



Study Guide on Spiritual Growth

Leaders' Guide

For use in Small Groups



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Study Guide on “Spiritual Growth”

Discussion Leaders – Please read before conducting the study

- † This study guide is designed for use in a small group setting.
 - † Do facilitate in a manner that allows group members to reflect what they have learnt to their own spiritual journey.
 - † As far as possible, encourage all participants to share their personal experiences.
 - † Try not to give the “leaders’ notes” too quickly. Allow members to ponder on the questions. For tips on facilitating good discussions, please see ***Annex A***.
 - † You might want to use two-three sessions for this study guide. Devote one session for completing the Spiritual Growth Assessment Process by Lifeway (***Annex C***)
 - † ***Remember to distribute Annex B and Annex C to all who are participating in this study guide.***
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Introduction (Participants might want to read the below

As Christians, we are expected to grow. We are often told that “growing spiritually” is important. As we come to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior; He is also Lord. Confessing that someone is “Lord” literally means to “follow” what that someone says, believes in, has done or is doing. Hence, as we submit to the “Lordship” of God in Christ Jesus, we also submit to the new life that Christ has given and is helping us to mold as we walk with God for remaining days of our lives. Remember that our baptism is not just about the redemption from sins; but also a “renewal” by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

However, some of us might not know exactly what “growing spiritually” is about. After all, the phrase “spiritual growth” cannot be found in the Bible! Some of us might think that we are already growing spiritually; but would there be areas of our life which we can grow more? Are there indicators which can allow me and others to observe more clearly what spiritual growth is about?

At the end of this study, you would be able to:

1. Have an understanding of what spiritual growth is about;
2. Be informed of the six disciplines of spiritual growth that serves as indicators for growth;
3. Have the opportunity to develop a personal growth plan;
4. Have the opportunity to develop a smaller group of accountability partners.

Before you start the discussion, ensure each participant has a copy of Study Guide on Spiritual Growth: Participants’ worksheet (Annex B)

1. What is “Spiritual Growth”?

<p>Question</p>	<p>When someone speaks of “spiritual growth”, what comes to your mind? In groups of 3-4, write or draw (individually) in the following blank space what you think “spiritual growth” is about. Share with one another (within the group of 3-4) your drawings / writings.</p>
<p>Leaders’ notes</p>	<p>After the groups have shared, ask them to gather back into the bigger group. Share with them the following:</p> <p>In the Bible, the term “spiritual growth” does not exist. However, the Bible does talk about growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. If the group is interested, they can find out more about these Bible verses (Mark 8:34, Ephesians 4:15-16, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 3:18). What is “spiritual” about this kind of “growth” is that our growth is dependent on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The work of the God through the Holy Spirit - Our submission to the moldings of the Holy Spirit. - Our devotion to pursue “eternal things” such as God’s word, the community of saints, worship of God etc. <p>While spiritual growth cannot occur without God, it is important to note that it is our choice to grow spiritually. Spiritual growth cannot occur “automatically”. This means that a Christian cannot grow spiritually just by saying that he or she believes in Jesus Christ, or even doing church-related activities such as attending a service, being an usher, being in a small group, or even attending a top notch bible study!</p> <p>Rather, spiritual growth occurs when we choose to interact with God and submit ourselves to do what He wills as we attend to these activities / groups. Spiritual growth requires diligence and focused labor (John 6:27; 2 Peter 1:5-8.) In the Christian sense of the word, spiritual growth can be summed up as <i>a life journey that</i></p>

	<p><i>pursues God’s call for each one of us to be more and more like Christ.</i></p> <p>Hence in the context of small groups, it doesn’t mean that you have been meeting for many years, or knowing a lot about the Bible, means that the group is growing spiritually!</p>
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2. Why is Spiritual Growth important?

Question	As disciples of Jesus Christ, do you think spiritual growth is important? If yes – why? If no – why?
Leaders’ notes	<p>Spiritual growth is important because (some possible comments):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is God’s will for our lives – Ephesians 4:11-16 (We will study this passage in more detail below) - Help us to discern more of God’s will and direction for our lives. If we connect more and more with God, we will come to know what His plans. (John 7:17-18) - Leads to growth in character (such as trustworthiness, integrity, honesty....) and fruit of the Spirit (peace, love, kindness, gentleness, self control etc). This will help you cope better with all aspects of your life (especially during trials and temptations). Such a life will also translate into great joy. - Help us to serve one another better – this is important for the community of Christ to grow and to partner God in the advancement of His kingdom. - Raise teachers and leaders that are essential to the work of the Church.

- Help us to rely more and more on God's resources to do His work and not rely on our own.
- Help us to discern what is wrong and right teaching of the word of God (1 Timothy 6:3-5). This will be foundational for how God's word is going to influence and guide our lives for our family and friends. Hence, spiritual growth ensures that we are not growing the wrong way - There is possibility of growing corrupt according to deceitful lusts (Ep 4:22); There is danger of growing wanton against Christ – (1 Ti 5:11); There are those who grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Ti 3:13).

Specifically for SG Leaders, other than the above, spiritual growth is important so that:

- We do not lead others in the wrong path. Remember that you are being observed as a leader by others – especially your small group members or colleagues at work.
- We can grow in character (such as trustworthiness, integrity, honesty....) and fruit of the Spirit (peace, love, kindness, gentleness). Your leadership role in the small group will be more influential in a manner that is pleasing to God.
- We can have a right perspective of ministry – focus on what is important to God and not man.
- We can cope better among the areas of work, family, ministry, community and self.
- We can better discern where and what to find resources to lead.

3. The metaphors of growth in Ephesians – the community aspect of growth

<p>Question A</p>	<p>Read the English Standard Version of Ephesians 4:11-16.</p> <p>Ephesians 4:11-16 ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask members to try to pick up words / phrases in the passage that they think describe “growth”. 2. Discuss: In what way do these words help us to understand more about being disciples / “saints” of Christ?
<p>Leaders’ notes</p>	<p>Words / Phrases that members might pick up are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Building up”, “until we all attain”, “to mature”, “grow up in every way...”, “makes the body grow...” Being disciples or saints of Christ requires that we grow consistently and not slack – so that we may no longer be children to the faith, but can grow into mature manhood / womanhood in Christ. - Members might come to the conclusion that the Apostle Paul places quite a lot of emphasis on the importance of how disciples should grow spiritually in Christ and not stagnate.

<p>Question B</p>	<p>Focus on Ephesians 4:15-16:</p> <p>¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.</p> <p>When the Apostle Paul speaks of “to grow in every way...” do you think he is talking more about our private time with God, or do you think the community (in this case the small group) should be involve in each of our spiritual growth journey? Why do you think so?</p>
<p>Leaders’ notes</p>	<p>Note that this question will lead the small group members to consider the community element of spiritual growth. However, do be sensitive. There is nothing wrong if a member suggests that he or she thinks that spiritual growth is about his or her private time with the Lord. You just need to encourage the person(s) to consider the communal aspect of one’s spiritual growth – which forms the essence of what the Apostle Paul is really saying in this passage.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Firstly, the letter of Ephesians is being addressed to the Christians at Ephesus as a Body of Christ and not to certain individuals. Hence, when the Apostle Paul urges that “we are to grow up in every way...”; he is addressing all the Christians that will come to hear of this letter. Remember that during those times, the Christians didn’t own their personal copies of the Bible. Specifically in the entire chapter of Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul focus is the community of believers – the Body of Christ. 2. Secondly, the phrase “to grow in every way” is preceded by the Apostle Paul’s encouragement for everyone to “speak the truth in love”. Clearly, spiritual growth is to be found within Godly relationships with one another. While there is a place for spiritual growth at an individual level – such as that of quite time / private devotions, there is and ought to be a time and space for

	<p>small group members to help one another to grow spiritually and primarily – by speaking the truth in love. In this day and age, we tend to value less and less of biblical truths but easily sink into accepting untruths for the sake of false “harmony”. We are reluctant to confront one another’s sins lovingly for the fear of losing friendships; yet we know deep in our hearts that in the longer term, it will be spiritually devastating for our friends.</p> <p>3. The Greek word for “ we grow” is <i>αὐξήσωμεν</i> (pronounce as <i>auxesomen</i>) and Paul uses the particular form of grammar call the <u>1st person plural aorist subjunctive</u>. This grammar form is often used when he wish others to join him in a particular action or state of being. In other words, as much as spiritual growth is an individual devotion, it is also an effort to be undertaken corporately, with the help of one another. And that is why a spiritual growth assessment in a small group setting is very meaningful and would have a much greater value than if you are to do it all by yourself.</p>
Question C	<p>Apart from what we discovered in Ephesians 4:15-16, why do you think the community aspect of our spiritual growth is important?</p> <p>Is there a community aspect in your own spiritual journey for example, being accountable to someone for your spiritual life? Why or why not?</p>
Leaders’ notes	<p>The community aspect of growth is important because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✠ It is biblical – as we have studied in Ephesians 4 and Ephesians 4 is but one of the many biblical passages that talks about the community aspect of spiritual growth. ✠ Many of us cannot trust ourselves to be consistent in our walk with God. Therefore, we need someone to keep us on our toes. ✠ We need others to teach and advice us – humility is part of growth. ✠ As we grow, we teach others – spiritual growth must give

	<p>rise to service. The Apostle Paul is interested that growth in the Lord Jesus leads to Godly ways of treating others and serving others as a Body in Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">† Often as a community, we can better discern between right and wrong.† Whether we like it or not, our spiritual maturity has an impact on others, especially our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.
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4. Summary of study

- a. You might want to end off this segment of the study guide with a summary:
 - i. Note that this is not a comprehensive study on spiritual growth. However, it does give three major conclusions which I think is important for every Christian to know and remember for the rest of their spiritual journey with God:

- 1. Spiritual growth is not a “given” upon salvation. It is a CHOICE we have to make and we would need God’s help.**
- 2. Spiritual growth is important both at the individual as well as the community level.**
- 3. As a small group, members can benefit from one another through mutual accountability for spiritual growth.**
- 4. Spiritual growth MUST lead to our service of the Lord and of others.**

5. Spiritual growth assessment

- a. After you have completed the above questions with the small group, distribute, if not already, ***Annex C: Spiritual Growth Assessment Process by Lifeway.***
- b. Once ready, discussion leaders are to facilitate the following:
 - i. We have covered mostly on why we think spiritual growth is important for believers and how spiritual growth is not just an individual effort, but also a communal one as well. For the rest of the session, we are going to observe and reflect on what are some indicators / areas of spiritual growth; and how can we seek to grow in these areas.
 - ii. Allow participants to know that there are two parts to the self assessment. The first part is “self-assessment”. Meaning that the assessment results will be privy unless one chooses to reveal the results. The second part is an encouragement to ask other persons to make observations about your spiritual life. By doing this, we want to encourage Christians to have accountability partners for which they can walk the spiritual journey.
 - iii. At the end of the study, you would have:
 1. A spiritual growth plan
 2. One or more friends appointed (whether within this group or outside this group) to be your accountability partner to help you fulfill the spiritual growth plan.

Do note that For Page 7, the Spiritual Growth Observations Instructions is optional. Good if the SG member can find someone to do it. For Page 9, instead of writing “Winter”; just write a three month period for each blank line. For example, if a person wish to start the spiritual growth plan in Jan, then for Number 1 (page 10), just indicate Jan – Mar, Number 2 Apr – Jun; Number 3 Jul – Sep; Number 4 Oct – Dec.