

Unit 2

Progress in Christian Maturity



Lesson 5

Motivations Toward Growth

Growing is an exciting yet difficult task. I remember a child whose mother helped him plant some seed. She wanted him to experience the process of growth. One day he came to her crying, “Mother, my seed won’t grow. Every day I pull it up to look at it and it isn’t growing!” Small wonder, you say. Yet we are often like this. Growth requires time, proper diet, and good soil. For the believer, the soil is our human spirit and will. If you cooperate with the Holy Spirit, your growth will be natural and continuous.

Parents and teachers often use rewards to encourage us to grow. These prizes are called incentives. An *incentive* is something that moves us to action. The Bible shows us many of the incentives provided for Christian maturity. Some are rewards we realize immediately as we begin to grow. Others are realized only after patient waiting. Yet each of these incentives is important. This lesson is meant to introduce some of these Bible rewards to you.

lesson outline

Goals We Relate to Now

Desiring to Grow Up

Knowing Right and Wrong

Receiving and Serving

Goals We See Further Away

Becoming Useful

Looking Like Jesus

Preparing for the Final Test



lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson, you should be able to:

- Identify motivations for Christian growth.
- Distinguish between “human-life” reasons for growth and eternal reasons.
- Point out some of the believer’s responsibilities in light of the judgment seat of Christ.

learning activities

1. Read the lesson in this independent-study textbook.
2. Answer the study questions in the lesson development, referring as needed to the textbook. Check your answers with those given at the end of this lesson.
3. Take the self-test at the end of this lesson, and check your answers carefully. Review those items answered incorrectly.

key words

cycle	issue	preparatory
endeavor	judicial	require
equip	liken	seek
eventual	option	ultimate

lesson development

GOALS WE RELATE TO NOW

Sometimes Christians are accused of being “other worldly.” This means they think more in terms of heaven than earth. The Bible, however, presents a balanced view of things relating to both heaven and earth. It relates to the “here and now” as well as the hereafter. Maturing as a Christian offers wonderful, immediate rewards. The Holy Spirit presents them to us as incentives to move us on toward our goal in God.

Desiring to Grow Up

Objective 1. *Point out what kind of people God wants us to become.*

The parents of a growing young child who misbehaves will frequently tell him, “Don’t be a baby!” I cannot imagine a child who would desire to stay at that level. Every individual wants to grow up as quickly as possible. To become an adult represents independence. It is a time for additional duties and privileges. Spiritual adulthood is a real incentive for Christian maturity. We have seen from 1 John 2:12-13 that the passage from “children” to “young men” to “fathers” is an important one.

The desire to be an adult and the fear of not growing should cause us to make several important decisions. We must be willing to separate ourselves from habits, speech, and behavior that are childish. Remember that Jesus commended a “childlike” spirit (Matthew 18:2-5). But there is much difference between being *childlike*, as Jesus meant it, and being *childish*.

First Corinthians 13:11 tells us to put away childish speech, feelings, and thinking. Perhaps our childish ways are most seen in demanding that people do things for us. This attitude shows selfishness rather than concern for others and is always taking rather than giving.

Also, we must grow to a higher level of knowing: that of understanding. To *understand* means to advance beyond simple memorization in order to apply knowledge and truth to everyday life. A child begins by learning to say only words, but an adult learns what to say and when to say it.

1 In 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul says, “I have no more use for childish ways,” and in 14:20 he tells the Corinthian Christians to be “grown up” in their thinking. In 13:11, these childish ways are listed as *speech*, *feelings*, and *thinking*. How mature are you in these areas of life? Use this simple chart as the basis for writing a self-examination in your notebook. Then pray that God will help you in areas where you definitely plan to improve.

	CHILDISH	MATURE
<i>Speech</i>	Usually about oneself: problems, plans, actions	Often about things of interest to others
<i>Feelings</i>	React with joy, anger, or self-pity according to personal desire of the moment	Use reason that considers eventual results; express concern for well-being of the group as well as oneself
<i>Thinking</i>	Values determined by own desires for pleasure and entertainment	Values determined by ultimate effect on others as well as oneself; pleasure is secondary to duty

There are three great desires for our spiritual growth. First, our heavenly Father longs for us to come into full maturity as sons and daughters. Then He can fellowship more fully with us. Our spiritual adulthood will glorify our Lord.

2 Read again Ephesians 4:13. According to this verse, what kind of people does God desire that we become?

- a) Christian
- b) Loving
- c) Important
- d) Mature

A second desire for our spiritual growth is that of the church and its leaders. The apostle discusses his concern in Colossians 1:28. He says, “We preach Christ to everyone. With all possible wisdom we warn and teach them in order to bring each one into God’s presence as a mature individual in union with Christ.”

Thirdly, because of their need to grow up, people desire their own spiritual growth. Maturity is completion of growth or full age. It is normal for all genuine believers to desire spiritual adulthood. Let us earnestly seek spiritual growth in order to perform special duties and receive special privileges (blessings) that require God-given maturity.

Knowing Right and Wrong

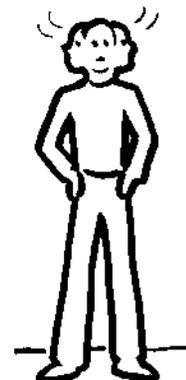
Objective 2. *State how mature people are enabled to distinguish between good and evil.*

Have you watched babies crawling on the ground? They will put *anything* into their mouths. It could be edible, or it could be poisonous. Babies have no ability to judge between the right and wrong thing to eat. Their play with objects can also be dangerous. A stick or other such object can greatly harm infants. As we grow up, our ability to use good judgment develops. This type of development helps us to tell right from wrong. This is an incentive for believers to grow up. They need the ability to tell right from wrong.

There is a definite danger for believers who do not grow up. They often read or listen to false teaching. Because they are immature, they do not realize its falsehood. They are open to deception. Satan finds it easy to confuse the “childish” Christian.

3 In Hebrews 5:14 an adult is described as being able to

- a) become a father.
- b) get married.
- c) distinguish between good and evil.
- d) quote many Scriptures.



4 Read again the passage in Ephesians 4:13-14. According to verse 14, “children are blown about” by every shifting wind of the teaching of those who are deceitful. What do these deceivers do?

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Do you see why we must grow in our ability to know the difference between right and wrong? Knowing right from wrong is important now to each of us! We need to “grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head” (Ephesians 4:15). Thus, we avoid the damages of immaturity.

The passage in Hebrews 5:14 tells us that it is through *practice* that mature people “are able to distinguish between good and evil.” Our word *gymnasium* comes from the Greek word for “practice.” As an athlete practices or exercises in a gymnasium, so we need to increase our ability to distinguish between right and wrong by practicing the right. We must grow up by the *practice* of God’s Word, examining and doing things in the light of the Scriptures.

Receiving and Serving

Objective 3. *Explain how and why a believer receives spiritual instruction.*

One terrible thing about being immature is that we miss important messages. You often say to a child, “I can’t explain this to you because you wouldn’t understand it.” Yet children want to know “why” and “how.”

This is the cry of the writer to the Hebrews: “There is much we have to say about this matter, but it is hard to explain to you, because you are so slow to understand” (Hebrews 5:11). The letter to the Hebrews was written to people who were in great spiritual danger. They were losing their spiritual sense of direction. There was a powerful message that could have greatly helped them. But their immaturity prevented them from receiving it.

5 Read Hebrews 5:12. What lessons did these people still need?

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Because the first lessons had to be repeated, new lessons could not be given. How sad! The full teaching of the Christian faith is by no means easy. It cannot be learned in one day.

The apostle Paul had a desire for the Ephesian Christians also. He wanted them to grow up. They could then *really* understand the wonderful things about being Christians.

6 Read Paul’s prayer for the believer in Ephesians 1:15-20. What do believers need to open to receive spiritual light?

- a) The window
- b) The Bible
- c) Their minds
- d) Their eyes

7 In Ephesians 1:18-19, what three important things need to be revealed to believers? (List them in the order mentioned.)

- a)
- b)
- c)

As we mature in this Christian experience, we are able to receive wonderful teaching through God’s Word and the Holy Spirit. The Word becomes very real, and it also is a means of teaching.

Believers cannot afford to miss great messages from God through His Spirit and His Word; therefore they must open their minds to receive these messages.

8 Second Timothy 3:16-17 has an important message for us. In verse 17 we are told why Scripture rebukes, corrects, and instructs. Why does Scripture do these things?

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God wants us to be mature and well equipped for His service. This is a great reason in this present life for our pressing on to Christian maturity.

GOALS WE SEE FURTHER AWAY

Objective 4. Describe the endeavor to which Paul likens the Christian life.

Do you enjoy personal testimonies? I do. I especially enjoy hearing from older Christians. They have proven God's grace. Also, they are nearer to the end of their life. They are soon to see their Lord directly. They see life from a better perspective. For many of us, the incentives we have just studied seem more real. But the Bible clearly teaches both immediate and more distant goals for Christian maturity.

The apostle Paul testifies to the aspect of distance in the process of Christian maturity. "I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

9 According to 2 Timothy 4:8, what is waiting for Paul?

- a) A prize of victory
- b) Another race
- c) A financial reward

Paul views the Christian life as a race. He sees the necessity of keeping the goal in mind. Have you ever been in a race or other athletic contest? The winner is usually the one best trained. We say that the winner "is able to go the distance," because his or her body has been strengthened by exercise. As the athlete trains for a physical contest, *train yourself to reach the more distant goals of a godly life* that require Christian maturity.



10 Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. What does every athlete in training submit to?

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11 In verse 26, Paul says that he runs straight toward

- a) his death.
- b) perfection.
- c) the finish line.

12 Referring still to the contest of life, Paul says in verse 27 that he keeps under control so he will not be disqualified.

The phrase *finish line* means "goal." Athletes in training must strengthen their bodies, through physical exercise, for the race. The Bible prescribes both physical and spiritual discipline for the race of life: "Keep yourself in training for a godly life. Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is valuable in every way" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Believers accept hard assignments because they view the ultimate goals.

Becoming Useful

Objective 5. *Identify the goal of the Word of God in the believer's life.*

Usefulness may be classified as a somewhat distant goal. "But," you say, "isn't usefulness to God an immediate goal?" In one sense the believer is always available to God. From the beginning, the Christian life is one of service. The newest believer can do a work for God. However, as we mature in God, we become prepared for greater responsibility.

At our house the children are given work to do from their earliest years. The work assignments are to teach them responsibility. The quality of their work at first is not good, but it is good for them to work. As they grow, they do much better. They can be trusted with more important assignments.

13 Reread 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The goal of the Word of God in our lives is to qualify and equip us to serve God. What kind of good deeds are we to be able to do?

- a) A particular kind
- b) Some kinds
- c) Every kind

We will spend an entire lesson later on the subject of our usefulness. At this point we simply need to realize that *total usefulness* is our goal. God equips some people to do some kinds of good deeds and other people to do other kinds. He wants to prepare us for every kind of deed that He plans for us to do. Let us desire to become *senior ambassadors* for God, prepared for any assignment from God, trustworthy and ready.

Looking Like Jesus

Objective 6. *State the likeness into which the Spirit transforms us.*

Another goal is to become more and more like Jesus. The believer has an immediate desire for this. But this particular goal of Christian maturity is a lifelong process. As we have seen, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. Believers must choose to allow the Holy Spirit to control their personalities, emotions, intellect, and will. The Spirit continually works at maturing the submissive believer into Christlikeness.

14 Review Romans 8:29 and rephrase it carefully in your own words.

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To be like Jesus is an important goal on which we will spend an entire lesson in Unit 3. Here, we are discussing it briefly. Jesus Christ loved us and bought our freedom with His blood. To know Him and be like Him is both a daily and a lifelong goal.

15 Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. Isn't that a wonderful picture? We reflect the glory of the Lord! Into what likeness does the Spirit transform us?

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To reflect the glory of the Lord, we must keep His beauty, His fullness, and His obedience constantly before us. Physically, mentally, and spiritually we must "keep our eyes fixed on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2) in order to reflect a measure of His likeness now and a greater measure of it as we mature in Him. What a challenge for an entire lifetime! But we have much more to say on this in Lesson 8.

Preparing for the Final Test

Objective 7. Explain how believers are to do their preparatory work for the final test.

There is a great incentive for the believer's maturity that is seldom discussed. Multitudes of Christians have almost no knowledge concerning God's judgment of believers. I am frequently reminded of a time in my college life when I returned to class after more than a week's absence. I walked in on the day of a mid-semester examination. What a shock! I had not read the assignments and did not even know the area of material to be covered. But I had to take the test! That will be the situation with countless believers. Our heavenly Instructor has told us clearly what is required and has carefully announced the time and type of examination. A consideration of these truths is most important for believers today. It affects their priorities, motivations, and Christian life in every respect. May this study help prepare and alert us for the test.

Let us read the following Scriptures that describe this eternally significant event!

You then, who eat only vegetables—why do you pass judgment on your brother? . . . All of us will stand before God to be judged by him. For the scripture says, "As surely as I am the living God, says the Lord, everyone will kneel before me, and everyone will confess that I am God." Every one of us, then, will have to give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:10-12)

More than anything else, however, we want to please him, whether in our home here or there. For all of us must appear before Christ, to be judged by him. Each one will receive what he deserves, according to everything he has done, good or bad, in his bodily life. (2 Corinthians 5:9-10)

16 According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, before whom shall we stand to be judged?

- a) Christ
- b) The church
- c) The Holy Spirit

Please note carefully the following pronouns that I have italicized. In Romans 14:10-12 it is "all of *us*" who shall stand at this judgment, so that "every one of *us*" shall give account of himself/herself. In 2 Corinthians 5:8: "*We* are full of courage"; verse 9: "*We* want to please Him"; and verse 10: "*All of us* must appear." These are the pronouns of God's family! It is not "they" or "them" but "we" and "us," the inclusive pronouns, that are used with reference to the body of believers.

One further note of importance to discuss concerning our appearance at this seat of examination is the matter of option. Is it by choice? May we in some manner avoid it? Romans 14:10 says we "will stand," and verse 12 says we "will have to give account." Second Corinthians 5:10 says we "must appear." The words *will* and *must* leave no doubt about the certainty of our keeping our appointment for judgment.

We must quickly put away wrong understandings about this evaluation. This judgment seat has nothing to do with our eternal salvation. In fact, as we have already stated, it is a family affair. There will be no unbelievers there. The original Greek word *bema* refers literally to a raised platform like that on which the umpire of the Grecian games would sit and from which he watched the contestants and rewarded the winners. That specific seat was known as the "reward seat" and never had the concept of a judicial decision. This "judgment" is not a place where the believer's salvation is reviewed. It is a place of inspection, examination, reward, and loss on the basis of how we used our talents and knowledge in life.

We have stated that every believer is called to be like Jesus Christ. Jesus lived His life according to the will of the Father and found His complete joy in that fulfillment. He took upon himself,

according to Philippians 2:6-7, the form of a servant. Believers are called to take on His image, to be His children and servants. Thus we can readily see that this *bema* will be the judging of the believer's servanthood under the lordship of Jesus Christ. This will be even more obvious as we move through the Scriptures.

17 Read Galatians 6:7-8. This passage states a law of God that applies to the natural and spiritual world. It is an address to Christians that contains specific comments concerning Christian life and work. State the law of God in verse 7.

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As we have seen, every farmer is involved in a cycle of buying, planting, working land, and awaiting the reward of his labor with keen anticipation. At great price, God has purchased and worked the soil of our lives. He expects results. Results will be a major issue in that day of judgment.

18 Read 2 Corinthians 9:6. Who will have a small crop, according to this verse?

- a) The person who sows little
- b) A poor person
- c) A city person

Now let us note two passages, written by the apostle Paul to different churches, that contain a great deal of similar teaching addressed to slaves and servants in the churches:

Slaves, obey your human masters . . . Do this not only when they are watching you, because you want to gain their approval; but with all your heart do what God wants, as slaves of Christ. Do your work as slaves cheerfully, as though you served the Lord, and not merely men. Remember that the Lord will reward everyone, whether slave or free, for the good work he does. (Ephesians 6:5-8)

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for men. Remember that the Lord will give you as a reward what he has kept for his people. For Christ is the real Master you serve. And every wrongdoer will be repaid for the wrong things he does, because God judges everyone by the same standard. (Colossians 3: 23-25)

Actually these Scriptures are addressed to all believers. We are the servants of Jesus Christ. He promises us that there will be a time of reward for faithfulness but warns us that we shall receive repayment for the wrong we have done.

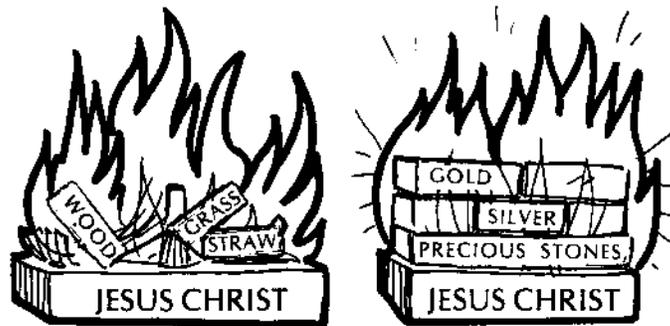
19 In both of the above Scripture passages, we are to do our work as though we were working for whom?

- a) The church
- b) Our own father
- c) The Lord

According to Romans 14:12, believer must give account of themselves to God. *Account* is a word that suggests a setting down of our blessings and opportunities to compare them with what we have accomplished: that is, God's investment in us compared with our profitable return to Him. This concept is in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 also. Look again at this passage of Scripture. It says that every believer shall actually appear before the Lord. At that time the results of his or her entire life will be reviewed. Evidently, this does not mean a recounting of sin. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from sin. But let us not treat this point lightly. This will be a solemn moment. Concern over the seriousness of this moment should strongly urge the believer to do the work and will of God.

Even in this course, part of the incentive to learn is the examination or test. Paul clearly implies that being examined before Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, will be for some an embarrassing moment. It will be so particularly for the Christian who has received the grace of God but has produced no fruit.

Do you remember our study in 1 Corinthians 3? Turn to 1 Corinthians 3:9-15. In one of Paul's examples, he likens the believer to a building. Christ is "the one and only foundation" for this building. Thus every believer begins with the same foundation. Believers then begin to build on that foundation. They build with either carelessness or fine craftsmanship; they choose their materials well or build cheaply. According to the apostle Paul, some use gold, silver, or precious stones, while others use wood, grass, or straw. Can we doubt the meaning of that comparison? Then the message becomes direct (rather than symbolic):



And the quality of each person's work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day fire will reveal everyone's work; the fire will test it and show its real quality. (1 Corinthians 3:13)

20 Now read 1 Corinthians 3:14. If what was built survives, what will happen to the builder?

Take a moment to copy 1 Corinthians 3:15 in your notebook.

Here is a clear picture. Every believer begins his or her building on Jesus Christ, the foundation, after receiving Him as Lord and Savior. Building materials are shaped from attitudes, choices, priorities, maturity, carnality, Christian character or lack of it, things believers do that affect God and themselves, doctrine, use of finance, stewardship of possessions and time, words, habits, motivations, quality of Christian service to others, and on and on.

The list seems endless. Every day we choose materials and add to the structure. But there will come upon us the moment of inspection. The examination of what we have built will be so severe that the apostle likens it to a test by fire.

Construction that is useless, careless, unchristlike, selfish, and carnal will quickly be consumed. Some Christians have so used their lives that when their works are tested, nothing will remain. Their works will be without reward. It will be as though they had never built upon their salvation. Others will experience loss but will find the fire powerless to consume what remains of true Christian works. These will be rewarded. And what better reward than to feel we have wisely built on the foundation that our blessed Lord provided for us at the price of His life.

Actually, every portion of Scripture that explains how God intends the believer to live becomes part of the evidence at the judgment seat of Christ. Colossians 3, Romans 14, and 1 Corinthians 4: 1-5 indicate this. Perhaps you are now asking, "Just where does this place me? What should I do now?" Here are several points to consider:

First, it should not surprise us that such a costly salvation entrusted in the hands of people demands an accounting. Think or read through the parables of the Lord. How many of them concern servants left with responsibilities and eventually brought before their Lord for an accounting? Ask yourself this question: Does this scriptural review of the judgment seat of Christ make me more aware of my responsibility for having received such a great salvation?

Secondly, there is a clear implication in the Scriptures that believers who are aware of future judgment can make changes in their priorities and life which will make the “examination” more successful on their part. For example, carefully consider the message in 1 Corinthians 11:31-32: “If we would examine ourselves first, we would not come under God’s judgment. But we are judged and punished by the Lord, so that we shall not be condemned together with the world.”

We can examine our lives now in preparation for the future judgment. We can change attitudes, review motivations, and redirect our energies toward the things that matter much in God’s sight. Above all, we can remain open to the Holy Spirit who will guide us into fruitful, spiritual Christian life and service.

self-test

TRUE-FALSE. Write **T** in the blank space if the statement is TRUE. Write **F** if it is FALSE. Then change the false statements to make them true.

- **1** An incentive is something that prevents or blocks us from action.
An incentive is something that
- **2** A believer who does not grow up is often subject to deceptive teaching.
A believer who does not grow up is
- **3** The letter to the Hebrews shows that the Hebrew Christians could not receive an important message because they were slow to understand.
The letter to the Hebrews shows that the Hebrew Christians could not receive an important message because
- **4** The believer is set apart by God to become like His Son.
The believer is set apart by God to
- **5** A believer's salvation will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ.
A believer's will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ.

ALTERNATE CHOICE. Read the set of questions carefully and write your answer in the space preceding each numbered item.

6–11 When Christ returns and a Christian's works are tested, those which are eternal will remain, while those which are only temporal will be consumed.

Write the letter **E** before those works that are eternal.

Write the letter **T** before those works that are temporal.

- **6** Desiring to develop beyond spiritual childhood
- **7** Judging a Christian brother or sister
- **8** Being concerned about the praises of others
- **9** Having ultimate Christlikeness
- **10** Living according to God's Word
- **11** Storing up riches on earth

SHORT ANSWER. Briefly answer the following question in the space provided.

12 What is the name for the place of judgment and reward for a believer's work?

answers to the study questions

- 1** Your own self-evaluation
- 11** c) the finish line.
- 2** d) Mature
- 12** his body
- 3** c) distinguish between good and evil.
- 13** c) Every kind
- 4** They lead others into error by tricks that they invent.
- 14** Here is a sample answer:
God planned that those whom He already knew would be like His Son, so that His Son would be the first among many brothers.
- 5** First lessons of God's message
- 15** Into the likeness of the Lord
- 6** c) Their minds
- 16** a) Christ
- 7** **a** The hope of their calling
b The richness of God's blessings for them
c The greatness of God's power in them
- 17** A person will reap exactly what he or she sows.
- 8** So that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do good deeds
- 18** a) The person who sows little
- 9** a) A prize of victory
- 19** c) The Lord
- 10** Strict discipline
- 20** He or she will receive a reward.