

# **Keys to Spiritual Growth**

## **Trusting God and Bearing Fruit**

*2 Peter 3:18*

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# Trusting God and Bearing Fruit<sup>1</sup>

## Scripture

Today we continue in our series of sermons on “Keys to Spiritual Growth.” My foundational text for this series is 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

In his book *Folk Psalms of Faith*, Ray Stedman tells a story of a woman who had been a schoolteacher for 25 years. When she heard about a job that would mean a promotion, she applied for the position. However, someone who had been teaching for only one year was hired instead. She went to the principal and asked why.

The principal responded, “I’m sorry, but you haven’t had 25 years of experience as you claim; you’ve had only one year’s experience 25 times.” During that whole time the teacher had not improved.

Some Christians find that they have grown very little spiritually after many years. They may have been a Christian for 25 years but discover that a one-year old Christian is overtaking them in terms of spiritual maturity.

My goal is to help you learn the keys to spiritual growth so that you can implement them in your life and grow spiritually.

High in the Alps is a monument raised in honor of a faithful guide who perished while ascending a peak to rescue a stranded tourist. Inscribed on that memorial stone are these words: *He Died Climbing*. My hope is that you would have that same kind of atti-

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

tude right up to the end of your life. That is why I want you to learn about the keys to spiritual growth.

## Lesson

Today, let's look at two more keys to spiritual growth that will help you grow spiritually. These two keys are:

1. Trusting God, and
2. Bearing Fruit.

### I. Trusting God

First, a key to spiritual growth is trusting God.

Contrary to the impression given by much of modern religion, with its massive buildings and impressive programs, glorifying God is as simple as trusting him.

#### A. *Examples of Trusting God*

Let me share just two examples of glorifying God by trusting him.

The first example of glorifying God by trusting him is that of Abraham. Romans 4:19-20 says this about Abraham: "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and *gave glory to God.*" Do you see how the apostle Paul links glorifying God and trusting God? Even though Sarah was old and had never been able to bear children, Abraham believed God's promise that she would have a son. And by trusting God Abraham glorified God.

Professing to believe what God has said is much easier than really trusting him. For example, the Bible says that when we give

money with the proper motives, God will reward us. Jesus said in Matthew 6:3-4, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” We say we believe the principle that God rewards giving, but we often find it difficult to put into practice.

Or, take another example. Some Christians fear death, even though God has said he will provide us with the grace we need to face death and take us to heaven afterwards (2 Corinthians 4:13-18; 5:1-5).

Frankly, most of us need to admit that we don’t trust God as much as we claim.

When Abraham’s promised son, Isaac, had grown to be a young boy, God told him to kill him as a sacrifice. So Abraham went up a mountain with Isaac, whom he laid on an altar and tied down. He took out a knife and was ready to plunge it into Isaac’s heart, but the angel of the Lord stopped him and God provided a ram as a substitute offering (Genesis 22:1-13).

Abraham obeyed God because he was confident that God would provide. He could have said, “God, how can you possibly fulfill your covenant with me (with descendants numbering as the stars of heaven) if I’m going to kill the only possible fulfillment?” But Abraham didn’t argue. He trusted God to keep his word, even if Isaac was killed. According to Hebrews 11:19, Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead.

Trusting God means we acknowledge his glory, which is the sum of all his attributes and the fullness of all his majesty. If he is who he says he is, then he is to be believed—and obeyed.

You will grow spiritually when you say to God, “If your Word says it, I will believe it; if your Word promises it, I will claim it; and if your Word commands it, I will obey it.”

The second example of glorifying God by trusting him is that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar set up an image of himself and commanded that all his subjects bow down and worship it. However, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

refused to worship the image. Daniel 3:13 says, “Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king.” Nebuchadnezzar was angry because those young Jewish men would not worship the image he had made of himself. They would worship only the true and living God—Jehovah.

In verses 14-15 Nebuchadnezzar said, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” Nebuchadnezzar put their trust in God to the test.

Did they believe that God could handle Nebuchadnezzar? They couldn’t see their God, but they could see Nebuchadnezzar. They couldn’t see the hosts of their God, but they could see the formidable army of Nebuchadnezzar.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (vv. 16-18).

They trusted God to deliver them—if not out of the fire, then into his heaven—because they remained true to him.

Verse 19 says, “Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual.” The soldiers who put the young men into the furnace were burned to death because it was so hot (vv. 22-23). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego really did trust God. There was no human way to escape their predicament, but true faith knows no impossibilities.

In their case, God provided a miraculous deliverance (vv. 24-28). That does not always happen, of course. But the reason the story is in the Bible is to teach us that the true God of heaven is always worthy of our trust.

### *B. Growing by Faith*

Exercising faith causes us to grow spiritually because it glorifies God. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “We live by faith, not by sight.” When we judge everything by what we see we will have difficulty growing.

Remember the twelve spies Moses sent into the land of Canaan (Numbers 13)? Ten came back and said, “We don’t want to go in there: we felt like grasshoppers because they’re giants!”

Those spies walked by sight, but Joshua and Caleb had faith, saying, “God is on our side; let’s go in!” Ten didn’t think God could handle the circumstances, but two knew that God is sovereign over all circumstances.

Trusting God means that you believe that God is sovereign in every circumstance in your life. Whether it is an illness, or a financial difficulty, or a prodigal child, or a marital infidelity, or whatever, you believe that God is in control of all circumstances.

Do you trust God? Are you like Abraham, who “did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God” (Romans 4:20)?

If you want to grow spiritually, believe God’s Word and trust him in every situation.

## **II. Bearing Fruit**

Another key to spiritual growth is bearing fruit.

In John 15 Jesus uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to describe our relationship with him. Spiritually we are one with him; we produce fruit as Jesus’ life flows through us. Verse 8 says, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit.” Fruitful-

ness glorifies God (and therefore energizes growth). Why? Because it is the evidence of his power at work in us.

Christians can be at many different levels of bearing fruit in their lives, but I don't believe there's such a thing as a fruitless Christian. Evidence of faith will exist in every believer, though it may be hard to find in some cases.

When I was a boy growing up in South Africa we had a peach tree in our backyard, and one year that thing went wild with fruit. We had enough peaches to feed the whole neighborhood! Another year we could only find one tiny, shriveled peach. But something was always there to prove it was a peach tree and not some other kind of tree.

Some Christians can be like that, exhibiting little evidence of belonging to God—but God wants them to grow and produce much fruit for his glory.

The fruit we bear is the manifestation of our character, and the only way people will know that we are children of God. God wants to present himself to the world through what he produces in us, so that his character is at stake in our fruit. He wants us to be fruitful.

It is God who produces fruit within us so that he may be glorified. There are two kinds of spiritual fruit.

#### A. *Action Fruit*

The first kind of spiritual fruit is what I am calling action fruit. This has several elements.

The first element of action fruit—and these are in no particular order—is leading others to Christ. The apostle Paul said, “I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest [or “fruit,” *KJV*] among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles” (Romans 1:13). What is the harvest (or fruit) he was referring to? Converts. He wanted to win people to Christ.

## Keys to Spiritual Growth

Action fruit includes leading others to Christ. Is that a product of your life? It should be natural for a Christian to lead others to Christ because one of the characteristics of life is reproduction.

The second element of action fruit is giving. The Philippians had sent Paul a generous love gift. In Philippians 4:17 he told them why he appreciated it: “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account” (NKJV). The greatest thing about their gift was the fruit that produced it.

Because giving is a fruit, it should not have to be coerced. When you are filled with the Spirit and committed to glorifying God, you will give voluntarily and generously. Giving comes from the heart. One godly pastor used to say, “You can give without loving, but you can never love without giving.”

In the next few months you are going to hear a lot about giving. We are embarking on a Capital Stewardship Campaign this fall. In addition, we are planning to have a Sunday school class to assist you in personal financial stewardship. Howard Dayton, CEO of Crown Financial Ministries, said, “tithing has decreased almost every year for the past three decades” so that today the average Christian household gives 2.5 percent of their income to the work of the Lord (and 1.7 percent to other charitable organizations).<sup>2</sup>

Now, giving a tithe of your income, or 20%, or 90%, for that matter, is not going to make you a mature Christian. Rather, it is as you grow and mature spiritually that you realize that *all* that you have belongs to God. You are simply a steward of God’s resources, and he expects you to manage his resources well. And as you realize that truth, you will find ways to give more and more to the expansion of God’s kingdom.

My goal during this fall is to help our church family grow in the area of financial stewardship. To those who might object that we ought not to speak so much about money, let me note that God has given approximately 2,350 verses in the Bible to instruct us how to manage our money, assets, and resources. In fact, the topic

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://crown.org/library/default.aspx> for more information.



of money is second only to the topic of love in the number of times the Bible addresses a topic.

So, giving to God is an evidence and expression of bearing fruit.

The third element of action fruit is expressing thanks to God. Hebrews 13:15 says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” Saying thanks to God is fruit—another product of his work in your life.

The fourth element of action fruit is pleasing the Lord. Colossians 1:10 says, “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work.”

One way in which we please the Lord is in our ministry to him. Every Christian ought to be involved in some service to the Lord in the church. There are opportunities to greet, usher, sing, teach, evangelize, provide childcare, disciple, and so on. Churches are constantly looking for people to serve, and our church is no exception.

Are you involved in a ministry? If not, why not?

“I am too busy” is the most common excuse. Not being involved in ministry robs you of the opportunity to grow spiritually,

One way to grow spiritually and bear fruit is serving in some ministry. If you are not involved in a ministry in this church, let me urge you to get involved so that you can grow spiritually.

Any good work is action fruit. It could be leading someone to Christ, giving a gift, thanking God, or some other form of service. God wants to see us bear that kind of fruit.

### *B. Attitude fruit*

The second kind of spiritual fruit is what I am calling attitude fruit.

Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” These are all attitudes.

Now, a question might be asked: “Which comes first? Attitudes or Actions?” Action fruit without attitude fruit is legalism, which was characteristic of the Pharisees. Many who tell others about Jesus do so with the wrong attitude—perhaps out of duty, obligation, or fear. Some people give their money grudgingly. Others follow a list of rules—they don’t do this and they don’t do that—but inside they want to do the opposite. They are acting in the right way, but they don’t have the right attitude.

If we have the right attitude, however, the right action will follow. When we yield ourselves to the Spirit, he produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in us. Those attitudes will then produce the right actions.

Unfortunately, many people who think they are serving God are doing so with wrong attitudes. When they tell Jesus at the judgment that they did many wonderful works in his name (Matthew 7:22), he will say, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (v. 23). We glorify God when we are fruitful both in our attitudes and in our actions.

How do we get the right attitudes? How do we become characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?

Galatians 5:25 says, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” As we yield control of our lives to the Holy Spirit, he will permeate our lives and produce the proper fruit in us.

### **Conclusion**

Total quality organizations have an incredibly high goal to do the right thing for 100 % of the customers 100 % of the time. Does that seem unrealistic? Isn’t 99 % good enough? Just think what you’d get if 99 % were good enough in certain areas:

- No electric service for 14 minutes each day,
- 1.7 million pieces of first-class mail lost each day,
- 35,000 newborn babies dropped by nurses each year,
- 200,000 people getting wrong drug prescriptions each day,
- 3 misspelled words on the average page of type, and
- 2 million people dying from food poisoning each year.<sup>3</sup>

You should aim at a 100 % commitment to spiritual growth. The Bible calls this “whole-hearted.” Anything less than a 100 % commitment to growth is “half-hearted.”

Trusting God completely and bearing fruit in your life will help you glorify God and grow spiritually. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas J. Stevinin, *People Power* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), p. 21.



# 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)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181)
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**PRAYER:**

O Lord our God, we thank you for what we are learning in the keys to spiritual growth.

Help us to trust you in all circumstances. We believe that you are completely sovereign in all things. We know that you rule and reign over all of your creation. You created the greatest stars and the tiniest atoms. There is nothing that is beyond your control, and so we ask you to help us to trust you regardless of the circumstances that are in our lives.

We also you to help us bear fruit in our lives. We want your character to flow in and through us so that the world may know that you are our God.

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.