



Sabbath

FOR STUDY

- » **Memory Text:** "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NKJV).
- » **Our Beliefs, no. 11, Growing in Christ:** "In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the church."
- » Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 19

CROSS TRAINING

As a child I watched the tangerine tree grow to monstrous proportions. Not only did our citrus tree grow in size, but it overwhelmed our family and friends with a crop of fruit that astonished people. My pride in the tree swelled from season to season, so much so that I thought the magic of growing fruit trees was simply genetic. I would certainly do the same when I was a man.

When the time came for me to plant my own fruit trees in my very own backyard, I picked out a tangerine tree to repeat the success of my childhood. I did everything to the soil I was taught to do. Cultivate, fertilize, mulch, protect, pray. After planting the tree in the ground, I continued the rituals week after week. I even spoke kindly and gently to the tree as I worked in the yard. On one occasion I sang to the tree. But the tree failed to grow.

My patience ran out, and I began to scorn the tree. "Silly runt weed! What's the matter with you?" I chided. "Every other tree in the yard is doing just fine. You are turning out to be such a disappointment!" I was raking some leaves in the yard near the base of the puny tangerine tree when the rake stuck on a tag at the base of the tree. I reached down to unhook the prongs of the rake and discovered the tag of the tangerine tree was still attached. I glanced at the tag, and to my horror I read, "Tangerine (Dwarf)." I tried to take back all the horrible things I'd said. I looked at the little tree and apologized, saying, "I'm so sorry! I didn't realize you were never meant to grow."

Dwarf trees are not destined for tremendous growth. But that's not the case with you and me. According to Christ, we are destined for unimaginable development. We must just make sure we are giving our spiritual growth the same attention I was giving the little tree. We need care and exercise—spiritual exercise. Cross training.

—Pastor Troy



Sunday

RESPONDING

- » Read John 15:1-17.
- » Jeff made a decision to deepen his relationship with God by trying to be consistent with his prayer and Bible study. For the first week he was consistent, but sort of slipped away the second week. He was disappointed that he couldn't even keep it going for more than a week.
- » If you could encourage him with something that was helpful for you in this lesson, what would you say to Jeff? What do you think God would want to say to him?

Monday

BIBLE ANSWERS ON GROWING IN CHRIST

- » Read Psalm 1:1, 2; Matthew 20:25-28; 25:31-40; Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 6:12-18; Hebrews 10:25; James 1:27.

What does the Bible teach, based on these verses, about what it means to grow in Christ?

- » As we stay connected to Christ through daily prayer, study of His Word, and Christian service, we can grow in the likeness of our Savior, and He will enable us to live fruitful lives.
 "As we need food to sustain our physical strength, so do we need Christ, the Bread from heaven, to sustain spiritual life and impart strength to work the works of God. As the body is continually receiving the nourishment that sustains life and vigor, so the soul must be constantly communing with Christ, submitting to Him and depending wholly upon Him" (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 19).
 "As the flower turns to the sun, . . . so should we turn to the Sun of Righteousness, . . . that our character may be developed into the likeness of Christ" (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68).

- » In order for plants to grow, they need seven things. Can you name them?

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| 1. Room to _____ | 4. W _ _ _ r | 7. T _ _ e |
| 2. The right _____ | 5. A _ r | |
| 3. L _ _ _ t | 6. F _ _ d (or nutrients) | |

- » **Answer the following questions.**

1. According to the Bible, what is our "light" (Psalm 27:1; 119:105; John 9:5)? How can Christians use the light they have received?
2. What does the "Water of Life" represent for a Christian (John 4:13-15)?
3. How does eating help us grow? In Matthew 5:6 Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." What does this mean to you?
4. Read John 6:35 and explain the meaning of this passage.
5. How can you apply these principles to your daily life? Be prepared to share your thoughts in Sabbath School.

Tuesday

REFLECTING

- » New Year’s resolutions are a lot like the exercises of the spiritual life. In a moment of conviction we express our hopes in the form of decisions to change one way or another. But our commitments are like “ropes of sand,” as Ellen White says in *Steps to Christ*. Good intentions will only get you to the place where you make promises. When the promises get broken and you fail to follow through, it feels as if your whole relationship with God is a failure. But the way to grow isn’t through promises, but through the practice of staying open to God’s Spirit. The work of growing closer to God is not the work of trying really hard—it is the work of training the heart and mind to stay connected to Him. If you want muscles, you have to lift the weights—not just once, but again and again. If you want to play the piano, you trudge through book 1, then through book 2, and as you continue to go, you learn and become more proficient. You want to be able to run for 15 kilometers? Start training. If you miss, stumble, or struggle, you can rejoice that you are human like everyone else. The only way you fail is by giving up completely on God. Let’s look at what God says about our spiritual journey.
- » First, remember that God provided grace that makes you a member of His kingdom—free and clear! See **Ephesians 2:8**.
- » Second, we can train with exercises that make our connection to God stronger. See **2 Peter 1:3-8**.
- » Third, if in your training you stumble and struggle at times, don’t give up. Don’t forget that you are a child of the King. Don’t lose sight of your place in His family. Remember Calvary and remember how you started this journey, and by God’s grace, pick up where you left off. See **1 Peter 1:8, 9**.
- » Just another thought. The Bible is God’s way of communicating with us. It is encouraging to know that He is always ready to help us and keep us from falling. See **Jude 24, 25**.
- » Take heart and trust God’s promises.

Wednesday

BIBLE INSIGHTS

Match the text with the phrase. All texts are from the New International Version of the Bible.

___ Colossians 2:6, 7

___ Colossians 3:16, 17

___ Colossians 1:3-6

___ Colossians 1:9-12

___ 2 Peter 1:3-8

___ John 15:16

___ John 15:5-8

1. “I am the vine.”
2. “. . . continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him . . .”
3. “You did not choose me . . .”
4. “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord.”
5. “His divine power has given us . . .”
6. “. . . we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus . . .”
7. “. . . growing in the knowledge of God . . .”

Thursday

CONNECTING

- » Think of how awkward it would be if you were to read your Bible and pray in the morning, then look in the mirror to see if there was any visible change. You’d be like the small boy who planted corn seeds in the ground and every day afterward dug up the seeds to see if they were growing. The seeds won’t grow if we constantly dig them up. The sun and the rain and the soil grow the seeds over time. The same is true for our spiritual growth. The spiritual disciplines or exercises strengthen you for service, but they don’t make you fit for heaven. The only thing that can fit you for heaven is to trust fully in the finished work of Christ on Calvary (see **John 1:10-12**). Anyone born again is destined to grow if they stay connected to God through His Spirit (see **John 15:16**).

Friday

APPLYING

- » Tuesday’s study explains how our salvation is a gift of God’s grace. Plan out your training for the week as an experiment. Take time at the beginning and the end of the week to reflect on God’s free gift of grace to you. In the middle of the crosses there is a track for training. Somewhere around the track, write a few exercises of the spiritual life you want to do this week. You may want to read a section of Scripture or spend time alone with God in quiet solitude. You may want to do a kind act of service for someone. Make your plan and see if you can follow through.

