

GROW

(Growing To Become Like Christ)

“speaking the truth in love,
we are to **GROW UP** to
become more and more like Christ
who is the head of His body, the church.”
Ephesians 4:15



Bill Loveless
Christ Is Life Ministries

GROW

(Growing To Become Like Christ)

Bill Loveless

Christ Is Life Ministries

Copyright © 2023 by Bill Loveless

All rights reserved. This book may not be copied or reprinted for commercial gain or profit. The use or copying of this material for personal or group study is permitted.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (GNT) are from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version—Second Edition, copyright ©1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.



Website: www.christislifeministries.com

Email: bill@christislifeministries.com

Introduction

I have written a four-part series based on what I believe is our calling as Christians:

“We are called to grow into Christ-likeness and experience our true identity in order to live life for others and experience a deep relationship with God.”

The series is called: ***Growing Up–Growing Out–Growing Deep***. Below is an overview of the study.

Growing UP – What it means to grow into Christ-likeness and to experience your true identity.

Book One - Growing To Become Like Christ

Book Two - Experiencing Your True Identity

Growing OUT – The overflow of Christ-likeness through you to selflessly live your life for others.

Book Three - Living Life For Others

Growing DEEP – Understanding the depth of God’s love for you and how to experience a deeper relationship with Him.

Book Four - Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God

This booklet, GROW, is a summary of Book One – *Growing To Become Like Christ*. I hope that, as a result of what the Holy Spirit reveals to you in this booklet, you will continue on by going through Book One.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

What Does It Mean To Grow Spiritually?.....	7
---	---

CHAPTER TWO

Why Do We Need To Grow Spiritually?.....	10
--	----

CHAPTER THREE

What If We Don't Grow Spiritually?.....	13
---	----

CHAPTER FOUR

How Do We Grow Spiritually?.....	22
----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER FIVE

How Will We Know We Are Growing Into The Likeness of Christ?	32
---	----

Introduction

*“Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.”¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, **Growing in every way more and more like Christ**, who is the head of his body, the church.¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”*

Ephesians 4:14-16

I am invited to partner with churches—denominational as well as non-denominational—all across America. The pastor of one of these churches told me that his vision statement is to “Grow up and grow out.” Then he went on to say, “Because our people are not growing up spiritually, we need to move the nursery into the worship center because we have a bunch of grown up two-year-olds.”

Even though those were disturbing words to hear, at least this pastor recognized that his people were not growing spiritually. Unfortunately, when I look at evangelical America these past 20 years of my ministry, this pastor’s words ring true for many of our churches.

Think about this: Why are so many churches dividing, blowing up (in a negative way), or simply closing their doors? Is it possible the main reason is that churches are filled with spiritually immature Christians rather than spiritually mature ones? I believe it is.

That is why I agree with Paul in Ephesians 4:14-16 that we must grow up spiritually because too much is at stake personally as well as in the body of Christ if we do not.

Therefore, in this booklet I will be answering the following questions:

- **What does it mean to grow up spiritually?**
- **Why do we need to grow up?**
- **What if we don't grow up spiritually?**
- **How do we grow?**
- **How will we know we are growing up?**

CHAPTER ONE

What Does It Mean To Grow Spiritually?

*“... but **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:18*

*“... like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may **grow** in respect to salvation.”
1 Peter 2:2*

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you have probably heard the term “spiritual growth.” Someone may have shared with you the verses above as proof that we need to grow up. For years, I heard the term, but I had no idea what it meant. I did all the things I was told to do to grow spiritually: read my Bible, prayed, applied what I learned from the Bible, involved in a life group, listened to sermons, and read spiritual books.

I assumed I was growing because I did all of these things (and did them well), only to discover 30 years later I wasn’t really growing. Why? Because I did not understand key truths about what spiritual growth is, the objective or goal of it, and how to grow. So, I want to share in this chapter some key words and verses that reveal the meaning of spiritual growth and the objective of it.

Let’s go back to Ephesians 4:15 in the New Living Translation and look at the word “growing.”

*“Instead, we will speak the truth in love, **growing** in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.” Ephesians 4:15*

The word “growing” in this verse means “inward spiritual growth.” Three verses and three key words that focus on spiritual growth are “conformed,” “transformed,” and “formed.” Let’s begin by looking at the word “conformed” in Romans 8:29:

*“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become **conformed** to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.”*

The word “conformed” means “to align our beliefs and thoughts with another or having the same form as another.”

The second word is “transformed” in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

*“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being **transformed** into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

The Greek word for “transformed” is “metamorphoo” which means “a change of the form or nature of a person into a completely different person by supernatural means.” It is where we get the word “metamorphosis.”

Finally, let’s look at Galatians 4:19 and the word “formed.”

*“My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is **formed** in you.”*

The word “formed” in the Greek means “in the same nature as.”

Now that we have looked at these three “growth” words, the next question is, “What is the objective or goal of spiritual growth?” Another way to phrase this question is, “What, or in this case, ‘who’, are we growing into?” Let’s take another look at these four verses to find the answer:

- “Growing in every way more and more **like Christ**” – Ephesians 4:15
- “Conformed to the **image of His Son**” – Romans 8:29
- “Transformed into **His [Christ’s] likeness**” – 2 Corinthians 3:18
- “**Christ’s** being formed in you” – Galatians 4:19

All four of these verses bring us to the same result: **the goal of spiritual growth is Christ-likeness**. Bringing these four verses together, let's define "growing up" this way:

Christ's being FORMED in you is the result of being CONFORMED to His image which occurs when you are being TRANSFORMED into Christ-likeness (i.e., growing to become more like Christ).

The question is: If we are **not** being conformed to the likeness of Christ, **not** being transformed into Christ-likeness, or Christ is **not** being formed in us, are we growing up? I believe the answer is "no." Until I understood the objective of spiritual growth and learned how to grow into Christ-likeness, I had very little spiritual maturity. (We will define what Christ-likeness is in Chapter Four.)

CHAPTER TWO

Why Do We Need To Grow Spiritually?

The primary answer to this question is found in the following three verses:

*“As a result, we are no longer to be **children**, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”*

Ephesians 4:14

*“Brethren, do not be **children** in your thinking....”*

1 Corinthians 14:20

*“When I was a child, I used to speak like a **child**, think like a **child**, reason like a **child**.” 1 Corinthians 13:11*

Paul is telling us that if we don't grow, we will remain spiritual children. This should be a real incentive because when you think of little children, what can children do?

As true as it is with physical children, it is also true with spiritual children when it comes to living the Christian life. Let's look at a few questions if we choose not to grow up.

If we stay spiritual children:

- Will we ever be able to process the truths of the Bible?
- Will we be able to walk consistently in the Spirit?
- Will we be able to discern God's will for our lives?
- Can we experience God's promises (e.g., victory, freedom)?
- Can we be transformed into Christ-likeness?

The answer to all of these questions is “no.” This is why we cannot afford to stay spiritual children.

Take a look at your spiritual journey so far by asking yourself these questions:

- Am I struggling with experiencing consistent victory in my Christian walk?
- Is there some sin pattern that I cannot set myself free from?
- Are there sinful behaviors or attitudes that I want changed, but they never seem to change no matter how hard I try?
- Am I experiencing some past woundedness that I have not been healed from no matter what I have tried?
- Do I sense that there is something missing or something more I want out of my Christian life?

The answers to these questions for me for the first 30 years was a resounding “yes.” I couldn’t understand what was wrong, but where I was at the end of those 30 years is a place I call “I can’t.”

Here are some examples of what I mean:

- I can’t set myself free from my sin strongholds.
- I can’t attain victory over my sinful behaviors.
- I can’t heal myself of my woundedness.
- I can’t change or transform myself.
- I can’t produce the joy and fulfillment that I want out of the Christian life.

How about you? Can you identify with any of these “I can’ts”? Are there any other “I can’ts” that you are experiencing?

[Note: If you have been a Christian for a number of years and if any of these things are true of you, please don’t feel any guilt, shame, or condemnation. My purpose for asking these questions is for us to be honest with ourselves and realize that the

activities we thought would produce spiritual growth may not have produced much, if any, spiritual maturity. Remember, it took me decades to recognize I wasn't growing spiritually.]

The Key Reason To Grow Spiritually: To Be TRANSFORMED

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed**....” Romans 12:2*

I believe the number one reason we need to grow is because the greatest promise in the New Testament is that we can be transformed. Remember the Greek word for “transformed” means “to change the form or nature of a person into a completely different one by supernatural means.”

I don't know about you but this definition sounds very attractive to me because I would like to experience changes in the way I think, feel, choose, and behave. How about you? What do you want changed about your life? To sin less? To experience godly behavior? To be set free from your fleshly behaviors (e.g., being angry, controlling, judging, unforgiving, etc.). To experience victory over a sin stronghold (e.g., pornography, alcohol, fear, anxiety, rejection)?

I hope the answer is “yes” because that is what God promises when we know, believe, and walk in the truth concerning ~~about~~ spiritual growth. Before we get into a deeper understanding of what that looks like, let's answer this question: What if we don't grow up?

CHAPTER THREE

What If We Don't Grow Spiritually?

This is a crucial question because if we don't understand the consequences of not growing up, we will never know the negative impact those consequences will have on each one of us and those around us.

If you have children, can you imagine what your life and theirs would be like if your children had not grown up? Therefore, let's look at the consequences of not experiencing spiritual growth.

Our Focus Will Continue Being On OURSELVES

*"Do nothing from **selfishness** or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." Philippians 2:3*

Would you agree that we come into this world being selfish? Up until we were saved, our focus was on ourselves, trying to get our own needs met and living life without much regard for others. This is true especially in a marriage relationship. If two self-focused people get married, is it any wonder that there will be problems? If we don't mature spiritually, we will remain selfish, self-focused, and self-centered.

We Will COPE With Life Instead of Being Transformed

Unfortunately, this is where most Christians are today. Instead of experiencing transformation, they live like unbelievers because they are figuring out ways to cope with their flesh, their struggles, and their relationships. I define "coping" as what we try to do using our own intellect, ability, will power, and self-discipline to deal with our unresolved conflicts, our unmet needs, or our ongoing fleshly behaviors. I understand coping with life because that is how I lived for 30 years as a Christian.

We Will Stay In BONDAGE To Our Sin, Our Flesh, and Our Fleshly Behaviors

Coping with life instead of being transformed means we will stay in bondage to our flesh and fleshly behaviors. Paul confirms this in Romans 7:14, 18

*“For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of **flesh**, sold into bondage to sin.” Romans 7:14*

*“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my **flesh**; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.” Romans 7:18*

In case you don't know what the “flesh” is, here is the way I define it:

THE FLESH is our desire to live life with OURSELVES as the source, INDEPENDENTLY OF or APART FROM God as our Source.

Our flesh says, “Life is all about me and you need to be all about me as well.” It also says, that apart from God:

- **I** can be in control of myself and others.
- **I** can get my needs met apart from God
- **I** can, in my own ability, fix, solve, or overcome all of my struggles and conflicts.
- **I** can change myself and others.
- **I** can produce a fulfilling and happy life.

However, it does not stop with the flesh. From our flesh flows fleshly behaviors. This is how I define fleshly behaviors:

Fleshly behaviors are self-centered, sinful ATTITUDES and ACTIONS that result from living from the FLESH.

Below is a list of fleshly behaviors that rise out of our flesh:

Rejecting	Controlling	Demanding
Frustrated	Manipulative	Unforgiving
Self-protective	Judgmental	Uncaring
Insensitive	Resentful	Jealous
People-pleasing	Self-righteous	Selfish
Overbearing	Critical	Angry
Guilting	Shaming	Envious
Deceitful	Bitter	Blaming
Condemning	Unloving	Resisting

The problem is that our flesh is toxic to us and those around us. Pick any of the fleshly behaviors above that apply to you. Does living from these behaviors result in “life” or “death” in you and those around you?

The Result of Staying Self-Focused and Being In Bondage Is INTERNAL TURMOIL or MISERY

During those years I was not growing spiritually, I was in constant internal turmoil and misery. I was totally self-absorbed trying to manage my fears, anxieties, and inadequacies. Instead of being transformed, I just learned to cope with my misery through my work, drinking, and pornography.

One problem when it comes to internal misery is that we may not recognize it because we have lived with it for so long it seems normal. We rationalize by saying, “It’s just how I am.”

We Will Continuously Be Deceived By SATAN and The WORLD

*“So also we, while **we were children**, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.” Galatians 4:3*

*“Little children, make sure **no one** deceives you”*

1 John 3:7

Satan wants to keep us spiritual children because it is easier to control and manipulate us. He does this by continually trying to deceive us which keeps us in bondage to our false beliefs. Not only that, Satan wants to keep us from growing up because he knows God’s truth and how, if we knew it and lived from it, our lives would be transformed.

Satan has a three-fold strategy to keep us trapped in our flesh and miserable. It is summed up in John 10:10:

*“The thief comes only to **steal and kill and destroy**;”*

He accomplishes this three-fold strategy by:

1. Keeping you from knowing God’s truth
2. Keeping you from walking in God’s truth
3. Keeping you from believing that Christ, not you, is the source for living the Christian life
4. Keeping you from walking by faith in God as your Source to transform your life

If he is successful, we become open to the lies from the world. The world says “do more to get more and don’t let anyone get in your way.” Satan uses the world to keep us focused on ourselves. We are also prone to believing lies concerning the cultural issues of our day (e.g., abortion, LGBTQ).

We Will Never Experience God’s Promises

If we don’t grow, we will never experience God’s wonderful promises. Here are a few examples:

- To live in **victory** over sin (1 Corinthians 15:57)
- To live in **freedom** from our fleshly behaviors and sin strongholds (Galatians 5:1)

- Be **healed** from our past or present woundedness (Psalm 147:3)
- Be **transformed** into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18)

I am sure that you, like me, want to experience all of these promises, but if we don't mature, then none of these promises will ever become our experiential reality.

Things Will Get Worse

If we don't grow, not only will nothing change and things will only get worse, but we will experience:

- More frustration
- More failure
- More defeat
- More disillusionment
- More inner turmoil
- More of the same or worse (i.e., no change or transformation)

We Can Get To A Place of RESIGNATION

Many Christians come to the place of resignation if they are not being transformed. They say, "This is as good as it is ever going to get." This is a very dangerous place to be because we have not only given up on God, but we have opened the door for Satan to use our resignation to keep us in bondage to our false beliefs.

We Can Even Reach A Place of HOPELESSNESS

A continuing attitude of resignation can eventually lead to feeling hopeless that we will ever grow up. Hopelessness is like a dark abyss where we are so consumed by the darkness that we believe our lives are beyond even God's ability to transform. For me, at the end of the first 30 years of my Christian life, I was depressed and beginning to have suicidal thoughts.

Our Hearts Will HARDEN Towards God

I define the hardening of the heart as:

The DEATH that occurs in our hearts from continuing to live from our spiritual immaturity and continuing to RESIST God's work in our lives to grow us up.

As you continue to resist allowing God to transform you, over time your heart hardens which, in turn, moves you further and further away from seeking God as the solution. Eventually, as you turn away from God completely, your heart will be deadened to God and to His desire to grow you into spiritual adulthood.

My Christian Life As A Grown Up Spiritual Child

I became a Christian at age 18 but did not get serious about my Christian walk until I was 22. At that point, I asked another Christian who was part of a ministry that disciplined college students, "Tell me how to grow spiritually?" The reason I asked the question is that up to that point everything I did in life was something I learned and then went out and accomplished. I call this the "learn and do" mentality.

So, when it came to spiritual growth, I felt I just needed someone to tell me what to do. Then after I learned how to do it, I would just go out and do it and be successful. Doesn't this sound logical to you?

Guess what they told me to do? I was told such things as: read your Bible, pray, apply what you learned from the Bible, be involved in a life group, go on missionary trips, give, attend church, serve in church, witness to others, listen to sermons, read spiritual books, confess sins and then avoid repeating them, etc. I was also told that if I could accomplish these things with God's help, then I would grow up spiritually. So, my spiritual objective was to treat this list as a spiritual checklist and successfully accomplish everything on it in order to grow.

I call this my thirty years of “trying” because I failed at consistently accomplishing anything on that list. However, being a strong-willed Christian, I kept trying for the next 30 years. During that time, I asked God many times to help, but I never really experienced His help.

Before being saved, I had great internal struggles with inadequacy, fear, anger, rejection, and unworthiness. This was because I was physically, verbally, and emotionally abused by my father throughout my childhood which created great internal woundedness. As I read God’s promises of victory, freedom, healing of woundedness, and transformation, I desperately wanted to experience those promises in my life. I thought that if I could successfully complete what I thought of as God’s “to do” list, then I would experience these promises.

The problem was that the more I tried, the more exhausted I became. Not only that, but all my trying never resulted in the freedom, victory, healing, and transformation that God had promised. As hard as I tried, I was never able to set myself free from the feelings and beliefs of fear, inadequacy, rejection, and unworthiness. In fact, all of these feelings only got worse.

Due to my being wounded by my dad, I harbored anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness towards him. I knew I was supposed to forgive him, but I couldn’t do it. In fact, as time passed, my feelings toward my dad got even worse. I also struggled over those years with fleshly behaviors such as anger, being controlling, being critical, and being judgmental.

In addition, I became very self-righteous because I had accumulated a lot of Bible knowledge and I thought people around me needed to know how much I understood about the Bible. At one point, my sister said that I was the most self-righteous person she ever knew. The sad part is that she was right.

The last ten years of my first 30 years of being a Christian, I got married. I mistakenly thought that marriage would solve

many of my problems. It only created more. When my wife would not meet my needs and expectations, my anger and controlling behavior would get out of control. We would go to Christian marriage conferences that told us what we had to do to have a Christ-centered marriage, but none of the marriage “to do” lists made any difference. As a result, after ten years my wife and I started emotionally separating.

As a Christian, one of my desires was to be a godly business owner. I failed at this as well because I felt so inadequate. As a result, I believed it was up to my employees to always perform well enough to make me look good. If I thought they were failing me in any way, they would get the full force of my anger.

All this time, I was faithfully going to church, reading my Bible, praying, and doing what I was told to do to grow spiritually. However, the more I tried, the more I failed. You can imagine that failing year after year only created a greater frustration with my Christian walk because nothing seemed to change, and my fleshly attitudes only got worse.

On top of the fact that I was not experiencing any change, I started condemning myself when I failed to do what the Bible told me to do. I kept thinking to myself that I must be doing something wrong, or I must not be trying hard enough. In addition, I felt that God had let me down because after all of my hard work for Him, He was not coming through with the victory and freedom He promised.

Truth be told, towards the end of my first 30 years as a Christian, I began giving up. I finally concluded that the abundant life Jesus promised must come after death because I couldn't attain it now no matter how hard I tried.

Why wasn't I growing up? What was I doing wrong? Were there some key truths that I was missing in my understanding of the Christian life?

Even though for those first thirty years of my spiritual journey I filled my mind with Biblical truth, there was no

evidence of any real spiritual growth. I am not saying God was not working in me, but without my knowing the truth about what it looks like to grow, any changes I experienced were negligible. I deceived myself into believing I was growing, but the truth is I never got beyond being a spiritual two-year-old.

What was missing in my spiritual understanding about spiritual growth? Let's look at the answer to that question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

How Do We Grow Spiritually?

There are four key foundational truths that I believe are necessary for spiritual growth.

Christ As “THE” Life

Jesus says in John 14:6 and John 11:25:

*“...I **AM** the way, the truth, and **THE LIFE**”*

John 14:6

*“...I **AM** the resurrection and **THE LIFE**.”*

John 11:25

What is Jesus saying in these two passages? It is clear that Jesus is saying that He Himself is **THE** Life. What does He mean when He says that He is **THE** Life? For many years, I read these verses and concluded that they only meant that He was the source for my eternal life in Heaven. However, is it possible that Jesus is telling us something more in these passages? Let's further explore the answer to this question by looking at what Paul says.

What Paul Says About Jesus Being THE Life

Paul took the truth of Christ as “THE” Life to a more personal level when he said in Colossians 3:4:

*“...Christ who is **YOUR** life....”*

What is Paul saying in this verse? He is saying that the life of Christ is more than eternal life that He gave you at salvation. He is saying that Christ is **your** life today, at this very moment. At this point you might be scratching your head and asking, “What is Paul talking about? What does it mean that Christ is my life?”

What Does It Mean That Christ Is Your Life?

God sums up the answer to that question in 1 Corinthians 1:30a (RSV):

“He is the SOURCE of your life in Christ Jesus,”

God gives us the answer in the first part of the verse when He says that He is the SOURCE of your life in Christ. One of the definitions for the word “source” is “the one who produces.” This may be a new truth for you because so many Christians have been taught falsely, as I was, that they are to be the source for living the Christian life with God’s help. You see, there can only be ONE true Source from which to live the Christian life.

The truth is that God—NOT you—is the only SOURCE from which you are to live THE Christian life.

Look at two other verses that reveal that God is your Source for living the Christian life:

“In Him we live and move and have our being.” Acts 17:28

“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things....” Romans 11:36

You may be wondering what it means practically that God is your Source. Let me give you two examples.

What Does It Mean That Christ Is Your SOURCE?

Let’s look at four words which reveal to us what it means for Christ to be our Source: initiator, producer, supplier, and transformer.

1. Christ Is The INITIATOR and PRODUCER

*“And I am sure that he who **began (initiator)** a good work in you **will bring it to completion (producer)** at the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:6*

Christ, as the initiator, began His work in you by drawing you to Himself for salvation. In addition, as your Source, He is the producer in that He will bring to completion the work He began which is sanctification. (“Sanctification” means “to purify internally by the renewing of your soul.”)

2. Christ Is The SUPPLIER

*“And my **God will supply (supplier)** all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19*

Christ, as the supplier, will meet your emotional and spiritual needs. An example of supplying your emotional needs would be Christ supplying His peace in the midst of your stress. An example of supplying a spiritual need is Christ protecting you from Satan and his evil strategies in your life.

3. Christ Is The TRANSFORMER

*“And do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed (transformer)** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2*

To me this is the most important attribute of Christ being our Source because I, like you, want to be transformed. The problem is that in and of ourselves, we cannot produce the spiritual transformation we desire. We must depend on Christ to be the transformer. Since transformation is so important, let's look further into what spiritual transformation looks like.

Being Transformed Into CHRIST-LIKENESS

Let's look at 2 Corinthians 3:18 again.

*"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into His (Christ) likeness with
ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord,
who is the Spirit."*

What Paul is telling us is that God's objective is to transform us into His likeness. Let me define Christ-likeness.

***Christ-likeness results from living FROM the
supernatural characteristics of Christ.***

The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23a is a great example of the supernatural characteristics of Christ.

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is [Christ's] love,
joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...."*

What we need to understand about the supernatural characteristics of Christ, represented by the fruit of the Spirit in this verse, is that these characteristics are things that we try to produce. Rather, these characteristics are who Christ is in us (i.e., He is our love, joy, peace, etc.). To explain, look at Ephesians 2:14:

*"For He [Christ] Himself is our peace, who made both groups
into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall."*

Paul declares that Christ's peace is not something we strive for. Christ Himself is our peace. Early on in my spiritual journey, I was taught that it was up to me with God's help to produce the fruit of the Spirit. I say kiddingly that a guy named Loveless should love more. So, I tried in and of myself to produce the love

of Christ—never knowing for 30 years that I already contained all the love of Christ and all the other fruit of the Spirit because that is who Jesus is in me.

I use the word “supernatural” to describe the characteristics of Christ because they are beyond our human understanding as Paul reveals to us in Philippians 4:7:

*“And the **peace of God, which transcends all understanding,** will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Here are some more examples of Christ-like characteristics.

Christ is our:

Unconditional love	Victory	Worth
Acceptance	Faith	Freedom
Patience	Strength	Peace
Forgiveness	Understanding	Security
Fearlessness	Wisdom	Discernment
Christ-confidence	Adequacy	Humility
Boldness	Righteousness	Selflessness
Rest	Compassion	Courage
Hope	Gentleness	Control
Faithfulness	Power	Joy

Christ-likeness is not only who Christ is IN us, it is what we are to EXPERIENCE and LIVE FROM as we are being TRANSFORMED into His likeness.

Some people have concerns when they hear that we are to become like Christ. Sometimes when people hear the term “Christ-likeness,” they believe it means we are becoming deity. We are not becoming deity. Rather, we are becoming like Christ in that we learn to live from His peace, humility, forgiveness, etc.

What are some key truths in being transformed into Christ-likeness?

Engaging God To Be Transformed Into Christ-Likeness

1. Growing In The Truth Starts With ENGAGING God

I said earlier that we can know and believe the truth and yet choose not to walk in it. How do we walk in the truth? We start by engaging God. This is how I define “engaging God”:

Engaging God means that you come to Him with a WILLING heart, totally DEPENDING on Him as your Source to grow you up.

Why must we totally depend on God for spiritual growth? Look at John 15:5 for a moment:

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

There are two key truths in this verse. First, the physical branches are totally dependent on the vine for life. Similarly, we, as spiritual branches, are totally dependent on Christ for life.

Second, when Jesus says that apart from Him we can do nothing, do you believe that includes your spiritual growth? Absolutely! In the context of spiritual growth, “nothing” means that we—apart from God—cannot develop spiritually. Our part is to totally depend on Him to do it.

2. The Way We Engage God Is By FAITH

“Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Hebrews 11:6

We know that God is the Source, but we have a part to play in God’s transformation process as well.

Faith is a moment-by-moment **DEPENDENCE** on God as your Source to grow spiritually.

Faith is simply coming to God with an attitude of total dependence and willingness for Him to transform your life.

Why is dependence the key to spiritual growth? Let me give you an example to explain. If you needed surgery, why would you go to a surgeon? For two reasons. First, you can't accomplish the surgery on yourself. Second, you must totally depend on the surgeon to do the surgery because he is trained to do it and you aren't able to do it. It is the same with letting Christ live in you.

3. Growing Up Means Taking STEPS of Faith

*"For we **walk by faith**, not by sight."
2 Corinthians 5:7*

The walk of faith begins with the first step. What does it mean to take a step of faith concerning transformation? Here is an example:

Step of Faith: "Lord, I am coming to You and trusting You to set me free from_____."

Faith does not depend on your having the "right" feelings or thoughts. Initially, you may be taking steps of faith despite what you think or how you feel. Faith is a **choice** to believe God and to act on that choice in spite of your doubts.

4. What Happens At The MOMENT You Take A Step of Faith

The moment you take a step of faith, God releases the full force of His power in you to transform you. What kind of power are we talking about? The power that raised Jesus from the dead according to Ephesians 1:19, 20:

*"I pray that you will begin to understand the **incredible greatness of His power** for us who believe him. This is the **same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead** and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms."*

This is the same power that created the heavens and is holding the universe together. Good news! You received all of God's supernatural power at the point of salvation according to Acts 1:8:

*"... you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...."*

God knew that without His power in you, you would never experience any spiritual transformation or spiritual growth. Therefore, He put the fullness of His power in us to transform our lives in order to:

- RENEW our minds to believe His truth (Romans 12:2)
- Set us FREE from our sin strongholds (John 8:32)
- HEAL our woundedness (Psalm 147:3)
- Give us VICTORY over the flesh, sin, Satan, and the world (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Ultimately, God's power will transform us into Christ-likeness according to Ephesians 4:15:

*"Instead, we will speak the truth in love, **growing in every way more and more like Christ**, who is the head of his body, the church."*

After 30 Years I Discovered "THE" Christian Life

Little did I know that during those thirty years God was in the process of bringing me to the end of my trying to live the Christian life by my own efforts. On Sunday, October 4, 1998, I was sitting in my car depressed, wondering why I needed to go

to church to hear one more message that would make no difference in my life.

While sitting there, a question came rolling across my mind: **“Are you done trying, in your own strength and ability, to make the Christian life work?”** I knew that thought did not come from me so it must have come from the Holy Spirit. My answer was: “Yes, I am done trying to live the Christian life. In fact, I am totally exhausted trying to live it in my own strength.”

As I said earlier, I also came to the conclusion that God was not going to help me accomplish any of these things because of the many times I had asked Him to help me and He never did. After I answered the Holy Spirit’s question, He brought these thoughts to my mind, “I (God) have been waiting for 30 years for you to come to this place of ‘I can’t.’ Today, I am going to speak to you through the speaker at your church and I am going to start you on a new Christian journey.”

Needless to say, I was getting a little excited. Our church had invited a man by the name of Ian Thomas to teach a four-day conference starting that morning. Ian Thomas was the director of a world-wide ministry called Torchbearers. At that time, I had no idea who he was or what his ministry was about. So, I went into church and when he got up to speak, these 18 words changed my life forever:

“God NEVER intended for you to live THE LIFE that ONLY Christ can live in and through you.”

What struck me were three things he said that I had never heard before. The first was that he used the words “THE Life.” The second was that only Christ can live THE Christian life and I can’t.

In addition to these powerful words, I saw in this man what the scripture calls “rivers of living water” (John 7:38). I say that

because I could tell that he was experiencing a joy and peace that I had wanted to experience for many years. This day marked the most pivotal day of my Christian life (other than the day I was saved) because this was the day I began a new journey called THE Christian life that would radically transform my life.

CHAPTER FIVE

How Will We Know We Are Growing Into The Likeness of Christ?

*“Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, **let us press on to maturity**, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.” Hebrews 6:1*

I have written several booklets on the answer to this question. However, let me give you just a few truths that will help you know what it looks like to grow into spiritual maturity.

You Will Be Depending More On Christ To Live His Life IN You

I wanted to add this key truth to what I shared in Chapter Four. Since Christ is in you and He is the only One who has perfectly lived the life, then He wants to live His life in you according to Galatians 2:20:

*“I am crucified with Christ, and I **no longer live**, but **Christ lives IN me....”***

Think about what Paul is saying in this verse. When Paul says, “I no longer live,” he is, in effect, saying that he, in his own human strength and understanding, CANNOT be the source for living the Christian life. This is amazing considering all of Paul’s credentials, intellect, and capability. He clearly acknowledges that none of those things qualifies him to be the source.

First, Paul admits that he cannot live THE Christian life, then he says, “Christ lives **in** me.” He recognizes his absolute need to depend on Christ to live THE Christian life in him and through him to others. This is how Paul grew up.

Therefore, like Paul we will know we are growing when we choose more and more to:

***DEPEND on Christ to LIVE
and PRODUCE His life in us.***

Depending on Christ to live His life in you may be a new concept for you. However, doesn't it make sense to depend on Christ to do what only He can do, and you can't? So, as we increase our dependence on Christ to live His life in us, we will grow spiritually. It is not a works-based attempt at growth. Supernatural spiritual growth comes as we depend on Him, trust in Him, and take steps of faith.

Concerning God's Truth, You Will Be Depending More On The Holy Spirit To:

1. Teach you God's truth (John 14:26)
2. Make God's truth become revelation to you (1 Corinthians 2:10)
3. Renew your mind to believe God's truth (Romans 12:2)
4. Remind you of God's truth in the midst of everyday life (John 14:26)

You Will Be Experiencing God's Promises

VICTORY – You will be experiencing victory over the power of sin, the flesh, the world, and the power of Satan.

*"... but thanks be to God, who gives us the **victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57*

FREEDOM – You will be experiencing freedom from your false beliefs, your defeating sin patterns, and your ongoing inner struggles.

*"So Christ has really set us **free**. Now make sure that you stay **free**, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law."*

Galatians 5:1

HEALING – You will be experiencing healing of your past and present woundedness.

*"He **heals** the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."*

Psalms 147:3

SUPPLY – Every need you have will be met in Christ.

*"My God shall **supply all your needs** ... in Christ Jesus."*

Philippians 4:19

As You Walk In Dependence on Christ, You Will EXPERIENCE Christ-Likeness

Being transformed means you will live more and more from Christ's:

Unconditional love	Victory	Worth
Acceptance	Faith	Freedom
Patience	Strength	Peace
Power	Forgiveness	Understanding
Security	Fearlessness	Wisdom
Discernment	Adequacy	Humility
Christ-confidence	Boldness	Righteousness
Selflessness	Rest	Compassion
Courage	Hope	Christ-control

Examples of What It Looks Like To Experience Christ-Likeness

Here are some examples of what it looks like to live from Christ-likeness.

- You live from **Christ's unconditional love** rather than trying to find love from others.
- You live from **Christ's acceptance** which means you no longer have to take ownership of other's rejection.
- You will find yourself forgiving those who have hurt or abused you with **Christ's forgiveness**.
- You no longer have to live in fear because you are living from **Christ's courage**.
- You no longer have to try and be in control because you are living from **Christ's control**.
- You can live from **Christ's peace** when you receive a life-threatening medical prognosis or some traumatic news.
- You can live from **Christ-confidence** in spite of all that is going on in the world.
- You can live from **Christ's control** when everything seems out of control.
- You will live from **Christ's selflessness** versus your selfishness.

His Love Will Flow Through You To Others

*“... may the Lord cause you to **increase and abound in love for one another**, and for all people, just as we also do for you.” 1 Thessalonians 3:12*

I must admit that I am not naturally a loving person. Because of my woundedness growing up, my tendency as an adult was to judge others instead of loving them. But, as God continues transforming my life, supernaturally, He is replacing my

judgmental attitude with His unconditional love. As a result, I find myself loving more and judging less.

As we grow spiritually, we will find ourselves being freed from our focus on ourselves which will release us to love others more. This is our ultimate calling according to Matthew 22:39:

“... love your neighbor as yourself.”

As 1 Thessalonians 3:12 above reminds us, as we grow, our love for others will increase.

He Will Grow Others Up Through You

“Each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

Ephesians 4:16

Have you ever thought God wants to work through you to grow others up? When you hear those words, are your first thoughts, “I am not qualified nor am I capable.” If that is what you are thinking, I hope you hear these words the Lord speaks to my heart all the time: “I am not calling the capable. I am calling the available.” God is only asking you to be available (being dependent on Him) for Him to speak through you. As you make yourself available, you will be amazed at what He will do through you.

As you grow and see others through the eyes of Christ, you will find yourself being used by the Lord to do such things as:

- Speak truth into others’ lives
- Speak words of hope
- Encourage others in their spiritual journey
- Boldly speak the truth
- Change others’ destinies

This last point may be hard to grasp: What if someone was living a legalistic, performance-driven life and you shared with that person the truth that THE Christian life is a Person and not a set of rules? What if that person heard that truth and started allowing Christ to live through him or her (Galatians 2:20)?

God will change spiritual lives and even destinies through you; all He is asking is that you will depend on Him to accomplish just that.

You Will Be Experiencing A Growing Personal, Intimate Relationship With God

From the Fall of mankind until the end of this world as we know it, God's heart is to bring us back to Himself. Paul tells us this in Ephesians 1:5:

“His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by **bringing us to Himself** through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure.”

Even though I have used and quoted this verse a number of times in my discipleship curricula, it wasn't until recently that God gave me spiritual eyes to see just how it sums up why God created man. It also answered my other “why” question

- Why did God choose each of us to be born out of 500 million genetic possibilities at conception?
- Why did He go to the cross for us?
- Why did He put His life in us?
- Why did He set us free?
- Why is He transforming us into His likeness?
- Why will we spend eternity with Him?

Here is what I believe is the answer to all those questions:

**To *EXPERIENCE* what we were created for:
a deep, personal *INTIMACY* with God.**

This is why God's plan gave Him great pleasure. Think about it for a moment. God had you in mind "before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). He chose you out of 500 million genetic possibilities. He "knit you together" in your mother's womb (Psalm 139:13).

Can you imagine God's anticipation for you to be born and how excited He was the moment you came into this world? You thought your parents were happy. Their happiness pales in comparison to how happy the Lord was (and still is) the day you were born because the stage was now set for Him to start bringing you to Himself for an intimate relationship.

Because of His eternal desire for intimacy with you, He began wooing you to Himself from the time you were born. First, for salvation so that you would spend eternity with Him. Second, so He could put His life in you to reveal more of His love. Third, to put His life in you to be able to remove every obstacle (false beliefs, unbelief, woundedness, etc.) so you would be transformed into His likeness and walk in the fullness of His love. Why? Because this is what you were created for: to express His life-changing love through you to others.

I am so thankful I am saved and Christ is living His life in and through me. I praise Him for the amazing transformation as well, but as eternally wonderful and necessary as salvation and transformation are, the overarching reason the Lord is doing all this is to restore the deep, personal intimacy with man that was lost at the Fall.

Therefore, please take a moment to go back through the "why" questions and when you finish, I hope you can see what John saw in I John 3:1:

"See how **very much** our Father loves us...."

His love for us knows no bounds. All He has ever done and all He will ever do is because He wants you to experience what you were created for: intimacy with Him.

My Journey Into Spiritual Maturity

As, I began the journey of depending on Christ to live THE life in me, God began growing me up.

Through trusting Christ to live in me, I am being set free from my sin strongholds of inadequacy, fear, anger, rejection, and unworthiness. Christ has replaced these strongholds with His adequacy, His courage, His love, His acceptance, and His worth.

Remember how I shared with you earlier about my hardened heart towards my dad because of all of his abuse? Over time, the Lord transformed me in such a way that I was able to forgive my dad for his abuse and rejection. Afterwards, the Lord healed my wounded feelings of hatred, bitterness, and unforgiveness towards my dad that I had struggled with for over 48 years.

In addition, the Lord is transforming our marriage as my wife and I increasingly depend on Christ to produce a Christ-centered marriage. He continues to set me free from the fleshly behaviors that created so much conflict earlier in our marriage. That is not to say that our marriage is conflict-free, but as we grow into Christ-likeness any remaining conflict continues to decrease while our intimacy, harmony, and oneness increases.

I could go on but I think you get the picture. I hope this booklet has given you a clearer understanding of what Paul means when he says that we are to grow up. It is paramount that we do so because on the other side of spiritual growth is a fulfilling and satisfying Christian life. Let's look at the words of Paul once again.

"Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching.

*We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, **GROWING in every way more and more like Christ**, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”*
Ephesians 4:14-16

CONCLUSION

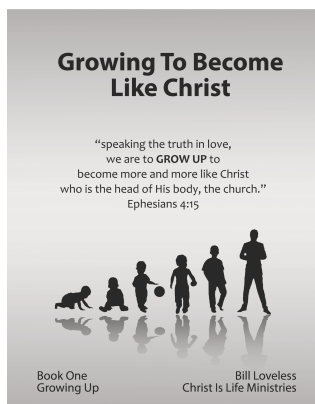
I hope this booklet has encouraged you and has given you hope that your life can be transformed. Because of that, let's look one more time at the definition of “transform”:

“A change of the form or nature of a person into a COMPLETELY different person by supernatural means.”

As we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christ-likeness, we will become completely different people. What an amazing promise that is. If you choose to depend on God to transform you into Christ-likeness, you will eventually come to the place where Paul says in Ephesians 3:20:

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”

Where Do I Go From Here?



The curriculum *Growing To Become Like Christ* is an in-depth curriculum that will give you a deeper understanding of the truths in this booklet. This is Book One of the four-part series *Growing Up-Growing Out-Growing Deep*. It is designed for small groups, one-on-one discipleship, and personal use.

You can download it for free from our website listed below.

I hope you will take advantage of this study and seek the Lord for a deeper understanding of what it means to grow spiritually. I know that as you appropriate these truths, your life will be radically transformed.

Blessings in Christ,

Bill Loveless

P.S. If you have any thoughts concerning what you have read that you would like to share or have any questions about what I have written, please email me at the email address below:

Christ Is Life Ministries

Website: www.christislifeministries.com

Email: bill@christislifeministries.com

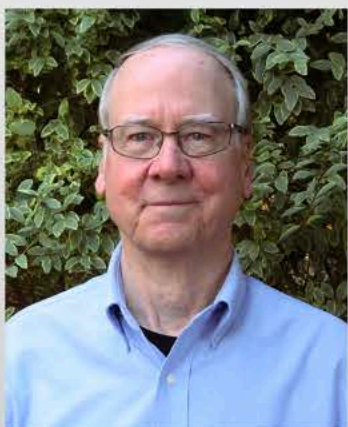
(1-1-24)

GROW

“14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.” Ephesians 4:14-15

I thought I was growing spiritually for 30 years only to discover I was still a spiritual two-year old. What was I missing? Why wasn’t I growing spiritually? I will be answering these and other questions like the ones below to better understand what Paul meant when he said, “growing in every way more like Christ.”

- What does it mean to grow up spiritually?**
- Why do we need to grow up?**
- What if we don’t grow up?**
- What key truths do we need to know to grow up?**
- How will we know we are growing up?**



Bill Loveless is the director of Christ Is Life Ministries (CILM). CILM is a non-profit, non-denominational ministry that focuses on discipleship. We teach Christians that Christ is our only Source for living the Christian life and what it looks like to be transformed into Christ-likeness and be drawn into a deeper intimacy with Him.

For further information and to see the other materials being offered, please go to our website:
[.www.christislifeministries.com](http://www.christislifeministries.com)

