

Session 8: How Does My Relationship With God Grow?

7.7.10

Introduction

Picture a tree busting its way through concrete as it grows from an acorn to a mighty oak tree. **How can a life which started so tiny overcome such obstacles and produce even more life?** Consider the cancer survivor who becomes a world class athlete. What steps did he take to move from near death to vibrant life?



All around us we see examples of **real life breaking through great obstacles**. In every area of life; plants, people, business, sports, we see simple steps leading to great fruit. What do they have in common? If you ask those who see vibrant, powerful life that overcomes great obstacles, they will **identify a few basic things that make all the difference**. **Knowing** these few basic steps, and **consistently applying** them, **release great power and profound change**.

Imagine an acorn in your hand. Someone asks you, "What will it take for that acorn to become a mighty oak?" You could probably give some pretty clear, simple answers. If someone applied these basic principles, someday a huge oak tree would result. **Faithful application of a few basic principles would lead to profound change over time.**

Consider those around you who claim to be Christians: Do they seem to have this concrete-busting, amazing fruitfulness... this **ability to thrive despite great obstacles?** You've probably heard many people complain about people who claim to be Christians but live inconsistent, weak lives. Maybe you are one of them. **Wouldn't it be great if we could be as clear about spiritual growth as we are about growing trees?** Sadly, there is much confusion about this. Ask 20 people and you will get 20 different answers.

No one is more eager for you to discover these things than God Himself. He has revealed Himself in powerful ways since creation. He wants to reveal Himself to you today. When He reveals Himself, and we respond with steps of faith, our growth accelerates. Then He reveals Himself more and more. See John 14:21. This life principle is at the root of all growth. God has done His best to make it simple to understand and apply; He gives examples, commands, and makes promises which can **release those seven amazing things in powerful ways**. The steps which lead to releasing that life are simple enough for a child to understand... **as simple as a wheel, with hub and four spokes...** Would you like to **discover the few basic things** that that lead to Jesus revealing Himself more and more to you, every day?

IF SO, HIS LIFE IS READY TO BREAK LOOSE THROUGH EVERY AREA OF YOUR LIFE.

PREVIEW OF SESSION: CHART THE COURSE

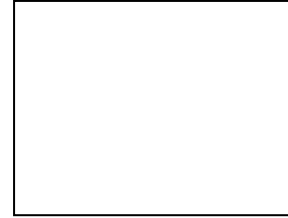
Here is what to expect in this session:

1. **Connecting with others: Link up with a person and idea (pairs).**
2. **Reviewing past concepts: Where are we? (group)**
3. **Exploring the topic: How Does My Relationship With God Grow? (group and pairs)**
4. **Teamwork/Prayer Partner: How can this topic affect your life this week? (group and pairs)**
5. **Assignment for next week: Be ready to report on this.**

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: LINK UP WITH A PERSON AND IDEA

Before we begin, briefly discuss the following in pairs:

- Share one positive or negative experience from the past week (in any category).
- What was helpful from the last session?
- Any progress in understanding or applying it?
- see pg.3, 4 “Warm up Q’s”



REVIEW: Session 7: *How Does a Relationship With God Begin?*

When a baby is born, a lot happens in just a few seconds. The doctors and nurses make sure he is healthy. His parents give him a name. The government gives him citizenship, legal rights as a member of society, and eventually a Social Security Number. And in an instant, this new child is entered into a web of relationships that will be a significant part of his entire life. One moment the child is in his mother’s womb; the next moment he has the potential to become a functioning member of society. A lot has happened! In the same way, we can **move from stranger to a child of God in just a moment**. In that moment, your relationship with God begins and many amazing things begin to happen in that instant. You may not feel all the changes, but they are real. It will take time to realize them. **It takes a lifetime to deepen your friendship with God.**

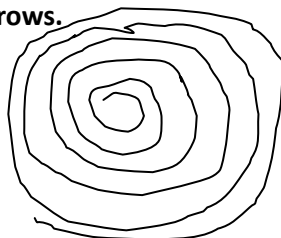
Beginning a relationship graphic:

But what exactly actually happens when your relationship with God begins? How do you make sure this new life doesn’t fizzle? Is there anything you can do to make this new relationship more real and tangible in your life?

In this session, you will explore **seven amazing things** that happen when your relationship with God begins (whether you feel them or not) and **five practical steps** that lead to God revealing himself in your life moment by moment.

This process is what grows your relationship. It is built on Paul’s prayers in Ephesians 1:17-20 and 3:16-20 and Colossians 1:9-12. (Phil 1:6, 2:13, 2 Thess. 3:4,5) This session welds together two concepts:

1. The moment you receive Christ many amazing things happen. They are not immediately visible, but they are very real.
2. As you trust Christ as the center to work outward through every area of your life, and as you take five very practical steps of faith, **Jesus reveals himself, his power is released in your life, and your relationship grows.**



Exploring the Concept: *Overview*

Overview: In order to explore this concept we will look at six questions:

Warm-up Questions:

1. Are there examples in my experience or in the natural world of having or receiving something but still **needing to take practical steps to experience it**?
2. Do **some actions** yield **real results** regardless of people's opinions, and could this be true in the spiritual world as well?
3. How did I form my opinion about spiritual growth?

Core Questions:

1. What does the **Bible actually say about spiritual growth**? How does it happen, what do we do, and what does God do?
2. How does spiritual growth work **practically** in my life?
3. What **steps can I take** that will make a real difference in my life?

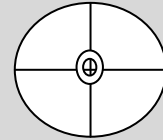
For the rest of the session, you will explore the first 3 questions, then the next 3 questions in more depth.

Warm-Up #1: Examples From Our World: What Can We Learn Here?

Personal Experience: In your experience, **when have you received** or signed up for **something** but **needed to take practical steps to see it in your experience**? Discuss them with your teammate. And think of other examples from your own experience, which may help someone else understand this concept better.

1. Beyond military recruiting: When you join the military, all the rights and responsibilities of a soldier are granted to you. What are some necessary practical steps (e.g., boot camp) before you can succeed as a soldier?
2. Beyond the wedding: After the dream wedding the relationship becomes disappointing, then dry, maybe even destructive, and finally ends. What practical things did they need to do to build their marriage? Why is worth it to take those steps?
3. Beyond the vacation brochure: You sign up and get tickets to go to Hawaii. What practical steps need to be taken for you to enjoy this trip of a lifetime?

Session Highlights



1. **Key Questions: HOW DOES MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD GROW?** *Key Scripture:* John 14:21
2. *Key Illustration:* Joining the military
3. *Key Faith Prayer:* "Lord, I want to grow. I want to see our new relationship change me in real ways. Help me take these steps of faith so that you can reveal yourself to me more.
4. *Key Faith Step:* Identify one of the five faith steps that you are weak in. Choose to work on this step this week.

The Natural World: What in the natural world illustrates the same principle: **real changes that need practical steps to be experienced?** Discuss this as a group. Your leader will help with a few examples.

1. Beyond the Surgery: After major surgeries, such as heart transplants, the patient is not immediately healthy and functioning independently. Although the problems of the bad heart are gone—things have changed in real ways—what steps must the patient take in order to enjoy and experience these changes.
2. Beyond the deed to the New Land: Your father leaves you his land when he dies. What practical must you take to farm the land, build a home, or use it for hunting?

Interaction: Describe something you are passionate about: what basic steps were necessary for you to experience knowledge, skill, success, reward, ability to help others?

Warm-Up #2: Transition to the Spiritual World

We have seen that in many situations in life profound changes can occur. They are real but not immediately obvious. In order to experience and enjoy these changes you must take action. **Could this be true in the spiritual world as well? Could it be that our relationship with God requires us to take some practical steps to enjoy, experience, and grow it?** Will those practical steps really work regardless of our emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends?

My experience, Natural world

Spiritual world

Basic steps to growth= Key things I need to:
 know,
 do,
 practice,
 have,

 The growth, benefits I experience=

Basic steps to growth= Key things I need to:
 know,
 do,
 practice,
 have,

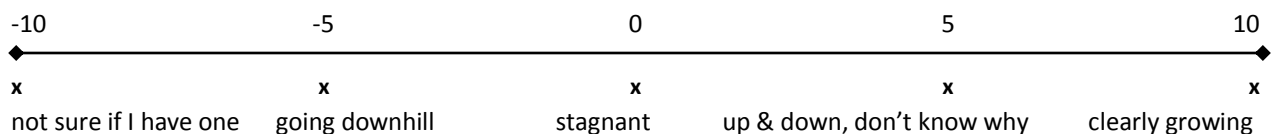
 The growth, benefits I experience=

In session 7, we introduced seven amazing things that happen moment your relationship with God begins. These changes **are real, but they are usually not obvious**. We don't usually feel or experience them right away. We must first take some steps of faith and obedience.

Warm-Up #3: Inspecting My Foundations: Question

The rest of this session will help you understand what the Bible says about how your relationship with God grows. But first, let's look at your present opinion and experience. This will prepare you to hear God's Word with an open heart.

Is your relationship with God growing , stagnant, or going backwards??



Why did you put your "X" there?
 What would help you move toward +10?

LIFE IS READY TO BREAK LOOSE THROUGH EVERY AREA OF YOUR LIFE.

In this section, you will explore seven amazing things that happen when your relationship with God begins. These things are real when you trust Christ, even if you cannot see or feel them. You will then **explore five practical steps that lead to experiencing those amazing things in your life.**

In the first column, describe your current view. In the second column, explore what God's Word says about starting a relationship with him. Every time you have a question or objection, write it in the left column. Underline the statements that seem important to you.

Your Current Beliefs/Assumptions

What do YOU think happens when you receive Christ?

What doesn't happen?

How do you know?

How have you formed your opinion (e.g., family, teachers, society)?

Were they reliable sources of spiritual insight?

If these amazing things are true, why don't we experience them, or see them in the lives of others?

Discuss the Reality Principle with your teammate: *What does your LEFT hand tell you about those amazing things? What my emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends say:*

Myth#1 "Growth is instant, passive, If you aren't swept along 0-100mph really fast, something is wrong with you."

Myth #2 "Growth is all up to you; rev yourself up! try hard, or else!"

Myth #3 "Real Growth only happens to special people; adjust to a mediocre life."

Myth #4 "Real Growth =high emotion; keep yourself stimulated, feed on dramatic circumstances, inspiring speakers,"

Myth#5. "Growth = knowing a lot of information, head filled with 'insider' info.,

How does that compare to what the BIBLE says?

Seven Amazing Things That Happen When You Receive Christ

The moment you receive Christ and begin a relationship with God many amazing things happen. They are not immediately visible, but they are very real. Like an inheritance, adoption, scholarship, marriage, or signing up with the military...**you have immediate and powerful realities true about you.**

What are those amazing things? *Explore the statements and scriptures below. Underline the words that are most significant to you.*

1. Your sins are FORGIVEN (Colossians 1:13-14).
2. JESUS enters your life. You have real hope for change (Revelation 3:20, Colossians 1:27).
3. Jesus' SPIRIT lives in you, actively working to change you (John 3:3-8; 16:5-13, Titus 3:1-7).
4. You are free from the grip of sin. You have NEW POWER to live for God (Romans 6:5-11, Galatians 2:20).
5. You have a NEW HEART. You are changed at your core (Ezekiel 36:26).
6. You have a NEW IDENTITY: *Child of God, New Creation* (John 1:12, 2 Corinthians 5:17).
7. You have begun the GREAT ADVENTURE of the abundant, ETERNAL LIFE (John 10:10, John 5:24, 1 John 5:11-13). And many more...

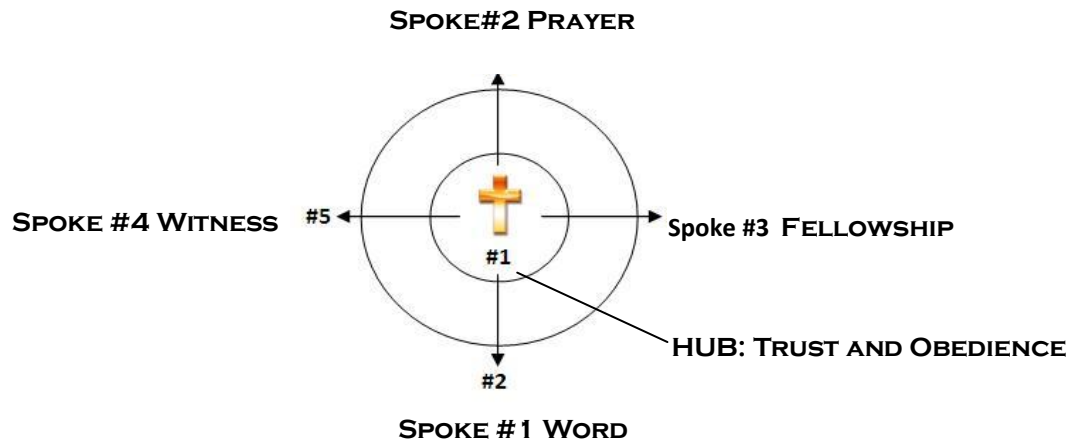
___ *Response: From 0-10, if you have received Christ, how real do these seem in your life?*

Have you seen them in other people's lives?

What practical steps will lead to these being more vibrant in my own personal experience?

Five Practical Steps that Lead to Growth

Reality tells us that in order to *experience* these amazing changes—in order for them to become visible in your experience—you must take certain practical steps. This section will explore the diagram below. This illustrates how, with Christ at the center, a few simple but profound steps allow his life to flow out through ours. They are not a recipe, but keys to a dynamic relationship.



The HUB: TRUST and OBEDIENCE

The first and most foundational step is to **trust** Christ as the center of your life. You trust and **obey** him over everything and everyone else. Why? Because He has revealed Himself to be so worthy of trust. (sessions 1-7) The Seven Amazing Things motivate us to allow Him to be our Lord or Master (Romans 10:9). The center, the core of everything, is the Living Christ. Growth occurs when every area of life rotates around Him, illustrated as the hub of the wheel. Trust shows itself in obedience, “choosing to live according to God’s word “... Obedience expresses itself in many ways, but as the core of all steps, obedience can be illustrated by four spokes on a wheel. These four practical core steps (2-5) radiate from the center. Without Christ at the center, the spokes can become just religious duties or rituals. But with Christ at the center, they bring life to every other area of our lives. *Explore the Scriptures and statements below, and jot down the things that seem most significant to you.*

John 14:21 – As I obey Christ as the center, the hub, the core of my life, he will show himself to me.

Galatians 2:20 – The living Christ actually lives through me, from the center outward.

Colossians 2:6-7 – My focus on Christ, my trust in Him and my attitude of submission to him will energize everything around the center.

Philippians 1:6, 2:13, 2Thess. 3:4,5, My confidence is in God Who produces growth in my life

___ Response: From 0-10, how consistently are you trusting and obeying Jesus at the very core of everything you do?

What hinders you?

What would help strengthen this area?

What scriptures or concepts would you add?

The four spokes represent four “talks” or ways of communicating. The more trust, obeying and communicating, the more Jesus reveals himself to me. And this leads to more trust and more obeying and communicating. This is the cycle of growth pictured in the diagram above. Each cycle brings more growth in the relationship. But when one of the “talks” is missing or inactive, it’s like you have a flat tire and you cannot move.

Spoke #1: WORD: *God communicates with me. (God → Me)*

As you read the Bible, God communicates with you through his Word. As we saw in session 5, the words in these books were given to people in the past and recorded and preserved for us so that we could know God. *Explore the Scriptures and statements below, and jot down the things that seem most significant to you.*

Matthew 4:4 – Life and spiritual nourishment comes from God’s Word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – God’s Word provides what we need to grow and please him.

Hebrews 4:12 – God’s Word is alive. He speaks through it to show us areas of weakness and sin.

Response: ___ *From 0-10, To what extent do you read, study, “feed on” God’s word?*

___ *To what extent would others say God’s word is your greatest source of truth and life?*

What hinders you?

What would help strengthen this area? What scriptures or concepts would you add?

See # 5 in Sv/Adv, # 5 in Destined for Security, # 5 in Destined for Intimacy

Spoke #2 : PRAYER: *I communicate with God. (Me → God)*

As you pray, you communicate with God. You talk to him like you would another person. He will often speak to you in your heart. This is a vital step and becomes especially powerful when you do it in conjunction with reading God’s Word. Read the Bible, respond in prayer, and listen for all that God has for you. *Explore the Scriptures and statements below, and jot down the things that seem most significant.*

Philippians 4:6-7 – Prayer is your opportunity to come to God with all your burdens and anxieties and receive peace and assurance that he is active and powerful in your life.

Matthew 6:7-9 – Jesus taught his disciples how to pray in a way that honored the Father and was authentic, practical, and meaningful.

Response: ___ *From 0-10, To what extent are you communicating honestly with God about everything?*

___ *to what extent are you seeing what a difference it makes to pray?*

What hinders you?

What would help strengthen this area? What scriptures or concepts would you add?

See Destined for Intimacy #1,2

Spoke #3: FELLOWSHIP: *I communicate with others in the family of God. (Me ← → Family)*

When you begin your relationship with God, you are adopted into a new spiritual family (Matthew 12:46-50; Romans 8:15-17). This family is made up of all people who have received Jesus. God created us with a built-in need for these relationships. It's part of our nature. God will work through these new friends and "family" to provide role models, encouragement, wisdom, coaching and accountability. *Explore the Scriptures and statements below, and jot down the things that seem most significant to you.*

Hebrews 10:24-25 – Believers should inspire each other to love and serve people better. To forsake this fellowship is to cut yourself off from something truly vital.

Ephesians 4:11-16 – Every follower of Jesus contributes something that others need, and the Body of Christ (all believers together) grows to health and maturity as everyone does their part. You need them, they need you.

Response: ___ From 0-10, to what extent are you building healthy relationships with other believers?

___ to what extent are you experiencing healthy "coaching" for spiritual growth?

What are some ways you could benefit from connecting more with fellow followers of Jesus? What are some ways you could contribute to others' spiritual growth?

What hinders you?

What would help strengthen this area? What scriptures or concepts would you add?

See Destined for intimacy #3, 4

Spoke #4: WITNESS: *I communicate with those not yet in the family of God. (Me → Others)*

Once we experience the powerful benefits of our relationship with God, we want others to join His family. Jesus reveals Himself when we feel His love for people who do not know Him yet. **We grow as we explain our faith, answer questions, and help others join the family as well.** *Explore the Scriptures and statements below, and jot down the things that seem most significant to you.*

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 – We are ambassadors for Christ as he speaks to others through us.

Matthew 28:19-20 – Jesus gave his disciples a mission to reach others.

John 15:16, 17:20

Response: ___ From 0-10, To what extent are you actively pursuing sharing my faith with others?

___ How well equipped are you to clearly explain the Good News about Jesus Christ?

What hinders you?

What would help strengthen this area? What scriptures or concepts would you add?

See Destined for Ministry #2,3,4,5, Destined for Eternity #3,4,5

Clarification: *This Is Crucial!*

These practical steps must be focused on the Living Jesus who reveals himself as we trust him. If we lose sight of him in all our “spiritual exercises,” these practical steps can become mere religious obligations that lead to comparison, pride, or discouragement. **Without Jesus as the center, focus, and purpose, all our spiritual practices will be empty.** They only become effective when empowered by his Spirit.

Core #2: How Does Spiritual Growth Work Practically In My Life?

In order to make this as clear as possible, let’s look at a few concrete examples of how this works in real life.



Core #3: What steps can I take that will make a real difference in my life?
How did God reveal Himself in the Bible?
How does God reveal Himself to us today?

Faith Response

- 1. The Hub: Surrendering, trusting Christ as the center, now, and moment by moment...**
- 2. God’s word:** I trust You Lord to work in the following practical ways...
- 3. Prayer:** I trust You Lord to work in the following practical ways...
- 4. Fellowship:** I trust You Lord to work in the following practical ways...
- 5. Witnessing:** I trust You Lord to work in the following practical ways...
- 6. Coaching others in #'s 1-5,** I trust You Lord to work in the following practical ways...

Which step of faith most relates to your life right now?

Why?

Who will be praying for you, encouraging, coaching you?

Whom can you pray for, encourage, coach?

A Word of Encouragement

Phil. 1:6, 2:13, 2 Thess.3:4,5.

TEAMWORK/PRAYER PARTNER: HOW CAN THIS TOPIC AFFECT YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK?

Discuss the following with your partner. Start now, and check in with each other through the week.

1. *General*: What is most helpful from this session? What is difficult? How clear am I?
2. *Specific*: How does this affect specific areas of my life?
3. *Faith steps*: How much do I live as though this is true? What practical steps do I need to take in order to live according to reality? Who else can I share this with?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: BE READY TO REPORT ON THIS.

Before next week's meeting, do the following to help you further understand and apply this session.

1. *Keep Your Eyes Open*: Look for **other examples** in your life or the natural world around you that involve **practical steps leading to dramatic changes**. Write down any examples you see.
2. *Reinforce Your Learning*: **Review the key scriptures**, the seven amazing things, the HUB, the 4 spokes. You know you understand them if you can **explain them to a 10 year old. Can you?**
3. *Apply the Reality Principle*: What are your emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends saying about salvation and **Growth Myths** (left column above)? How do those things stand up to the claims of Scripture (right column above)? Write your thoughts and observations below.

What my emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends say:

What the Bible says:

START A "GOD SIGHTINGS" SCRAPBOOK: Records of times where you saw God at work....

4. *Share with Someone Else*: If you are convinced of the reality of salvation, or the power of these practical steps of growth, *share this with someone else*. If you are not, *ask someone else what they think*. It will help you to talk this out with others who are interested in the topic

Session 9: HOW DO ALL THESE THINGS LEAD TO LIVING LIFE TO THE FULL?

What are my next steps?

How does my new identity affect my Family, Finances, Fitness, Friends, Fruit and Fun?

How do I strengthen my faith and communicate these things to others?

How will "Destined for Security" and other resources help me grow?