lo, **I raise up** the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs.

Habakkuk 2:2-3 – ² And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. ³ For **the vision is yet for an appointed time**, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: **though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.**

Habakkuk 3:1-6 – ¹ A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. ² O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. ³ God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. ⁴ And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. ⁵ Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. ⁶ He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

Isaiah 45:5-7 – ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: ⁶ That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. ⁷ **I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.**

Isaiah 45:11-13 – ¹¹ Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. ¹² I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. ¹³ I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah 55:8-11 – ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: ¹¹ **So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.**

Job 41:11 – [God says:] Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? **whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine.**

Genesis 45:5-8 – ⁵ Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for **God did send me before you to preserve life.** ⁶ For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. ⁷ And **God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth**, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ So now it was not you that sent me hither, but **God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.**

Genesis 50:20 – But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but **God meant it unto good**, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

John 9:2-3 – ² And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? ³ Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but **that the works of God should be made manifest in him.**

1 John 4:4-21 – ⁴ Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. ⁵ They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. ⁶ We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. ⁸ He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. ⁹ In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. ¹⁰ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. ¹² No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³ Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

¹⁷ Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love him, because he first loved us. ²⁰ If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? ²¹ And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Putting Others First

1 John 3:16 – ¹⁶ Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Growing In The Spirit

John 3:5 – ⁵ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

John 16:13-14 – ¹³ Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. ¹⁴ He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

John 16:7-8 - ⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter [Holy Spirit] will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. ⁸ And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

Matthew 5:6 – ⁶ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Galatians 5:16-18 – ¹⁶ This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

The Prayer's of David

Psalm 86:11-17 – ¹¹ Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. ¹² I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. ¹³ For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. ¹⁴ O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them. ¹⁵ But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. ¹⁶ O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid. ¹⁷ Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.

Psalm 139:23-24 – ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: ²⁴ And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Summary

I wish there was a formula for growing close to God but there isn't. It is a relationship. We are all different. We all have different needs, different problems, different hang-ups and different personalities. Therefore, each of us will develop our relationship with God in slightly different ways.

God knows each of us better than we know ourselves. He knows what we need and he knows what will be a stumbling stone for us. If we willingly submit ourselves to him fully, our relationship will grow quickly. If we have areas of our life that we are unwilling to submit to him, our relationship will progress more slowly. If we learn to hear His voice, He will guide us. If we have trouble hearing His voice, we need to seek Him and ask Him what the cause is and remove it from our life. We may need to Fast and spend more time in prayer.

In my senior year in college I had a business management class. Our last assignment was to predict interest rates for each quarter of the coming year. Throughout my college experience I had learned many methods of forecasting the economy, interest rates and the stock market. But I had also learned that none of these methods were reliable. Therefore, I chose not to use any of the methods I had learned. I used a combination of the methods and my personal judgment based on the political climate. I could not explain my forecast in any reproducible formula and therefore I was rebuked and my grade for the class suffered as a result. Those who used formulas proven to be unreliable received an "A". People like formulas even if they don't work! Nevertheless, time proved my forecast to be 100% accurate.

Don't fall into the trap of believing that your spiritual growth has to progress according to any formula because it doesn't. There are certain elements that are essential to our spiritual growth. These are faith, love, confession and repentance, Bible study, prayer, praise and worship, fasting, refraining

from evil and being obedient to God's voice in our life (walking in the spirit). But God may call one person to spend more time in prayer and another to spend more time in Bible study. It is almost certain that as the seasons of our life change, God will call each of us to spend more time in one or more of these elements of our spiritual growth. If we are in tune with God, we will hear Him and obey. As we walk in obedience to God from one season of our life to another, our faith will grow, our relationship will grow deeper and deeper and we will get to know him better and better.