

Growing Up a Second Time

Steps We Take in the Christian Walk¹

Smile, your brain is plastic. Not as in Saran Wrap, but as in flexible. Essentially this means that your brain changes in both structure and function in response to your experiences, choices, and environment. Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist Santiago Ramón y Cajal said, “Any man could, if he were so inclined, be the sculptor of his own brain.”

God calls us to a lifetime of growth and change. He has laid out for us simple steps to facilitate the process. But we needn't sculpt our brains alone! He has already walked the steps He lays out. He will give us mighty power of His Holy Spirit. Through the ongoing infusion of divine energy, “Our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Step by step, choice by choice, we may grow in Christlike beauty throughout our lives.

The danger of a step-by-step process is that we start thinking of ourselves as human doings instead of human beings. So, let's talk about the “be's” of getting to know and grow in God. These steps are not so much once-and-done linear, but cyclical, repeated over and over throughout our time on earth.

Behold

The first step of growing in Christ is beholding Him. As we see His character of love, our hearts become soft and moldable. Beholding means taking a prolonged look, observing intently over a span of time. Have you beheld God in nature, in close bonds, and in life experiences? Dwell on those things. Then dwell on the ultimate expression of God's love, the Cross. No richer, deeper, more crystal-clear revelation of God has ever been seen, for “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Be Aware

In order to appreciate all God has done to save us, we must take an honest look at our sinfulness. If we fail to see our need, we will fail to appreciate His Gift. Our “carnal mind is enmity against God” (Romans 8:7). Realizing this, we feel a sense of shame. But just at the point of despair, we hear John the Baptist cry, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Jesus told Nicodemus during a secret night meeting about being born again (See John 3:3). Through this birth we may access all the riches of God through Jesus Christ. He says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6).

¹ This study is based on the classic book *Steps to Christ* by E.G. White. For a more comprehensive understanding, get yourself a copy and read it!

Be Broken

For seed to take root and grow, the soil must be ready. God breaks up the fallow ground of our hearts through the gift of repentance. When the salvation-seeking thousands at Pentecost cried, “What shall we do?” Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). But notice that even repentance is a gift. Peter said of Jesus, “Him God has exalted . . . to *give* repentance to Israel” (Acts 5:31). Jesus said that through the Cross He would draw *all* to Him (See John 12:32). If we do not resist this drawing, we will find ourselves at the foot of the Cross, our hearts made humble and soft by the Spirit.

Be Honest

Realness with God and other people relieve us of the burden of pretentious self-righteousness. The wise man identified two choices with two outcomes: “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Notice that confession of sin precedes forsaking. Our sins hurt others. When we admit what we’ve done, we clear the path to healing. “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). We confess our sin directly to the ones we have hurt. And of course, all sin should be confessed to God, who promises that: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Be Blessed

Staying connected requires something of us. We must develop the art of a healthy devotional life. “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). Our surrender to God must be revisited each day as we check for idols such as materialism, status, and ease. But what do we give, when we give all? Only those things that would harm us in the end.

Believe

God has promised internal transformation. He says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). He has promised that our scarlet sins will be as white as snow (See Isaiah 1:18). Once we take the initial steps of repentance, confession, and surrender, then we believe God has forgiven us because He has promised. Many conscientious people struggle with this. Sometimes we must “faith it ‘till we make it.” Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (John 5:8). Taking that step of faith opens the heavenly valve through which God’s power can flow.

Be Accountable

Biblically, the teaching of justification by grace through faith co-exists with the teaching that we will be judged by our works. Yet God wants true obedience, which begins with a change of heart. “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them” (Hebrews 10:16). David said, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day!” (Psalm 119:97). Through this internalization of the gospel, we learn to hate what we once loved and love what we once hated. We can rest safely in Jesus, who will give us the power to leave sin behind. Yet should we sin, “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Become

This walk of faith is not a once-and-done, instant transformation. In living by faith, we embark on a path of lifetime development. God’s followers grow like “trees of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:3)—and trees grow slowly, don’t they? But oh, how mighty they become! The key to strong, steady growth is the proper soil. Jesus said, “Abide in Me” (John 15:4). When we root in this soil, bask in the sunshine of God’s love, and soak in the rain of the Holy Spirit, we cannot help but grow. This is why the enemy tries so hard to lead us away from God. He tempts us with the pleasures of the world. When this fails, he tries to overwhelm us with its cares. If he fails at this, he’ll entice us to become hyper-critical of other people. And finally, when all else fails, he’ll lead us to become hyper-critical of ourselves. We must turn away from all these things to Him. Then “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Be a Servant

Jesus came, “not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28). To accept God’s blessings without sharing them is like eating without working; soon we become flabby and unhealthy. While it does require a sacrifice to serve others, “the generous soul will be made rich” (Proverbs 11:25). Some excuse themselves from service because they lack distinctive talents. This is wrong! Each of us can contribute in our sphere, however small, remembering Jesus, who, “though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Be a Student

We may learn about God from a number of “books”: the glories of nature, close relationships, and life experience. But if we desire a crystal-clear, comprehensive course in the character of our God in heaven, the Bible is the best place to look. The central figure in the Bible story is Jesus. He said of the Scriptures, “they . . . testify of Me” (John 5:39). The message of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and return light up the pages of the Bible and focus us on the hope we find in Him.

Beseech

God speaks to us through His Word and His Spirit, and we may speak back in the form of prayer. We may also lay our needs before Him, knowing that if we ask according to His will, He hears us (See 1 John 5:14). In other words, if God can possibly answer our prayers with a “Yes,” He will. If God did not spare His own Son “but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). Our conviction of His generous, loving character will give us the boldness to ask. “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Matthew 11:24).

Be Wise

How do we manage the inevitable doubts that come into our minds? God gives us evidence of the truth, but in order for us to grow in faith, He leaves room for doubt. Often as we come upon a difficult passage of Scripture, we will need to accept our limited understanding. He says, “Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?” (Job 11:7). The implied answer to this rhetorical question is “No,” as there will always be things we don’t understand. Yet much of doubt begins with our own wayward hearts. This is why Jesus said, “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). Our first step in overcoming doubt is to choose obedience to what we know to be true.

Be Joyful

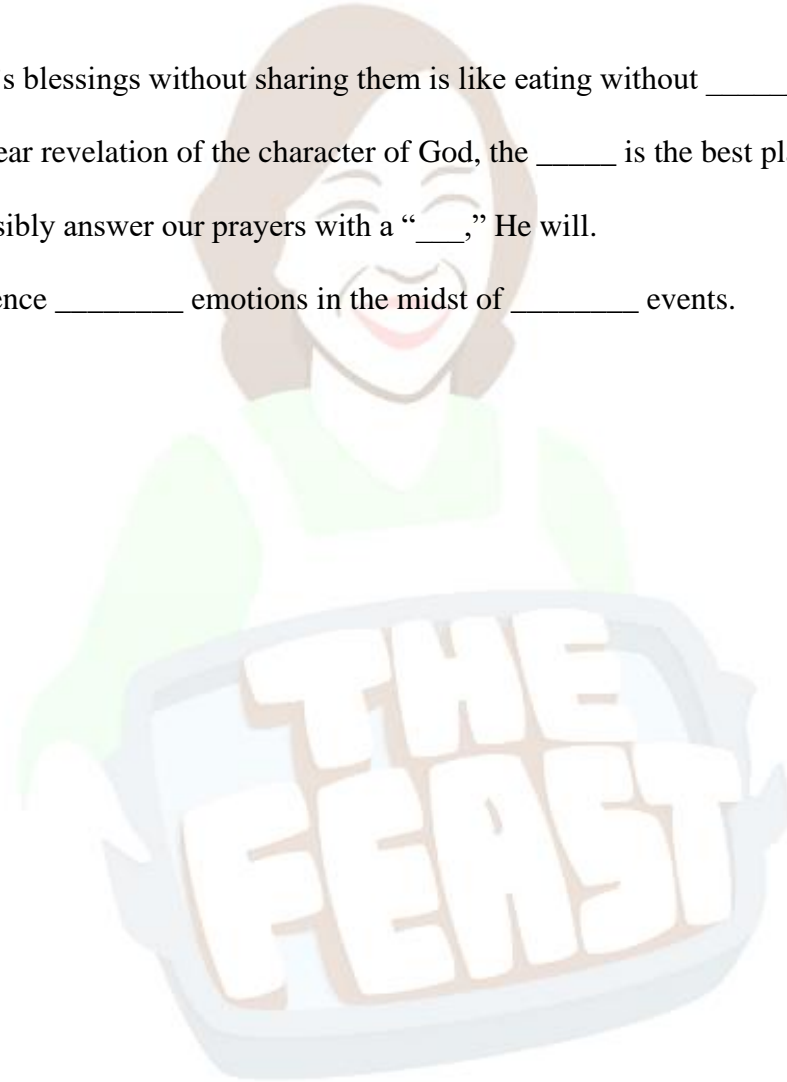
We can experience positive emotions in the midst of negative events. And negative events will abound! Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Our beaming countenances shine out the gospel in a dark world, making us “living epistles” (See 2 Corinthians 3:3, KJV). In one of His most important sermons, Jesus called His disciples to abide His love. Then He said, “These things have I spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

The Takeaway

Following Jesus means a lifetime of joyful, painful-at-times, but nevertheless solid, growth and thriving in the Lord. In fact, if we allow Him to lead us, growth is guaranteed. The simple steps He gives us are not so much sequential as cyclical, building upon one another again and again throughout our lives. Taking them by faith, we find ourselves in a joyful place of overflowing love and service to others that is but a foretaste of an eternity of bliss.

Quiz

1. When describing cognitive flexibility, scientists say the brain is _____.
2. The first step of growing in Christ is to _____ Him.
3. Even repentance is a _____ from God.
4. We should _____ our trespasses to one another and pray for one another, that we may be healed.
5. To accept God's blessings without sharing them is like eating without _____.
6. If we want a clear revelation of the character of God, the _____ is the best place to look.
7. If God can possibly answer our prayers with a "____," He will.
8. We can experience _____ emotions in the midst of _____ events.



Answer Key

1. Plastic
2. Behold
3. Gift
4. Confess
5. Working
6. Bible
7. Yes
8. Positive, negative

