

**QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF
TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE STILL GROWING IN THE LORD
2 PETER 3:18**

INTRODUCTION

One of the early explorers to the North Pole charted his journey hourly to ensure that he stayed on course through the white wasteland. At one point a strange phenomenon began to occur. As he checked his position, his instruments indicated that even though he had been moving northward, he was actually farther south than he had been an hour before. Regardless of the speed at which he walked in the direction of the Pole, he continued to get farther from it. Finally he discovered that he had ventured onto an enormous iceberg that was drifting in one direction as he was walking in the other.

There is a world of difference between **activity** and **progress!** That's as true with a Christian's journey toward Christ-likeness as it is on a North Pole expedition! The Christian life is meant to be one of growth and progress!

We are even commanded here in 2 Peter 3:18 to ***grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord!***

How can we know that we are growing in grace? How can we know that we are making real progress and not merely just deceiving ourselves with activity?

It's often hard to recognize spiritual advance over short periods of time!

Trying to determine the progress of a soul is like looking at the growth of an oak tree—you can't actually see it growing at the moment, but you can compare it to where it was some time ago and see that there has indeed been growth!

These questions that we'll look at tonight can help you discern whether or not you are maturing spiritually as you should. It would be good for us to use them to evaluate our life, especially over the past six to twelve months.

Let's begin, shall we?

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**1. Are you more hungry and thirsty for God than ever before?
(Psalm 42:1; Matthew 5:6; Philippians 3:7-10)**

The writer of Psalm 42:1 said, *"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."*

Have you been thirsting for God like that? **Is He your passion?**

If so, your ***soul-thirst is a sign of soul-growth.***

Do you yearn to know Jesus Christ more and more intimately?

Think about the Apostle Paul for a minute. In spite of all of his maturity in Christ, in spite of all he had seen and experienced, He declared late in life that he wanted to know Christ more intimately. **(Philippians 3:7-10)**

What was he talking about? Didn't he already know Jesus better than most of us ever will? Of course he did. But **the more he knew Jesus, the more he wanted to know Him.**

The more Paul progressed in spiritual strength, the more thirsty for God he became.

Is your soul thirsty for the Lord? Do you long to see Him face to face?

Like a deer thirsting for water are you thirsting to be filled and saturated with God? That's a sign of someone who's growing as a Christian.

Matthew 5:6—"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

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- 2. Are you more and more loving? (1 John 4:7; John 13:34-35)**
The mark of a Christian is love, especially love for other Christians!
1 John 4:7—“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”

John 13:34-35—“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

If you are growing in love, then you are growing in grace!

Can you recall recent instances of Christlike love in your life?
Have there been occasions when you’ve sacrificed your own preferences, plans, or rights for those of others?

These are mileposts on the journey in grace. Those who are stalled in selfishness are stuck spiritually!

- 3. Are you more sensitive to and aware of God than ever before? (Romans 6:11)**

The grace of God causes us, who were once dead to God, to be
“alive unto God through Jesus Christ Our Lord” (Romans 6:11).

One result of this new life is the glorious invasion of our souls by the Holy Spirit of God. His resident presence can give us a sense of being *“alive to God”* in daily life as we are filled with Him!

What does this look like? Have you ever seen an artesian well? Well, think of the Holy Spirit being like a spiritual artesian well that frequently brings thoughts of God and the things of God spontaneously to a Christian’s mind!

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Growing Christians find spiritual pleasure in seizing and dwelling upon these thoughts!

The Spirit prompts the growing child of God to see God everywhere—in pink-tinged clouds at sunset, in the tweet of a sparrow, the kindness of a friend, the death of a loved one, even in the timing of a traffic signal.

Think about how as we sit here in this service tonight we are literally being bombarded by radio and television signals, cellular phone conversations, and satellite transmissions. Of course, we have been entirely unaware of them, because we aren’t built to receive them!

When we were in our lost condition, we weren’t built to receive the things of the Holy Spirit either!

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

But once we were *“alive to God,”* the Spirit made us alive to God’s presence everywhere. Not that we are always sensitive to and aware of God, but if you find yourself noticing and often choosing to enjoy the Spirit’s promptings, chances are you’re growing spiritually!

- 4. Are you governed more and more by God’s Word? (2 Timothy 3:16-17)**

Before we were made alive to God, we were controlled mostly by what we wanted—our fleshly desires. But after we became alive to God, we have a new desire to be governed by His will!

In other words, the true Christian has a new compulsion to do what God wants him to do! And that information is found in the Bible!

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The classic text on the sufficiency of Scripture for the Christian is *2 Timothy 3:16–17*. Words like *doctrine* (teaching), *reproof* (rebuking), *correction*, and *instruction* are all growth-related words.

When you are growing as a child of God, you can regularly point to how the Word of God has been *teaching* you, how it has *reproved* you for sin, how it has shown you *how to correct mistakes* in your life. And you can point to how the Bible has been *training you to live in new ways*, the ways that God says are right!

I hear people who are moving forward in the things of God telling me how they are having new insights into the truth of Scripture, how God has used the Bible to give them direction for a career or ministry, how the Lord has reproved them about materialism or family failures or prayerlessness, and how He has corrected them.

Can you point to specific ways the Word of God has been doing this in your life during the past year? If so, you are growing in grace.

5. Are you concerned more and more with the physical and spiritual needs of others? (James 2:14-16; 1 John 3:16-19)

In *Luke 9:11* we read of Jesus encountering a crowd of people, and we're told that He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

That was typical of Jesus. He taught them God's truth and then often He would heal or feed them. **He was concerned primarily with their spiritual needs but He cared deeply about their physical needs, too!**

The more we become like Jesus, the more concerned we will be about the physical and spiritual needs of others. In my ministry experience I have observed that the longer a person is a Christian, the less evangelistic he tends to be.

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This is obviously not a mark of growth or Christlikeness, but of spiritual stagnancy. We must consciously fight this tendency toward "*evangelism erosion*."

How have you been demonstrating a concern for both the spiritual and physical needs of others? Have you shown it through helping to provide for someone's food, clothing, shelter, or health needs?

Have you proven it through praying for someone, giving to someone in great need, witnessing to someone who needs Christ, or through encouraging someone who needs a lift?

A sure sign of Christian growth is seeing needs you never saw before and then beginning to meet them.

6. Are you more and more concerned with the Church and the Kingdom of God? (Ephesians 5:25; John 15:1-8)

Jesus loved the Church, the people of God, so much that He died for them. The more we grow to become like Jesus, the more we will love His Church, too. We'll be concerned with our part in His local Church and with the work of His Kingdom as a whole.

Christians who isolate themselves from the Church aren't growing stronger by their isolation. They are like a body part that's separated from the body or like embers that have been separated from the fire.

The more we separate ourselves from participating in the life of the local Body of Christ and working for His Kingdom, the less we will grow.

7. Are the disciplines of the Christian life more and more important to you? (1 Timothy 4:7b-8)

Growth in godliness is ultimately a gift from God, but that doesn't mean there is nothing for us to do.

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Regarding our role in spiritual growth, God has said that we are to **exercise ourselves for the purpose of godliness.**

As we engage ourselves in and practice the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life, the Holy Spirit molds us more into the character of the Master!

Probably the most common reason for the lack of spiritual growth among Christians is inconsistency with the spiritual disciplines.

We don't grow in grace if we fail to use the God-given means for growing in grace.

It's a simple fact: Those who grow the most and the fastest are those who place themselves in the channels of grace such as the intake of God's Word, prayer, worship, service, evangelism, silence, solitude, learning, fasting, and so on.

8. Are you more and more aware of your sin? (1 Timothy 1:15)

In one of the last things he wrote, when he was about as mature as a believer gets, the Apostle Paul described himself as the worst sinner in the world.

How could he say that, since he was probably more like Jesus than anyone we've ever met? It's because the closer we get to Jesus, the more aware we become of our sin and how unlike Him we really are.

One of the first spiritual struggles of a new believer occurs as he becomes aware of sin that never bothered him before. It's not uncommon for a new believer to feel more guilty at times than he ever did before becoming a Christian.

That's because he's alive to the Holy Spirit for the first time in his life, and so he's more aware of sin.

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The more we grow as a Christian, the less we will sin. But it often will seem as though we sin more because our sensitivity to sin will be so much greater.

9. Are you more and more willing to forbear and forgive others? (Ephesians 4:1-3, 31-32)

Forgiveness is one of the hardest and most unnatural things we could be asked to do.

But the more we become like Jesus, who forgave even those who nailed Him to the cross, the more we will be willing to forgive.

Bitterness will not usually crush the one we are bitter at but will only serve to crush us!

Are you still bitter at someone you were bitter toward months or years ago? If so, then regardless of all your Christian activities, you have deceived yourself about having made any real spiritual progress during that time.

Have you forgiven any longtime hurts during the past year? If so, then you have made a measurable advance in Christian maturity.

10. Are you thinking more and more of heaven and longing to be with the Lord Jesus? (Philippians 1:23-24)

The Apostle Paul wrote this to a Church needing his help.

The more he became like Christ, the more he wanted to depart and be with Christ—that is, to be in heaven, for he knew that would be better by far.

Do you think like that very often? One of the signs of becoming more like Jesus is increasingly wanting to be where He is. It's a matter of direction.

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CONCLUSION

Growth in grace happens intentionally, not automatically. Like the explorer on the iceberg, you can drift away from spiritual progress, but you never drift forward.

Without purpose and an occasional evaluation, you'll eventually find that, despite your activity, you've been carried away from Christlikeness.

But don't be discouraged by slow spiritual development—as long as you are growing! Direction is more important than speed. The question isn't always how quickly are you growing, but rather it's "are you growing?"

Regardless of the measure of your maturity, what is past is past. You can start fresh today. What would God have you do to begin growing once again? (1 John 1:9)

Are you more like Jesus today than you were a year ago?