

What About Spiritual Growth?

We know you want to grow spiritually and that is why we've provided this booklet. Spiritual growth is like physical growth, you need both food and exercise to be healthy. The following five areas will provide both spiritual food and exercise for you. You will feel yourself growing as you practice them...and you will also glorify God.

Objective #1 Seeking God through Prayer

Prayer is talking with God. It is a two-way communication with the creator of the universe, the author of the Bible and the Father of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He promised to answer prayer in Mark 11:22-25:

“Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea’, and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone forgive him so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

When a follower of Christ prays and his prayers are answered, three things happen.

1. He has prayed in faith believing.
2. He has prayed specifically and thereby met the conditions of a loving heavenly Father.
3. The Father has responded.

Many people fail in prayer primarily because they fail to pray. The challenge to every new believer is the practice of a regular prayer time each morning. This is a commitment to spend a few minutes reading the Bible and communicating with God in prayer. Believe it or not, most Christians do not spend a regular time with God each day and pray specifically in faith. Below is the A.C.T.S. outline from Bill Hybels book, *Too Busy Not to Pray*, which is practical and helpful. As you go through it on a regular basis you'll find yourself covering the bases of your life in prayer.

Adoration (*Psalm 100*)

Begin your prayer time with praise, worship, and adoration for God. Tell Him how impressed you are with what He has done and is doing in your life. You may want to:

1. Choose one of God's attributes and list the benefits to your life because of it.
2. Paraphrase a Psalm
3. Pray back scripture to the Lord.

Confession (*1 John 1:9*)

Take inventory of yesterday. Ask God to show you if there is anything that displeased Him. Make a list. Pray through the list, confessing each item and then destroy the list.

Thanksgiving (*Luke 17:11-19; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*)

Thanksgiving is always a choice. We can choose to be thankful or resentful. You will be strengthened spiritually when you choose to give thanks. Make a list of how God has blessed you. Use the following categories to help:

1. Spiritual
2. Relational
3. Material
4. Physical

Supplication (*Philippians 4:6-7; 1 John 5:14-15*)

Supplication is a prayer that is consistent and determined. It is used for long-term prayer needs. It is not a lack of faith to bring matters up to God again and again in prayer. Here are some ways to categorize:

1. Major concerns
2. Relational needs
3. Physical & material concerns
4. Spiritual
5. Character issues

When you're done, wait and listen to the Lord in prayer. You'll likely receive one of these four responses to your requests:

1. **No-** Your request was not in God's will. (*II Samuel 12:15-16, 22-23; Matthew 26:36-39*)
2. **Slow-** Your request is not God's will at this time. (*Genesis 15:2-6; 21:2; John 11:3,6,14-15,17,43-44*)
3. **Grow-** Your motives are wrong. (*Numbers 14:26-45; James 4:3*)
4. **Go-** Your request is right, timing is right and spiritual condition is right. (*I Kings 18:36; James 5:17-18; Acts 12:5-6, 12-17*)

10 Prerequisites for Answered prayer:

1. Unconfessed sin will put a barrier between you and God. (*Psalms 66:18*)
2. God hears the prayers of those who obey His commands. (*I John 3:22-23*)
3. God will not hear prayers from wrong motives. (*James 4:3*)
4. We are to pray according to God's will, not ours. (*I John 5:14-15*)
5. Abiding in Christ will allow our prayers to be heard. (*John 15:7*)
6. To have answered prayer, we must actually pray. (*James 4:2*)
7. Prayer in the Spirit, that is, under the Spirit's control, is a prerequisite. We must persevere in our praying. Prayers offered in the flesh will not be heard by God. (*Ephesians 6:18*)
8. We must forgive those who have wronged us in order to be forgiven. Restored and right relationships are essential for open communication with God. (*Mark 11:25*)
9. We're to pray with thankful hearts when we come before God. (*Philippians 4:6*)
10. We are to pray and never give up. (*Luke 18:1*)

Objective #2 Studying God's Word for Growth

The Bible is a living book because it contains the Word of the Living God. God uses the Bible to speak to us about our lives, to give us comfort, guidance, correction and direction. The Word of God provides the foundation for our character and our relationships. We study the Bible in order to know God and grow in our relationship with Him. The apostle Paul pointed this out in these verses:

“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.” II Timothy 2:15

“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” II Timothy 3:16-17

A Practical Method of Bible Study: Approach a passage as if you were an investigative reporter; ask the following kinds of questions.

Who wrote the passage?

Who is it written to?

When was it written?

What can you learn about the culture and customs of this time?

Where was it written?

What was the destination of the passage?

What are the problems or circumstances?

What is happening?

What truth is being taught?

What are the promises, commands, or blessings in this passage?

Why was this passage written?

How does this passage affect my life?

What is God saying to me in this passage?

After these investigative questions have been explored, a clear understanding will begin to emerge. Bible study can be one of life's most exciting experiences, because you're discovering God's way and will.

A study notebook can be a real asset to such a study. Write the answers to the following questions in your notebook after you have done your investigative work:

1. What are the commands I need to obey?
2. What are the promises I can trust God to keep?
3. What do I need to learn about God? Jesus? About the Holy Spirit? About my fellow believers?
4. Are there any repeated words or ideas?
5. Are there any comparisons (like “flesh vs. Spirit” in *Romans 8*)?
6. Are there any lists (like the “fruit of the Spirit” in *Gal. 5:22-23*)?
7. Are there any cause/effect relationships (like *Romans 10:14-18*)?
8. Are there any consequences or blessings to look for?

Some Basic Bible Study tools:

- The Bible (More than one version can give a clearer picture. I also recommend a good study Bible for the serious Bible student, such as *Thompson Chain or Dakes*; usually a New International Version is best).
- *Strong's Concordance* -used for looking up Scriptures on a particular word or subject. It also has a Greek and Hebrew dictionary.
- *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*
- A Bible Dictionary
- Bible Maps/Atlas (usually listed for you in the back of your Bible)
- A notebook to record your progress

Objective #3 Sharing our Faith with Others

God has given us “good news” to share with our network of friends and family. We have been given this good news to share with anyone who has not experienced God’s love and forgiveness. They can have eternal life if they will believe the message of the gospel and turn to God. In order to do that, they must hear the Gospel message.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

Romans 10:13-14

Circumstances and possibilities too numerous to name are used by God to bring a person to a time in their lives where they are confronted with a decision about their faith. The gospel may be presented to a person many times and in many ways before an actual decision is made. In fact, most people who have made decisions for Christ have heard the gospel six to ten times in a way they could understand before they made a decision.

People may experience conviction for their sinful behavior or become aware of their present eternal condition. This may happen over many years or in a very short, and sometimes intense, period of time. People move from resistance towards receptivity, based upon their personal experiences and their exposure to the gospel.

Objective #4 Stewarding Our Resources as a Trust from God

Tithing is the practice of giving a tenth of one's income or property as an offering to God. The word 'tithes' means tenth. It is God's basic plan for funding His work on the earth through the church.

The first recorded instance of tithing in the Bible occurs in *Genesis 14:17-20*. After returning from rescuing Lot and defeating his enemies, Abraham met Melchizedek, the "King of Salem" and "priest of God Most High." The text states simply that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe of all the goods he had obtained in battle.

Jacob, Abraham's grandson, also gave a tenth to the Lord, as recorded in *Genesis 28:22*. This happened long before God's law on tithing was taught by Moses.

We also have the Law of Moses, regarding tithing, given in *Leviticus 27:30-32* and *Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 11-12 & 17-18*. This gives the details of tithing, stating that the Hebrew people were required to give from their fruit, and seed and flocks.

The most clearly given Old Testament teaching on tithing comes from *Malachi 3:7-12*, which reads:

- 7 *“Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty.
“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’*
- 8 *“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.
“But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’
“In tithes and offerings.*
- 9 *“You are under a curse - the whole nation of you - because you are robbing me.*
- 10 *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty,
“and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room for it.*
- 11 *“I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit”, says the Lord Almighty.*
- 12 *“Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the Lord Almighty.*

Basic to tithing is the acknowledgment of God’s ownership of everything in the earth (*Psalms 24:1*). In the New Testament, the words “tithe” and “tithing” appear eight times (*Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42, 18:12, Hebrews 7:5-6, 8-9*).

As believers, Christ Himself is our model in giving. He gave everything for us. Tithing is one of the ways we actually give back to God. It is tangible and a clear evidence of our love for God and obedience to Him.

In the New Testament, giving is to be voluntary, willing, cheerful and given in the light of our accountability to God. Giving should be systematic (*I Corinthians 16:1-3*) and not limited to a tithe of our incomes (*II Corinthians 8:7*). We recognize that all we have is from God. We are called to be faithful stewards of all our possessions.

Tithes and Offerings are God's Means of Supporting His Church.

The reward of a successful tithing steward is partnership with God. God offers us "full team membership" with all the benefits, if we are willing to meet the requirements of consecration and obedience. The promises to someone who tithes regularly are wonderful, because we are cooperating with Him.

A. Gods Financial Plan for Funding His Church is Tithes and Offerings.

1. Tithing is the Bible word meaning "tenth."
2. Tithing came before the law. *Genesis 14:20*
3. God considers the tithe His personal property. *Leviticus 27:30-32*
4. Jesus supported tithing in His teaching. *Matthew 23:23*

B. Eight Principles of Tithing *Malachi 3: 6-12*

1. God considers it robbery when His people do not tithe. vs. 6-8
2. Tithing causes us to rise above the curse. vs. 9
3. We're not to divide the tithe, but give it as a whole. vs. 10
4. The tithe belongs in the storehouse. vs. 10
5. Tithing provides the base for God's House. vs. 10
6. God invites a test of this principle. vs. 10
7. Tithing opens heavens resources to us. vs. 10
8. Tithing rebukes the devourer. vs. 11

C. Three Questions

What if I can't afford to tithe?

This is an issue of faith, not money, since everyone can tithe who can figure out how much ten percent is. God has promised to supply our needs if we are obedient and faithful to Him. The real question is, "Do I believe God can take care of me or not?"

What if I'm afraid to start?

This is an issue of fear. It's always difficult to start new things, and tithing is no different. That's one of the reasons God invites us to "test" Him and see the benefits of obedient tithing.

Where should I tithe?

God is very specific that we are to tithe where we get our spiritual food and that we are not to divide the tithe. It is considered one lump sum. That's the difference between offerings and tithe. We can give offerings anywhere we want, perhaps many places, but our tithe can go only to our storehouse.

Objective #5 Serving Others Through Our Spiritual Gifts

Discovering Our Spiritual Gifts

In *1 Corinthians 12:1* the Apostle Paul declares to the Corinthians “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” This applies to us as well.

A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ according to God’s grace for use within the context of the Church and its mission in the world.

The main idea here is that we have a job to do together (*John 17:23*). The assignment has been given to us by God (*Matthew 28:18-20*). To accomplish this assignment, God has given spiritual gifts to each of us (*1 Corinthians 12:7*). The fact is we cannot accomplish God’s plan for our lives without these gifts from the Spirit (*John 15:5*).

Wonderful things can happen when the church is filled with people who love God and have the ability to work together because they have discovered their gifts. As a Small Group Leader your ministry will be empowered by the Holy Spirit if you operate in the gifts He has given you. To help you discover your spiritual gifts you can take a **Spiritual Gifts Survey** in a workshop called, **Experiencing Spiritual Growth** offered by the Northgate Church. This will be an enjoyable experience and give you further information about spiritual gifts.

To effectively discover and apply the spiritual gifts God has given us will require that we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit filled life is the Christ-directed life by which Christ lived His life in and through us in the power of the Holy Spirit (*John 15*). Here is how you can make the wonderful discovery of the Spirit-filled life.

What we should know about a Spirit-filled life:

1. A person becomes a Christian through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, according to *John 3:1-8*. From the moment of spiritual birth, the Christian is

indwelt by the Holy Spirit at all times (*John 1:12, Colossians 2:9-10, John 14:16-17*).

2. The Holy Spirit is the source of the overflowing life (*John 7:37-39*).

3. The Holy Spirit came to glorify Christ (*John 16:1-15*).

4. In His last command before His ascension, Christ promised the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to be witnesses for Him (*Acts 1:1-9*).

Remember: We are filled (directed and empowered) by the Holy Spirit by faith. When we are filled we can experience the abundant and fruitful life which Jesus promised each believer.

What we should do to live a Spirit-filled Life:

1. Sincerely desire to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 5:6, John 7:37-39*).

2. Confess your sins. By faith, thank God that He has forgiven all of your sins- past, present and future- because Christ died for you (*Colossians 2:13-15; I John 1:7-9; 2:1-3; Hebrews 10:1-17*).

3. Present every area of your life to God and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit (*Romans 12:1-2*).

4. By faith, claim the fullness of the Holy Spirit, according to:

a. His Command to “Be filled with the Spirit”

“And do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)

b. His Promise to always answer when we pray according to His will.

“And this is the confidence that we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know we have the requests which we have asked from Him.” (I John 5:14-15).

We believe that it is not only God's will that every believer live a Spirit-filled life, but that we discover our gifts so we can serve others. You can live a Spirit-filled life and allow God to work through you to be an effective Small Group Leader. To learn more about the work of the Spirit on the life of the leader and the life of other believers, here are some passages you might want to read.

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 3:11, I Corinthians 12:13*).
- The indwelling of the Holy Spirit (*Romans 8:11, I Corinthians 3:16, II Timothy 1:14*).
- The filling of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:4, 4:8, 4:31, Ephesians 5:18*).
- The convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (*John 16:7-11*).
- The regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit (*John 3:3-6; Titus 3:5-6*).
- The reassuring ministry of the Holy Spirit (*I Corinthians 2:12-16; I John 4:13; 5:7*).
- The sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit (*Romans 8:11-12, II Corinthians 3:18; II Thessalonians 2:13*).
- The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (*John 16:13, I Corinthians 2:13*).
- The intercessory ministry of the Holy Spirit (*Romans 8:26*).
- The empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit (*Luke 4:14, 18-19, Acts 1:8, Romans 15:13-19*).
- The comforting/helping ministry of the Holy Spirit (*John 14:16; 16:7; Acts 9:31*).
- The believers responsibility to be filled with the Holy Spirit (*Galatians 5:16-26, Ephesians 5:18*).