

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF MANCHESTER

“DEEPER AND STRONGER” - SPIRITUAL GROWTH SERIES

THE ESSENTIAL ROOTS

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1 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)

⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Two week ago as I livestreamed a message from home, I starting a series on personal spiritual growth and we continue it today.

I showed our church Logos, a tree.

Then I showed a tree with roots, representing what this series is about. Looking at the roots that dig into the nutrients to create and sustain a healthy, growing tree.

Let me give you a simple definition of what it means to be growing spiritually. **Growing spiritually is simply becoming more like Christ, in our actions and our character.** (Holiness or Sanctification)

Romans 8:29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son....*

If we are growing spiritually, one year from now, we should be able to love a little more like Christ loves, forgive a little more like Christ forgives, serve a little more like Christ, etc..

Today I want to share 5 key things (see Card) that Christians have found thru the ages, make up the “root system” of a Spiritually Growing Christian. Things God calls us to do that result in fruitfulness and Spiritual Growth. These are “Holy Habits” that we do. Sometime they are called Spiritual Disciplines, but they help create increasing “Christlikeness” in us.

Some Christians assume that, or act like spiritual maturity happens automatically, but they also realize they are not growing. They see the problem, but they don’t know what to do about it.

Once upon a time there lived three men: a doctor, a lawyer, and an engineer. For some reason all three offended the king and were sentenced to die on the same day.

The day of the execution arrived, and the doctor was led up to the guillotine. The executioner asked, "Head up or head down?" "Head up," said the doctor. "Blindfold or no blindfold?" "No blindfold."

So the executioner raised the blade, and z-z-z-z-ing!

Down came the blade—but something happened. It stopped barely an inch above the doctor's neck. The executioner was baffled, but the law stated that if an execution didn't succeed the first time the prisoner had to be released, so the doctor was set free.

After making some adjustments to the guillotine, the lawyer was next. "Head up or head down?" said the executioner. "Head up". "Blindfold or no blindfold?" "No blindfold." So the executioner raised his blade, and z-z-z-z-ing! Down came the blade --and again stopped an inch above the lawyer’s neck. -- so he was set free.

The executioner made more frantic adjustments and then the engineer was led up to the guillotine. "Head up or head down?" asked the executioner. "Head up." "Blindfold or no blindfold?" "No blindfold." So the executioner raised his blade, **but before he could pull the handle, the engineer yelled out, "WAIT! I see what the problem is!"**

If you are not growing spiritually, there is a problem too - and I want to help you from God’s Word to SEE how to fix it. Contrary to popular opinion, it will not fix itself.

Today 5 things we can/should do to dig deep into the resources of God. For each I am going to give you a “minimum requirement” goal/level for you to make a commitment to. Write them down somewhere.

Is this level of commitment ALL that you could do? No. But these are like *Daily Minimum Requirements of the Body*. You need this amount just to be healthy and growing.

Are there other things besides the 5? Yes. But these are really *essential nutrients/roots* of SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

THEN I am going to ask you to sign a SPIRITUAL GROWTH card, put in Collection Box if you will say “*yes, I will, with God’s help commit to these minimum goals in these five areas.*” (we will laminate it and return it to you)

I. A LIFE OF WORSHIP

Romans 12:1 (ESV) *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

Point: The first part has to do with Worship. *Becoming a Regular Worshipper of God.*

In actuality, ALL I share today is a part of your worship of God. **We worship God when we bring glory and express our love back to our loving God.**

So, *servicing* is worship, *giving* is worship, *spending time with Him daily* is worship...

And so is weekly, corporate worship. From the creation of the world, God set aside one day a week out of seven (not 1 a month, every other week) but 1 day a week as a day set aside *for the corporate worship of God*.

Hebrews 12:28 (NIV) *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,*

The **minimum goal**, the first taproot of this growth covenant is to, **make "weekly corporate worship" the regular habit of your life.**

Of course there will be exceptions. Sickness, travel, etc, but I'm asking you (God is too) to **make our need for weekly worship on par with our need for food.** We don't say, "*Oh, I don't think I'll eat today, maybe tomorrow unless something else comes up.*" No, it's a necessity and so is Corporate Worship.

For some it's easy to make excuses, but look at others – they come to worship even if they can't get here without help (or in a wheelchair). Sometimes you can't. God knows. But stop making excuses.

You were created for worship. Anthropologists have noted that people in every culture instinctively worship something. If we fail to worship God, we always find a substitute, even if ends up being our things or our selves.

When I first fell in love with Nina, and we were attending different colleges campuses, I couldn't be with her, **BUT I thought of her constantly:** while eating breakfast, driving to school, attending class, waiting in line at the market, pumping gas -- I could not stop thinking about this woman! I often thought about all the things I loved about her.

This drew me closer to Nina even though we lived miles apart from each other.

Worship is a way we draw closer to our God and show our love for His Amazing Grace and Love to us!

Action/Application: Make a commitment to prioritize regular, weekly Worship with God's people.

II. DAILY TIME WITH GOD

Text: John 15:5 (ESV)

⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

The second root into God power for our lives is to have a daily time in your life to spend with Jesus through prayer and His Word.

Let's see, how can I impress on you the great value of this Holy Habit of a Quiet Time with God to help you be a spiritually growing Christian, growing more Christlike?

OH, I know – **Leo Sayles**....when his world began to crumble around him...

Point Action/Application:

When you sign this card I'm asking you to accept the challenge to set aside, at a minimum, 15-20 min a day to enjoy your relationship ALONE with God. (Quiet Time/ Devotions)

Who Needs a QT?

- A. **Jesus did.** See **Mark 1:35-38** (Text, Mk. 6:46; Lk. 6:12; 22:41) He departed to a *solitary place*. Jesus found a private place with few distractions.
- B. **Moses did.** When he received the ten commandments– 40 days (Ex. 34:28)
- C. **King David did.** (Ps 5:3; Ps. 88:13; Ps. 143:8).
- D. **You and I need a QT too.**

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN HAVING A QUIET TIME?

John 15:7 *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*

The Bible is the primary way God speaks to us and Prayer is the primary way we speak to God.

If you develop the habit of *Reading Prayerfully* and *Praying Biblically*, you are well on the way to a rich, rewarding habit of daily time with God.

To Grow, every one of us needs to DAILY connect with God.

All kinds of resources are available. (ODB, guide, books, on-line) No excuse.

III. COMMITTED TO A SMALL GROUP - (FELLOWSHIP)

Text: Acts 2:42

Ephesians 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

The bible tells us that we don't/can't become what He wants us to become ALONE. We NEED other people and they are a part of God's plan to make us more Christlike (as we are for them).

There is a big topic in the New Testament. It's called *Fellowship*. Fellowship as a word can be used

casually to talk about getting together with others for fun or enjoyment. Or to eat together.

But in the Bible, Fellowship is much more than that. It is brothers and sisters in Christ, caring, nurturing, challenging, helping each other to follow Jesus.

We do that in many ways. We study the Bible together, we pray for each other....

Let me show you.

“One Anothers”

Let’s do a Jet tour review of one phrase that is used several times referring to fellowship - “*One Another*”. These verses will give you a good idea of what I am talking about:

- *Be devoted and give preference to one another* (Ro. 12:10)
- *Accept one another* (Ro. 15:7)
- *Care for one another* (1 Cor. 12:25)
- *Carry each other’s burdens* (Gal. 6:2)
- *Forgive one another* (Eph. 4:32)
- *Encourage, build up one another* (1 Thess. 5:11)
- *Spur one another on to love and good deeds* (Heb. 10:24)
- *Confess your sins to one another* (Jas. 5:16)
- *Pray for one another* (Jas. 5:16)
- *Serve one another* (1 Pet. 4:10)
- *Love one another* (1 Jn. 4:11)

The list above provides only a brief taste of what happens because of Christian Fellowship.

Do you know what is absolutely true? These are all impossible to experience individually! You have to be with “*one another.*” And this dynamic is experienced in **Small Group settings**. If you are a Believer but not “involved” with other believers in a SS Class or Study or even a Church, I would think that the preceding list of “one another’s” is not occurring in your life.

Action/Application:

That’s why **Third commitment** you need to make this year is: and this is a Minimum – **become actively part of at least ONE Small Group ministry in our church that meets regularly.**

A Sunday School class, Bible Study Class. More than one is better, but at least one. Find one, join one. If you’re a loner, it will be hard. Still a necessity.

IV. A REGULAR GIVER TO GOD

In 2 Cor. 8:7, the context is the Apostle Paul is

commending the Corinthian Christians for the generous, monetary gift they have given to help the work of Christ back in Jerusalem. This is what he says:

2 Corinthians 8:7 (ESV)

7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

Jesus speaks of generous giving too.

Matthew 6:19–21 (ESV)

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

So not only is generous giving part of God’s means to carry on his kingdom work on earth, but it also builds us up spiritually.

Action/Application:

The SPIRITUAL GROWTH commitment in this area is to **financially give a sacrificial offering to God on a regular basis.** (I’ll say more in a bit to help you understand that)

Why Important?

1. Our giving to god keeps our focus on what’s really important.

Matthew 6:21 (ESV) *21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Jesus is saying: *“When you invest in My work it will make you care about what’s happening in my work. But if you refuse to put your treasure there, then eventually you will lose interest.”*

Another way to put it: *“Whatever you place your treasure in, that is what you really value. That’s your true allegiance. Your true love.”*

Nina and I have a few investments as part of our retirement planning. There are literally thousands of stocks and mutual funds to choose from, aren’t there? But, day to day, the only ones I really am really interested in, are the ones that we have invested in. I don’t care what the others are doing, but I do care about what the ones we have are doing.

It’s a *spiritual principle.* *“When you invest in God’s Kingdom work it will make you care about what’s happening in His work, but if you refuse to put your treasure there, then eventually you will lose interest.”*

On top of that, *He knows how easy it is for us to put*

our trust in money and things rather than on Him. It can easily become an idol in our lives – competing God. Giving helps it not to be an idol.

2. Our giving to God is a great way to show our **LOVE** to God (another act of worship)

Here's the cool thing. When we give out of a HEART of love as Jesus has been talking about, even though God doesn't need our Gift - it's an expression of love that reaches God - *and He Loves it!*

Do you know what Paul said about the Macedonians in **1 Cor. 5:8**? He said, "*First they gave of THEMSELVES.*" And you know, that's what God really wants! He's more interested in your HEART than He is in your bank account.

When my son, Thomas was about 4 years old, he came up to me and says, "Daddy, could you give me some money?" And I say, "Well, why do you want money?" And he says, "Because want to buy you a present." So I give him money and he goes and buys me a present, and he buys a gift and gives it to me.

You know, since it way my money to begin with, you would be hard-pressed to argue that I was somehow better off after receiving that present. I gained nothing.

But you know what? *I still liked it!* **Correction, I LOVED getting the present!** I felt really good that my boy wanted to give me something because he loved me, even if what he gave me was only TEMPORARILY HIS!!!

That's the way it is with us and God. He doesn't tell us to give because he needs the money.

- He loves when we give because it expresses our love for Him.
- And he loves what it does for US - keeping money and materialism from dominating our lives.

Action/Application:

Give a sacrificial offering to God on a regular basis.

How much? I can't tell you. *How about for every dollar you give God 10 cents of it.* That was the Tithe – giving first 10% of your resources to God.

Now I have to make a confession. I don't believe the tithe (10%) is a direct command to us. The tithe was a command to the Israelites under the Old Covenant. But the principle of giving sacrificially to god is. (Nina and I have given more than 10% for most of our lives, still do). Investing.

I believe the 2 most critical aspects Biblically are *the giver's attitude* -out of love, and it being *at the level of sacrifice.*

The *gold-medal giver* in the New Testament turns out to be a woman who contributed less than a nickel. And on the day she was singled out, wealthy contributors cast large, lavish gifts into the temple - yet Jesus awarded her the trophy for giving. (check out Mk. 12:41-44)

V. SERVING IN FRUITFUL MINISTRY

Text: Eph. 4:12-13

Matthew 20:26-28 ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, **whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,** ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

Serving God and others help us grow spiritually.

Action/Application: Make a Commitment to Serve in AT LEAST ONE ministry in the church this year.

Why?

1. SERVING CLEARLY MAKES US MORE LIKE JESUS

And that's what spiritual growth is all about.

This is foundational. If you want to grow in Christ's likeness, then being a servant must be tops on your list.

2. SERVICE EXPRESSES LOVE FOR GOD

Serving in the church of God is one of the clearest manifestations of loving God Himself. The writer of Hebrews reminded his readers that God would never forget the love they showed to Him by ministering to His people: **Hebrews 6:10** ¹⁰*God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.* The people of God show their love for God by serving the church of God.

However, you can serve and not grow if you don't serve out of a heart of love. You can serve out of obligation, serve out of lower motives than to express your love to God....

Elmer Towns tells about a member of a motorcycle gang who was dramatically converted to Jesus and the first Sunday after his conversion he went to church. Nobody in the church knew him and he walked down to the second aisle and sat in the seat. And the people kind of stared because he looked the part; big, burly,

bearded, long hair, leather vest, tattoos.

As the service began the pastor got up and made an appeal for a nursery worker. "The assigned person was sick" he said, "And we need someone to work in the nursery today." No one volunteered.

He asked a second time, Again, no one volunteered. But the cyclist was praying, "Lord, I love you and I want to do what you want me to do and if you want me to go work in nursery just have the preacher ask a third time."

Then for the third time the preacher asked, "Please we need someone to work in the nursery," the cyclist raised his hand, stood up and turned to head toward the nursery. **And immediately 20 parents stood up, volunteering to work in the nursery.**

I submit to you that in this story, the only one who was serving out of love for the Lord was the motorcyclist. The others were serving out of something else.

Unfortunately, some serve God not as an expression of love. Eventually it shows.

- Some serve because they do it for their children.... when the kids are gone so are they
- Serve for Personal Gratification or
- Serve for Personal Recognition

Some may try to serve God without loving Him, but no one can LOVE God without SERVING Him.

As CH Spurgeon boldly declared, "He is no Christian who does not seek to serve His God."

Action/Application:

So Bottom Line – Make a Commitment to Serve in AT LEAST ONE ministry in the church this year.

CONCLUSION

1 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)

***8**for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*

Look at your card. Are you growing spiritually. Is your tree growing? Are you a little more like Jesus than you were a year ago?

Look at the tree. Your tree needs to grow and bear more fruit. What should you do?

- Wait...and hope for the best?
- Talk to it....? Come on little tree, you need to grow!
- **No, you put your roots down deep into the fertile soil.**

God is the fertile soil. And these 5 key roots draw from His resources.

Will you get in the game? Then do what I'm doing. Making a commitment to do all 5 key *habits of holiness* this year.

I've signed my card and I'm putting it in the box...

Picture this. I'm sure a number of prospective next pastors are going to speak to me this year. They will ask, "Tell me about the congregation? Where are they spiritually?"

Here's what I want to say, "Let me tell you. *These people love Jesus. They are a Worshipping congregation, Serving, Giving, Fellowshiping Congregation. They spend time with Jesus every day! And are becoming more and more like Jesus!*"

More important Picture. Suppose an angel ask Jesus, Tell me about FBCM? "That's my bride! Look at them they Worship, Serve, Give, Build each other up, they stay in my Presence Daily. Look how they love me!"

That's what I want God to say about me. About you.

Let's pray...

Gospel –

All morning we have been talking about how to express our love back to God. But that's not where it starts. The Bible says, "*We love because God first loved us*" God "*loved us and gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins.*"

That's where it begins – receiving His love for you as Jesus loved you and died to pay for your sins. You receive His gift of love by putting you faith in Him. "*whoever believes in him will not perish by have everlasting life*"

Dear Jesus. I know I am a Sinner. I know you are the Savior. Right now I turn from my sin and I turn to you in faith. Forgive me and make me Yours. Be my Savior and my Lord forever. Amen.