

# **Keys to Spiritual Growth**

## **Confessing Christ and Glorifying God**

*2 Peter 3:18*

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July 16, 2006

# Confessing Christ and Glorifying God<sup>1</sup>

## Scripture

Last week I started a new series of sermons titled “Keys to Spiritual Growth.” Spiritual growth is as essential to the life of a Christian just as physical growth is essential to the life of a child. Because God commands us to mature spiritually, we need to understand how that happens.

The master key to spiritual growth is the glory of God. Ian Hamilton, Pastor of the Cambridge Presbyterian Church in Cambridge, England, said at a Banner of Truth Conference for ministers that “the formative principle of the Christian life is the glory of God.”<sup>2</sup> John Piper, Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, has built his entire ministry on the principle that “God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in him.”<sup>3</sup>

God is supremely concerned about his glory, and the way to grow as a Christian is to focus on the glory of God.

With that in mind, let’s read the exhortation from the apostle Peter to grow spiritually in 2 Peter 3:18:

**<sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)**

## Introduction

Some years ago, during Super bowl XXXVII, FedEx ran a commercial that spoofed the movie *Castaway*, in which Tom Hanks played a FedEx worker whose company plane went down, stranding him on a desert island for years. Looking like the be-

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the material for these sermons comes from Dr. John MacArthur.

<sup>2</sup> In a sermon preached at the 2000 Banner of Truth Conference at Carlisle, PA.

<sup>3</sup> [http://desiringgod.org/who\\_is\\_dgm\\_index.html](http://desiringgod.org/who_is_dgm_index.html). See also books by John Piper, such as *God’s Passion for His Glory*.

dragged Hanks in the movie, the FedEx employee in the commercial goes up to the door of a suburban home, package in hand.

When the lady comes to the door, he explains that he survived five years on a deserted island, and during that whole time he kept this package in order to deliver it to her. She gives him a simple, “Thank you.”

But he is curious about what is in the package that he has been protecting for five long years. He says, “If I may ask, what was in that package after all?”

She opens it and shows him the contents, saying, “Oh, nothing really. Just a satellite telephone, a global positioning device, a compass, a water purifier, and some seeds.”

Like the contents in this package, the resources for spiritual growth are available to every Christian who will take advantage of them.

## **Lesson**

In the rest of the “Keys to Spiritual Growth” series I want to give you many practical ways in which you can glorify God and thereby grow spiritually. Today I want to look at just two keys:

1. Confessing Christ as Lord, and
2. Aiming Our Lives at Glorifying God.

### **I. Confessing Christ as Lord**

First, spiritual growth begins by confessing Christ as Lord.

In Philippians 2:5-8 the apostle Paul discussed the humiliation (Greek, *kenosis*) of Christ, explaining how he took the form of a man and humbled himself, even to the point of death on a cross.

Then in verses 9-11, the apostle said, “Therefore God exalted him [i.e., Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Because of Jesus' obedience, the Father has exalted him and called everyone in the universe to confess him as Lord. That brings glory to God.

To give glory to God, we must confess Jesus Christ as Lord. That's part of salvation, not just a subsequent act. You can't say, "I've trusted Jesus as Savior, and later on I'll make him Lord." These are not two distinct acts. When you are saved, you confess Christ as Lord. That is why the apostle Paul said in Romans 10:9, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Salvation is a matter of confessing that Christ is Lord.

And when you confess Christ as Lord, you become keenly concerned for the glory of God. Before your conversion you may have used God's name in vain without giving it a second thought. But now that you are a Christian, it bothers you.

Englishman Henry Martyn served as a missionary in India and Persia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. My favorite commentator John Stott, tells us that Henry Martyn

turned his back on an academic career and entered the ministry. Two years later. . . he sailed for India.

"Let me burn out for God," he cried in Calcutta, as he lived in an abandoned Hindu temple.

And as he watched the people prostrating themselves before their images, he wrote: "This excited more horror in me than I can well express."

When he heard a blasphemous comment about Christ, Martyn responded, "I could not endure existence if Jesus was not glorified; it would be hell to me, if he were to be always thus dishonored."<sup>4</sup>

If you have never confessed Jesus Christ as Lord, you have no capacity to live for his glory. If you dishonor the Son, you dishonor the Father (John 5:23). But, if you have confessed Christ as Lord, you now have the capacity to glorify God, and to grow.

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<sup>4</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* (Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), pp. 21-22.

So salvation is the necessary beginning for glorifying God and, therefore, for spiritual growth. You cannot grow until you are born. That is as true in the spiritual realm as it is in the physical realm.

## **II. Aiming Our Lives at Glorifying God**

The second key to spiritual growth is aiming our lives at glorifying God.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31 the apostle Paul said, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

When you confessed Jesus as Lord, that was done to the glory of God. Now whatever else you do—even the most mundane functions of life such as eating and drinking—should be focused on the glory of God. That should be the underlying attitude of your life.

In John 8:49-50 Jesus said, “I honor my Father. . . . I am not seeking glory for myself.” We will grow spiritually when we follow Jesus’ example by making God’s glory the focus of our lives.

Aiming our lives at glorifying God will be seen in a number of ways.

### *A. By Being Willing to Sacrifice All*

First, aiming our lives at glorifying God will be seen by being willing to sacrifice all.

Let me give you a number of illustrations of this truth.

In John 12:27 Jesus said, “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.” In anticipation of the cross Jesus was saying, “God, can I ask you to bail me out? Of course not—this is what I came here for.”

Then he said, “Father, glorify your name!”

A voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again” (John 12:28).

Christ was about to suffer immeasurable anguish in body and spirit, but he was willing to glorify God despite the cost.

You will grow spiritually when you do God's will regardless of the consequences.

John 21 contains another illustration of God being glorified through sacrifice.

God had chosen Peter before the foundation of the world for some important tasks. He was to be a key leader in the first-century church as it spread from Jerusalem to the rest of the world. Unfortunately, Peter was inconsistent in his early days of discipleship. He often gave strong verbal assent but failed every time he was tested.

God had shown Peter great things, such as Jesus' walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33), the feeding of five thousand people (14:15-21), and the transfiguration (17:1-13). God's power had enabled Peter to make this great confession of Christ: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Peter saw soldiers fall backward like dominoes in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus spoke (John 18:3-6). Peter had seen the resurrected Christ in the upper room (20:19-23) and even had a personal audience with him (Luke 24:34).

Yet in spite of all that, he remained inconsistent. He probably felt inadequate because of his many failures.

Following his resurrection, Jesus promised to appear to the disciples in Galilee (Mark 16:7). When Christ did not arrive immediately, Peter got impatient and said, "I'm going out to fish" (John 21:3). In other words he said, "I'm going back to do what I used to do. I wasn't cut out for the ministry—I've failed every time I've had an opportunity. The one thing I can do is fish, and I'm going back to it." Peter was the leader, so several other disciples followed him.

Verse 3 continues, "So they went out and got into the boat." The Greek text is literally "the boat," perhaps indicating that they were using Peter's own boat. He was going back to his old profession, and the rest were going with him. But they couldn't catch any

fish because the Lord had rerouted every fish in the Sea of Galilee away from Peter to get his point across. Verse 3 concludes by saying that although they fished all night, “they caught nothing.”

Jesus appeared in the morning and confronted Peter. After Peter affirmed three times that he loved him (vv. 15-17), Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted.” He was saying, “Peter, you’ve had your own way—putting on your own belt, and going where you wanted.”

Then Jesus said, “But when you are old you will stretch out your hands [a phrase used in extra-biblical literature to speak of crucifixion], and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18-19).

Peter’s death would bring glory to God because Peter would be willing to lay down his life for Christ. That prophecy must have been a surprise to Peter, who had previously denied Christ under persecution (Mark 14:70-71). But the Lord said to him, as it were, “One day you will glorify me because you will be willing to die for my sake.” And, of course, Peter did glorify God by his death.

Let me give you one more illustration of God being glorified through sacrifice. This illustration is about one of the most remarkable missionaries of all time.

In the nineteenth century, John Paton and his newly wed bride were sent from Scotland to the New Hebrides (known today as Vanuatu), a group of Islands in the western Pacific where only cannibals lived. When they landed, they didn’t speak the language, and all they knew about the place was that missionaries had gone there and never returned. Their lives were constantly threatened.

Paton’s wife gave birth not long after they arrived. Both she and the baby died several days later, and Paton slept on their graves for three or four nights to keep the Islanders from digging up their bodies and eating them. Despite such trials, he devoted the rest of his life to ministering in Vanuatu. Near the end of his life, Paton said in his autobiography that he didn’t know of one Islander

who hadn't made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. God used John Paton because he was willing to do God's will at any cost.<sup>5</sup>

Paton was so willing to glorify God by being willing to sacrifice all that I believe his gravestone has the following words, "When he arrived on the Island, there were no Christians; when he left the Island, there were no heathen." Remarkable, isn't it?

You cannot grow spiritually by charting your own course, saying, "Lord, here's what I will do, and here's what I won't do." You must be willing to be embarrassed, defamed, and dishonored by the world, and settle for fewer possessions in this life.

Spiritual growth occurs when you are consumed with God's glory and not your own comfort and plans, and when you are willing to sacrifice all for the greater glory of God.

### *B. By Being Humble*

Second, aiming our lives at glorifying God will be seen by being humble.

The person who is truly living for the glory of God will be willing to be outdone by others. Jealousy can be a problem in serving God. We are often not as concerned with God being glorified as we are with who gets the credit.

We should rejoice when God's work is accomplished—even when someone does it better than we do.

Philippians 1:14-18 is a wonderful illustration of humility from the life of the apostle Paul. Paul was nearing the end of his life when he wrote to the church at Philippi, but he had been involved in some great adventures through the years. While leading the expansion of the first-century church, he preached on Mars Hill in Athens and accomplished great things in Corinth, Thessalonica, and Berea. He survived a shipwreck while being transported as a prisoner to Rome, as well as many other experiences.

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<sup>5</sup> James Paton, *The Story of John G. Paton* (New York, NY: A. L. Burt Co., n. d.).



Because of his missionary tours, Paul was the spiritual father, grandfather, or uncle of nearly every Gentile believer. No man had a greater influence on the first-century churches than Paul.

In fact, he sometimes preached all night when he visited them. On one such occasion, a man fell out of a window during Paul's sermon and died. But Paul raised him from the dead and then continued to preach (Acts 20:7-12).

Paul was so loved that whenever he came to town everyone embraced him. When he left Miletus, the Ephesian elders "all wept as they embraced him and kissed him" (Acts 20:37).

By the time he wrote to the Philippians, however, Paul was in prison and no longer active in worldwide ministry. A new breed of young preachers was capturing the people's attention. They probably learned the best of Paul's material and added new techniques. Because of them, the people may have been forgetting the imprisoned apostle.

The young preachers criticized Paul, using his imprisonment as an opportunity to gain prominence (Philippians 1:15-16). They probably said, "God is finished with Paul because he's not contemporary," or, "Paul made a big mistake and God had to shelve him. That's why he is in jail."

Despite opposition, Paul's attitude in prison was one of joyful contentment. He rejoiced in the boldness of his followers. In Philippians 1:14 Paul said, "Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly." Some Christians had become bolder in their witness because of Paul's example and suffering for Christ.

Moreover, Paul rejoiced in the preaching of the gospel. In verses 15-17 Paul said, "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry. . . out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains." Paul's opponents were jealous of his achievements and tried to make his imprisonment worse through criticism. But Paul did not complain. Rather he said, "But what does it matter? The important

thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (v. 18). He was saying, “As long as Christ is preached, who cares what they say about me?”

Only a mature, humble man whose aim was to glorify God could say that. That should be our aim too.

So, aiming our lives at glorifying God will be seen by being willing to sacrifice all and also by being humble in all circumstances.

### *C. By Being Joyful in Trials*

Finally, aiming our lives at glorifying God will be seen by being joyful in trials.

In his first letter, the apostle Peter wrote to a group of believers who were suffering because of their obedience to Christ. 1 Peter 4:14 says, “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” Our natural tendency is to become angry and retaliate under persecution, but Peter said we are blessed. Being reproached is a special blessing because it indicates that we have the Spirit. Our attitude in trials should be one of joy because God is being glorified.

1 Peter 4:15-16 continues, “If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” We should be glad to suffer for Christ.

Author and Pastor Jim Van Yperen tells the story about a lady named Margaret who attended a church he served many years ago. Confined to a wheelchair for most of her adult life, Margaret lived with a body contorted and misshapen, ravaged by multiple sclerosis. She spoke softly, often slurring her words in barely audible grunts. She drooled constantly and was in pain nearly all her waking hours. Margaret had grounds for complaint; but she did not complain. She loved Jesus, and she never missed church. Sunday

morning and evening, midweek prayer meeting, and special gatherings, Margaret was always there, always in a neatly pressed dress.

One night, after Pastor Van Yperen first arrived at the church, he was conducting a forum asking questions and facilitating dialogue with a group of about 20 people. He asked them to tell him their favorite Bible verse or a passage from Scripture that was personally meaningful. Several people offered verses that he noted on a flip chart up front. After many people spoke, Margaret let him know she wanted to say something. Most of the people had recited their verses from memory or read them aloud from Scripture. Since Margaret could not speak, he looked up the verse for the group and read it for her: “It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees” (Psalm 119:71).

Margaret smiled broadly and nodded her head. Her wheelchair was a testimony to aiming her life at glorifying God by being joyful in trials.

One of the characteristics of life is growth. If you don’t want to grow spiritually, that may indicate that you are not a Christian. But, if you do want to grow, you must obey Jesus Christ by being willing to sacrifice all for Christ and have a humble attitude toward others. Then you will be able to rejoice when suffering for him.

## **Conclusion**

The master key to spiritual growth is to glorify God. Today we looked at two practical ways to glorify God.

The first practical way to glorify God is by confessing Christ as Lord. This is where we must all begin. We must be Christians in order to glorify God.

The second practical way to glorify God is by aiming our lives at glorifying God. We aim our lives at glorifying God by being willing to sacrifice all for Christ, by being humble, and by being joyful in trials. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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**PRAAYER:**

Our Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to learn about the keys to spiritual growth.

Lord, the first practical way to glorify God is by confessing Jesus as Lord. If there is anyone here today who is not yet a Christian, would you grant that person the gift of faith and repentance? Enable that person to trust in Jesus Christ alone for the gift of salvation.

And then help all of us to aim our lives at glorifying you. Help us to glorify you by being willing to sacrifice all, by being humble, and by being joyful in trials.

And as we grow, continue to glorify yourself in all things. And all of this we pray in Jesus' name, to whom be glory both now and forever! Amen.

**CHARGE:**

May God help each one of us to grow spiritually. And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.