



We expect trees, grass, animals and babies to grow. When they don't, we know something is wrong. What is true in the natural realm is also true in the spiritual realm. Believers are expected to grow, and when they don't, something is wrong. In this five-day reading plan, Dr. Tony Evans will introduce you to the process of spiritual growth.

Day 1

- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Ephesians 1

We have multiple markers that identify us, and verify we are who we say that we are, such as a driver's license, social security number and birth certificate. But sadly, identities get stolen and exploited. In a recent study on identity theft, it was reported that over \$107 billion dollars have been stolen in the past six years. The victims often face difficult challenges in reclaiming their identity.

As Christians, we receive a new identity that is essential to our spiritual growth. It is vital to know who you are, how you have been changed and the purposes God now has for you in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says our old lives are gone, which means spiritual growth presupposes that new life has begun. When a sinner places their faith in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life, a new birth has taken place, and a new identity has been given. That identity places us with Christ, giving us everything we need to grow spiritually.

According to Ephesians 1, we have blessings, holiness, redemption, forgiveness, grace, revelation, an inheritance, hope, assurance, power and victory in our new identity with Christ! Unfortunately, many Christians either don't understand their new identity or have allowed Satan to steal it. This is why Paul

prays that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened. That is, he prays that we can recognize or reclaim our identities in Christ. Once you understand who you are in Christ, you will begin to experience spiritual growth like never before.

How would you describe your old life before accepting Jesus Christ versus your new life in Christ after your conversion?

Day 2

- 1 Peter 2:2
- Hebrews 5:11-14
- Matthew 4:4

Most people I know love solid foods—whether it’s bread, steak, vegetables, fruit, potato chips or even candy bars. However, I’ve never seen somebody trying to feed a 3-month-old baby a piece of ribeye. Why? Because a baby can’t process solid foods like steak at that age. Instead, a baby needs milk. Everything required for the baby’s growth and maturity is found in the milk. It’s built in.

A similar rule applies to believers regarding how we process spiritual food. Food is fuel for growth and health. God's Word provides the nourishment we need to grow and mature. In other words, Scripture is our spiritual food. Therefore, the Bible is indispensable for spiritual growth. Reading, studying, internalizing and digesting Scripture strengthens the soul, encourages the heart and transforms the mind.

If you go to the store and look at baby food, you’ll notice a “stage number” somewhere on the label. This number tells us, based on the baby’s level of maturity, what foods it can handle. We don’t start babies off on steak because the baby isn’t mature enough to handle it. Likewise, every believer should begin with a spiritual diet that fits their level of maturity and progresses from there. For the new believer, this means you should start with the basics of the faith, including core doctrinal truths and spiritual disciplines like prayer, worship and service. This is your milk. As time passes, you should progress to what Scripture describes as solid food. This points to not only more difficult doctrines and teachings, but also to the application of Scripture to your daily life. Either way, this suggests that Christian maturity involves a movement “from milk to meat” as we grow spiritually. Just like the baby, everything required for our growth and maturity is found in the Word of God. It’s built in. The question is, are you eating enough of the spiritual nutrients you need to grow and mature?

Do you have a regular "feeding schedule" for Scripture? What schedule should you develop for sitting down and reading God’s word?

Day 3

- Hebrews 10:23-25
- 1 Corinthians 12:4-13
- Ephesians 4:15-16
- 1 Peter 4:10

In school or on the job, many of us hold mixed feelings toward group projects. On one hand, they are great because everybody contributes to the overall success of the project. Different members of the group possess different skills that advance the project along. Because there are more people in a group, the task gets divvied up among the members so that no one person does all the work alone. On the other hand, sometimes members of the group fall off. They don't participate or add any value to the group, adding extra burdens and workloads to the other members. When they depart from the group, they no longer receive the benefits from the group.

God didn't design our spiritual growth to occur apart from other believers. Spiritual growth is a group project, and that group is called the church. The word church means "the called-out ones," and is used over one hundred times in the New Testament, primarily referencing gathered assemblies of believers. It never meant a building. It never meant a program. Instead, church always referred to the body of believers who congregated to celebrate and worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

We receive certain benefits as members of the church and as members of God's family. God gives every member of His family, every member of the church, a spiritual gift. These gifts are to be used to serve, build up, encourage, and strengthen the family as a whole. When believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit come together for worship, praise, teachings, encouragement, and service, God shows up in a special way, and we grow spiritually as we experience His presence. But this only happens in the context of corporate worship. Meaning, you won't experience God in this way on your own. Without the church, your spiritual growth will be impeded. You need the church, and the church needs you!

In what ways have you found your spiritual growth "stirred up" or "stimulated" by the community of the church?

Day 4

- James 1:2-3
- John 16:33
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

All of us know what it's like to take a test in school. You get taught specific lessons throughout the semester.

At a certain point, the teacher will administer a test to the students. The test is designed to reveal what the student knows. They are never designed by the teacher to hurt the student. Instead, the teacher desires and takes joy in the students' ability to pass the test. However, when you fail a test, you won't progress to the next grade. Some of us have experienced moving up a grade in school, while witnessing a friend having to repeat the grade. Why? Because they failed too many tests, meaning there was no retention of information, no growth and no development. So, they had to repeat the lessons.

God is the perfect teacher. He develops us spiritually through His Word and through trials. A trial is an adverse circumstance that comes into your life designed to develop you spiritually. They don't come on our timing when we're ready for them. Instead, they typically pop up when we least expect them to. Sometimes trials involve pain and suffering. Trials may be unpleasant, but they nevertheless teach and transform. God always has a purpose in permitting trials because through them, He moves the believer towards spiritual maturity.

Tests are slightly different. A test is a situation that comes into your life and forces you to apply spiritual resources to determine the best course of action. In other words, a test evaluates if you know the right answer. God uses trials to develop us, but eventually, He will administer tests in our lives to reveal what we know about Him. Have we retained the information that we learned through our trials? Is there any real growth and development in our spiritual walk? And if we fail the test, we must repeat it. God will only allow us move forward when we pass the tests because in passing the tests, we become more like Christ.

What are some trials and test that you have experienced in your life that God used for your spiritual growth?

Day 5

- Romans 8:29
- Ephesians 4:13-14
- 1 John 2:12-14

When our children were small, we took cross-country road trips. We hopped in the van and traveled to some new part of the country. As we drove, small, rectangular signs would appear with the word "mile" followed by a number. These signs, called mile markers, alerted you to the distance covered between two places and also help determine which direction you were traveling. They provided evidence of the progression toward your goal.

Likewise, spiritual growth contains markers that inform you of your progress. But what's the end destination? What's the goal of this journey? God answers this for us in Scripture. His desire is for all believers to become like Jesus. That is, He wants believers to always reflect the character of Christ. This is what spiritual maturity means. It is the ability to consistently live life from the perspective of the Spirit rather than the flesh,

resulting in a maximized life that brings God glory.

Spiritual growth unfolds in stages much like ordinary human development, moving through infancy, adolescence and adulthood. We do not begin the Christian life fully mature, though God does expect us to become fully mature. Spiritual infancy is marked by dependency. Baby believers need someone to feed them and teach them basic truths and habits in order to grow in their faith. Spiritual adolescence is marked by growing pains. Growth leads to boldness, but boldness can lead to foolishness. Adolescent believers need someone to help them be strong, overcome the devil through the Word of God and handle conflicts in a godly way. Spiritual maturity is marked by consistency. Over time, spiritual maturity can be confirmed when a person consistently responds to life's circumstances in a Christlike manner.

No matter what stage you are in, there are markers to alert you of the distance covered in your journey. These markers are godly changes in your thoughts, attitudes and actions. They provide evidence of the progression toward spiritual maturity.

What markers in your life can you point to as evidence of your spiritual growth?