

This Psalm is entitled A Song for the Sabbath day—which probably meant it was designed to be sung in the temple on the Sabbath day—it is a psalm that contrasts the future of the wicked with that of the righteous—the wicked are described in v7—“when the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever...”—the righteous are described in v12—“the righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon...”—in contrast to grass that springs up rather quickly and is destroyed, the righteous are like a tree—which are sturdy, steady, fruitful, and long-lasting...

Within the Psalm the righteous are described as a palm tree (v12a), a cedar (v12b), and a fruit tree (v14)—collectively these provide a beautiful picture of a Christian—[a] a palm tree flourishes and provides shade, [b] a cedar tree is strong and sturdy, and [c] a fruit tree provides food to eat—thus the righteous are described as a flourishing, beautify, sturdy, and fruitful tree—an imagery used throughout Scripture to illustrate the great subject of spiritual growth...

- I. Three Opening Thoughts Concerning Spiritual Growth
- II. Five General Reasons for the Need of Spiritual Growth

- I. Three Opening Thoughts Concerning Spiritual Growth

- A. It is a process begun in God’s planting

1. I think it is important to underscore that spiritual growth implies the presence and reality of life—growth is the result of life...
2. For example, to continue the imagery of a tree—a tree can only grow after it has been planted—growth implies planting...
3. V13—“those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God...”—the imagery is that of the outer courts of the temple...
4. The temple was the “house of the Lord”—it was the place of God’s special presence—it was the place where God uniquely dwelt...
5. We find in 1Ki.6:29 that upon the walls surrounding the temple, there were carved pictures or imageries of palm trees...
6. 1Ki.6:29—“on the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer rooms, he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers...”
7. Thus by referring to the righteous as palm trees—“planted in the house of the Lord”—the psalmist no doubt had this fact in mind...
8. The righteous are like palm trees planted within the house of the Lord just as every Jew would have associated palm trees with the temple...
9. Thus by being “planted in the house of the Lord” the psalmist meant—those who have been restored to fellowship with God—they have access into His house...
10. But my point here is this—spiritual growth only takes place in the hearts of those who have been planted by God into His favor...
11. By nature we are all born into the dead soil of Adamic soil—by nature we are all planted outside of the house of the Lord...
12. We are all by nature outside of God’s favor and grace—we know nothing of the rich soil of God’s favor and acceptance...
13. Oh but dear brethren—what happens is that God in sovereign power, uproots us from our native soil and replants us into the soil of the second Adam...
14. Ps.1:3—“he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper...”
15. Notice two things—[a] a past fact—“he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water...”—this refers to a past fact—the righteous have been planted...

16. Matt.15:13—“but He answered and said, Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted...”
17. Notice [b] a present reality—“that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither...”—this refers to present growth—the righteous are bringing forth fruit...
18. But what I want you to see is that the bringing forth of fruit in season—is the result of being planted by the rivers of water...
19. This is why some people don’t grow—they have never been planted by God in the rich soil of His amazing grace...
20. They have no life within them—they are barren trees which produce no fruit in season because the tree is dead...

B. It is a certainty as well as a necessity

1. Here I simply want to point out that the Scriptures describe growth both as something that will happen and something that must happen...
2. This keeps us clear from two errors—[1] there are those who deny that all Christians grow—they say there are some Christians who remain infants all their lives...
3. This was a famous lie in the 80’s when a false teaching often described as a “carnal Christian” was systematized and promoted...
4. Basically put—this view teaches that a person can be a true Christian but not grow—that a person can remain an infant for all their days...
5. Now obviously—I am not denying that all Christians grow at various rates—neither am I denying certain times within the Christian life where progress is halted...
6. But what I am saying is this—all Christians to general degrees grow—and if they do not grow then they are dead...
7. Prov.4:18—“the path of the righteous is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day...”
8. The path of the righteous [without a single exception] shines ever brighter unto the perfect day—there is progressive growth...
9. But [2] there are others who fail to put enough emphasis upon our responsibility to grow—they seem to imply that it takes place without any effort on our part...
10. But this of course is in odds with the clear teaching of Scripture, for example, 2Pet.3:18—“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior...”
11. Here we are expressly exhorted to grow—we are not to sit back and wait for God to grow us—but we are to grow in grace...
12. Thus I suggest that spiritual growth is both a certainty as well as a necessity—all Christians do grow and all Christians need to grow...

C. It is a grand and glorious mystery

1. This of course is similar to physical or natural growth—who can fully grasp how a baby grows into a toddler into a child, teen, and then adult...
2. Ecc.11:5—“as you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child. So you do not know the works of God who makes everything...”
3. The work of God in the realm of grace is similar to that in the realm of nature—in other words—spiritual life is similar to that of natural life...
4. They both begin by a birth—they both continue by way of growth—and they are both a grand and glorious mystery...
5. Thus it must be stressed that oftentimes spiritual growth [as with physical growth] is going on unknown to us—that is—without our conscious knowledge...
6. Again this is similar to physical growth—no one was able to actually see our bodies grow—yet every child grows...

7. What happens is that growth is perceived by others—for example, let's say your grandparents don't see you for a year or two...
8. What is the first thing they will usually say—Wow, have you ever grown—look how big you have become...
9. And so too—our own spiritual growth often times goes unnoticed to us, but is usually perceived by those around us...
10. Pink—"A child, by weighing and measuring himself, may discover that he has grown, yet he was not conscious of the process while growing. So it is with the new man: it is 'renewed day by day' yet in such a hidden way that the renewing itself is not felt, though its effects become apparent..."

## II. Five General Reasons for the Need of Spiritual Growth

### A. Spiritual growth increases assurance

1. The first reason behind the necessity of spiritual growth is that it increases or strengthens our assurance that we are in a state of grace...
2. For example, think again of Prov.4:18—"the path of the righteous is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day..."
3. Here we are told that the path of the righteous shines brighter and brighter—thus to the degree that our path shines brighter and brighter—the more we can be assured that we are righteous...
4. If the path of the righteous grows brighter—and yet our path is only getting darker—we have no basis to be assured that the Son has dawned in our hearts...
5. But in contrast to this, spiritual growth necessarily argues life—and where there is growth we can be assured there is life...
6. 2Pet.1:5-11—"but also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..."
7. Notice two things [a] a description of growth (vv5-7)—we are to add or increase our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love...
8. These things are to be sought with all diligence and deliberation—these are to be increased or enhanced in the soul...
9. Notice [b] the reason for growth (vv8-11), v10—"therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble..."
10. This is to say—to the degree that you are diligent in growing in these things, will be the degree that you are sure you are elect and thus called...
11. How does a man or woman know that they have been elected to life from eternity past—well my friends, Peter provides us with one sure way—growth in grace...
12. Pink—"It is because so many become slack in using the means of grace and are so little exercised about growing up into Christ 'in all things' that doubts and fears possess their hearts. If they do not 'give all diligence to add to their faith' by cultivating their several graces, they must not be surprised if they are far from being 'sure' of their Divine calling and election..."

### B. Spiritual growth hinders declension

1. The surest way to ensure we don't backside is to ensure we are progressing—generally speaking—we are either going forward or backwards...
2. For example—have you ever walked up an icy hill—if you're not moving forward you're moving backward—but rarely are you standing still...

3. So too—the best way not to go backward is to go forward—let me put it another way—stagnate Christians are a prime target for temptation...
4. Thomas Watson—“There is no standing in religion, either we go forward or backward. If faith does not grow, unbelief will; if heavenly-mindedness does not grow, covetousness will. A man that does not increase his stock, diminishes it: so if you do not improve your stock of grace, your stock will decay...”
5. 2Pet.3:17-18—“you therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand [the presence of false teachers], beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen...”
6. I want to come back to this text and study in greater detail in our next study—thus I want to briefly point out two things...
7. Notice [1] a warning of falling away, v17—“beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked...”
8. Peter here refers to the false teachers referenced in the latter part of v16—“untaught and unstable people who twist [the Scripture] to their own destruction...”
9. V17—“you therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked...”
10. Thus Peter’s warning largely has reference to the possibility of falling away from the truth—of believing a damnable lie—or heresy...
11. Notice [2] an exhortation to grow, v18—“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...”
12. Here Peter provides a sure remedy against possible deception—not only were they to beware of falsehood but they were to be advancing in grace and knowledge...

### C. Spiritual growth fosters adoration

1. By this I mean growth brings with it an intensified love and delight in the things of God—and in God Himself...
2. The more we grow the more esteem we have for God and the more enjoyment we will have with and in God...
3. Let me illustrate that from an apostolic prayer, Eph.3.14-19—“for this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height -- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God...”
4. Here we find the apostle’s prayer concerning the Ephesian saints—it basically has four petitions—[1] that God would grant them to be strengthened with might (v16), [2] that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith (v17), [3] that they may be able to comprehend and know the love of God (vv18-19a), and [4] that they may be filled with all the fullness of God (v19b)...
5. It is primary the latter of these that I want to briefly focus upon—as there is a sense in which the other three pour into this one...
6. It was the desire of the inspired apostle that these newly concerted Christians would grow in such a way that they would be filled with the fullness of God...
7. Let me put it this way—one result of spiritual growth is that we would be filled with all the fullness of God...
8. The big question of course is this—what does it mean to be filled with all the fullness of God?—let me suggest that it at least means this—that we are filled with love for Him and with the knowledge of His love for us...
9. Barns—“[The phrase] means that you may have the richest measures of divine consolation and of the divine presence; that you may partake of the entire enjoyment of God in the most ample measure in which he bestows his favors on his people...”

10. Thus we learn that it is the desire of God that His people grow in their comprehension and apprehension of God's love—so that the fulness of God would dwell in them...
11. My dear friend—are you a Christian person—if you are then you have a desire to grow in your adoration and delight of God...
12. Well here is how—grow—grow in your understanding and comprehension of God's love in the person of Jesus Christ...
13. And remember what I earlier said—this will take work—it takes work to grow—it just doesn't happen outside of our effort...
14. Prov.13:4—“the soul of a lazy *man* desires, and *has* nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich...”

#### D. Spiritual growth benefits others

1. A growing Christian is a blessing to everyone he encounters—he is an encouragement to his family, neighbors, and pastor...
2. Conversely—there are few things that more discourages a parent, spouse, or pastor than the lack of spiritual growth...
3. 3Jn.1:4—“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth...”—nothing brought him more joy than to know that his spiritual children were growing...

#### E. Spiritual growth glorifies God

1. This of course is the greatest reason behind our need for spiritual growth—the more we grow the more our Father is honored...
2. I think I am right in suggesting that every true Christian wants to glorify and honor God—this is chief end of the existence—to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever...
3. Thus the need for spiritual growth doesn't foremostly concern our own happiness [though it does concern that]—but God's glory...
4. Isa.60:21—“your people shall all be righteous; the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified...”
5. This prophecy has reference to heaven—a time when every Christian will be perfectly and flawlessly righteous...
6. Notice the Lord described this righteous community as—“the branch of My planting, the work of My hands...”
7. In other words—it was His work that got them there—they are the work of His hands—he brought them there by His power and grace...
8. Notice why—“that I may be glorified”—that He may get all of the glory and honor—the reason being—He did all of the work...
9. But here is my point—if the completion of our growth is designed for the glory of God—then the process of this growth glorifies Him...
10. Ps.92:12-15—“the righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, 15 to declare that the LORD is upright; *He is* my rock, and *there is* no unrighteousness in Him...”
11. I want you to notice two things—[1] the promise of growth (vv12-14), and [2] the purpose of growth (v15)...