

LESSON 4 Hindrance and Help to Christian Growth

After the last lesson, you should feel somewhat like a son growing up, a valuable piece of land being carefully farmed, or a great and beautiful building under construction. Which likeness do you most identify with? No matter! In a sense, we are like all three at once! Each illustration describes exciting potential for Christian growth.

One part of this lesson is meant to show you from Scripture things that cause Christian maturity to be delayed or even stopped entirely. Recognizing these will help us identify them in our own lives. Knowing why we are not growing spiritually can help us bring about change.

Another part of this lesson lists things which aid spiritual growth. Knowing these things, we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit in allowing our new lives in Christ to grow. Together we should find encouragement and help in this study.

lesson outline

What Hinders Our Growth

Wrong Timing

Wrong Exercise of Will

Lack in Diet

What Helps Our Growth

The Holy Spirit Our Helper

The Holy Spirit Working Through Our Spirit

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- State what caused the people's retarded spiritual condition in Hebrews 5:12.
- Point out a specific wrong exercise of the human will in its relationship to God's will.
- Explain why it seems evident in 1 Corinthians 3:1–2 that the Christians' own negligence had caused their lack in spiritual diet.
- Explain why a believer may grow in Christ through the Holy Spirit.
- Identify two opposing forces in your life.
- Describe your part in achieving a walk in the Spirit.

learning activities

1. Read the lesson.
2. Do the exercises in the lesson development, and check your answers with those given in this textbook.
3. Take the self-test at the end of this lesson. Review those items answered incorrectly.

key words

automatic
hinder

hindrance
negligence

rational
sift

lesson development

WHAT HINDERS OUR GROWTH

There are enemies of natural growth; we have briefly studied this in reference to soil and building. The Bible is direct about some areas which hinder Christian maturity. We need to know them. Perhaps you remember when you were a child and your parents had to teach you about harmful things. Maybe they told you to avoid certain plants or animals. The first thing they did was teach you to recognize them. Let us identify some things that hinder spiritual growth.

Wrong Timing

Objective 1. State what caused the people's retarded spiritual condition in Hebrews 5:12.

The new birth begins a time of spiritual childhood. Have you ever seen children "dressing up" in adult clothes or pretending to be grown-up? It's humorous to see them walking about in too large shoes or sandals, or pulling a hat over their ears. Sometimes we say to such children, "Wait until you're older to do these things."



Timing is important. We must not only be concerned with doing right things but also with doing them when the time is right. Wrong timing refers not only to premature action but also to retarded condition. Hebrews 5:12 presents an outstanding example of retarded spiritual condition due to failure to apply present knowledge of God toward further spiritual progress.

Application

1 After reading Hebrews 5:11–14 underline verse 12. What was the people’s problem as described in this verse?

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The Greeks, in whose language the New Testament was written, thought of time in two basic ways: (1) *chronos* signified a succession of minutes, hours, and days; and (2) *kairos* referred to crisis periods. These periods included such important times as growing, testing, and other experiences in an adult’s life.

In the process of Christian maturity, both of these ideas of time are important. God expects certain things of us based on the actual length of time we have been Christians. He is in charge of our times of crisis also. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 concerning God’s control of times and seasons.

How long has it been since you were born again? Perhaps it was very recent. Perhaps you have been a Christian a long time. Just remember that the *actual time is important*. We should not expect more of ourselves than God does. Growing up is a time-consuming process. Lack of time can limit growth. But if you have not shown enough progress, do not despair. Ask the Lord to help you, through this course, to faithfully apply your present knowledge of spiritual things toward further maturity in Christ.

Often the Bible speaks of time as being fulfilled. Ephesians 1:10 is one such example of God’s time plan: “When the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

Application

2 Who must complete the plan mentioned in Ephesians 1:10?

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How encouraging to believe that God controls all aspects of the believer’s time! *Kairos*, periods of crisis, come at irregular times that only God can order. They bring circumstances that teach us.

Application

- 3 Read Luke 22:31. Who asked permission to test Peter?
 - a) Satan
 - b) God
 - c) Fellow believers
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Who gave permission to test Jesus’ disciples? (This question is not directly answered in Luke 22:31.) God permitted Satan to test the disciples just as He had given him permission to test Job (Job 1:6–12).

The object of this test in Luke 22:31 was to sift the disciples, and Peter in particular. In the following verse, Jesus was praying for Peter that he would come through his moment of *kairos*—not just to survive, but to be stronger and strengthen others. Let us pray that we, also, may show the endurance in crisis that produces spiritual growth in us and in others.

Application

4 According to Romans 5:3–4, what produces endurance?

5 Complete the following statement on the basis of Romans

5:4. Persevering will produce
and from that will come

God allows and arranges times of pressure and times of crisis, which are opportunities for us to grow toward Christian maturity.

Wrong Exercise of Will

Objective 2. *Point out a specific wrong exercise of the human will in its relationship to God's will.*

Why are you studying this course? If maturity were automatic, why should anyone try to mature? You already know the answer. God arranges the *kairos* (crisis), but we must decide how to respond. When God created us, He gave us a will. God has chosen not to violate this right.

Application

6 Let us return to Hebrews 5:11–14 for a moment. According to verse 11, why was it hard for the writer to explain spiritual truth to the Hebrews?

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The verb “are” in the original language of verse 11 is better translated, “have become.” The Hebrews were not always dull, slow, and hard to move. The Greek word for “slow,” *nothros*, means “hard to push.” Here is what was being said: “Many truths cannot be given because you have become slow and hard to move.”

You can see that these Hebrews had a *choice* in the matter. Their *will* was involved. They had hardened their hearts against the process of growing up. Again in the last part of verse 12 is the concept that the people were slow to understand. They had to have milk and could not take solid food. In a way it seems fair to say that most Christians are as mature as they *will* make up their minds to be. God provides the school, but we decide whether or not to learn!



Application

- 7 Read again Luke 22:31–32 and complete this sentence: Jesus prayed that Peter’s faith would
- 8 Read Jesus’ words to His disciples in Luke 21:34–36. Notice how many things the disciples must decide or do for themselves. In your notebook, list the actions of the will found in these verses.



Almost all the things we have studied, or are going to study, have to do with our *will*. Many Scriptures that do not directly mention our *will* do, nevertheless, imply the use of the human will. Here are portions of two verses rephrased to emphasize more directly the *will* concept in them:

1 Peter 2:2: A new believer should be like a new baby. He should *will to drink* spiritual milk.

2 Peter 3:18: The believer should always *will to grow* in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Application

- 9 Reword the following Scriptures in your notebook. Emphasize the *will* concepts by underlining them.
- a Ephesians 4:15
 - b 2 Peter 1:6
 - c 1 Corinthians 13:11
 - d Ephesians 4:13



Have you completed your notebook work for the preceding exercise? You will find that a good understanding of the *will* is important and that this extra long assignment will help.

Hebrews 12:1–2 emphasizes the importance of human will in the race of life. This passage indicates that we are to:

Will to rid ourselves of anything that would hinder our spiritual progress, and *will to keep our eyes on Jesus* in order to make progress toward spiritual maturity in the race of life.

If you rebel against God’s will, you are exercising your will wrongly. Christian maturity requires submission of our will to

God's will. Even Jesus had to submit His human will to the divine will in order to bear the cross (Matthew 26:39–42).

Application

10 According to Hebrews 12:2, Jesus was able to die on the Cross because of the

- a) fellowship of those around Him.
 - b) victories during His earthly life.
 - c) anticipation of future joy.
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This is a good moment for you to reflect. Do you wish and will to become a mature Christian? Pray that you will respond rightly to the situations God places you in.

Lack in Diet

Objective 3. *Explain why it seems evident in 1 Corinthians 3:1–2 that the Christians' own negligence had caused their lack in spiritual diet.*

There is a saying in many cultures that a man becomes what he eats! It is important not only how much we eat, but what we eat. Some foods contain things which produce only fat. Other foods are good for energy and strength. Christian maturity is limited by spiritual diet. We have already looked at this to some degree in Lesson 3. The newborn Christian is to desire milk. But, in order to grow, the believer must move from milk to solid food.

Notice in Hebrews 5:12 that if the Christians were maturing, they would *be* teachers. Instead, they needed teachers. They could not yet eat solid food (digest the truth directly), but had to drink milk (predigested food). *Someone else* had to study the truth of God in the Bible, prayerfully learn from God, and then prepare his own mind and spirit to teach them on a level they could understand.

In Hebrews 5:11, the writer to these Christians says, “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.” The full teaching of the Christian faith is by no means an easy thing to understand. It cannot be grasped or learned

in one day. A believer will often avoid teaching which is difficult. Similar rejection is seen in a baby. A baby does not like it when the mother stops the milk feeding and insists on solid food. Yet the mother knows it is the next step for her child’s growing up.

You have proved your desire to come into Christian maturity. But that does not make it easy, does it? We will see in later lessons that for the believer *solid food means*: (1) moving beyond basic Christian principles to more difficult concepts, (2) learning to know the difference between right and wrong, (3) accepting responsibility, and (4) forming Christian character. To do all this you must *look to God for supernatural help* as well as exercise your own will.

Application

11 In 1 Corinthians 3:1–2 it seems evident that the Christians should have been able to digest advanced spiritual food and that Paul, therefore, regrets having to feed them with milk. What was his reason for feeding them milk (v. 2)?

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WHAT HELPS OUR GROWTH

Earlier, we discussed the power to grow which is in all life. Then, in the first part of this lesson, we pointed out reasons growth does not happen. Growth has its limitations and its enemies. We begin to grow by receiving Jesus Christ: repenting of our sin and confessing His lordship in our life. We have learned that this is the process of being born again. Our new life is spiritual. Do you remember Jesus’ description of this experience in John 3:6?

Application

12 According to this passage there are two births: one by human parents and the other by the



The Holy Spirit Our Helper

Objective 4. *Explain why a believer may grow in Christ through the Holy Spirit.*

It is important to understand how the Spirit helps us grow. You have seen parents helping their children grow by teaching them to walk and to speak, patiently helping them to mature. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit is the trainer for the new Christian life. The apostle Paul explains this process in 1 Corinthians 2. The Holy Spirit reveals God's secrets to us.

Application

13 Base your answers to these questions on 1 Corinthians 2:10–11.

- a By whom did God make known His secret?
- b Who searches the hidden depths of God's purposes?
- c What knows all about a person?
- d Who knows all about God?



First Corinthians 2:12 says: "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." What a statement! The Holy Spirit helps us know all that comes from God. We could say the Spirit helps us "grow up" to full adulthood. He helps us mature and patiently works with us toward this goal.

Jesus was born in human form through a direct act of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit is who helped Jesus fulfill His human purpose. He was led by the Spirit to be the obedient servant of the Father (Matthew 4:1).

Application

14 According to Acts 10:38, how was Jesus prepared for His earthly ministry?

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As Jesus prepared to return to the Father, He promised His followers another *Helper*. The word “another” (John 14:16) suggests one like Jesus himself. This is an important promise, and we should study it carefully. The word *helper* [or *counselor*] here means “one who works beside us to help.”

Application

15 Read John 14:15–20, then answer these questions:

- a How long will the Helper stay with us (v. 16)?
- b Where will the Helper be while helping us (v. 17)?

16 Read John 14:25–26. Jesus promised His disciples that the Helper would make them remember

- a) part of what He had told them.
- b) all that He had told them.
- c) more than He had told them.



It is important for you to read John 16:5–15. Stop now and do this. Jesus says in this passage that it is better for His followers that He leave the earth.

Application

17 What reason did Jesus give His disciples in John 16:7 for His going away?

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Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the church so the Spirit might teach us and lead us “into all the truth” (John 16:13). He will bring us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. In this likeness we fulfill

the true destiny of people. The Holy Spirit led Jesus to fulfill His human purpose as the obedient servant of the Father. Thus, through suffering death and being resurrected, He won for us salvation. The Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus' likeness, so that as His servants, we may be a body that reflects Christ upon the earth. What a wonderful plan! We are part of God's purpose in the world.

The Holy Spirit Working through Our Lives

Objective 5. *Identify two opposing forces in your life.*

Objective 6. *Describe your part in achieving a walk in the Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of all true believers. The question is how. Man is composed of body, soul, and spirit. The body is physical and easily identifiable. We sometimes refer to it as the "outer man."



To be more specific, the soul is generally thought of as that part of man containing the mind, the will, and the emotions. The spirit is generally thought of as that part of man which is made alive or regenerated when we are born-again and linked to God's Spirit. In other words, the human spirit is the point of contact between God and redeemed humanity. The Spirit is very much at work in our "inner man." Because we have a will or "free moral agency" (the power of choosing or making decisions), we may feel our lives are a battleground. As God's Spirit seeks to direct our lives, communicating through our spirits to our souls, sinful human nature coupled with a will may resist Him. There may be spiritual tug-of-war as described in Galatians 5:16–17.

The spirit of man becomes a battleground when man refuses to let God's Spirit direct his life. Have you ever watched two people pulling against each other to possess something. It looks like they will pull it apart. That is like the spiritual *tug-of-war* we find in Galatians 5:16–17.

Application

18 Read Galatians 5:16–17. According to verse 17, what two forces oppose each other?

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Galatians 5:19–23 describes our lives first when human nature is in control, then when the Spirit is in control. Human nature produces life as described in verses 19–21. However, when the Holy Spirit controls man’s spirit, He produces an entirely different lifestyle.

Application

19 The qualities in Galatians 5:22–23 are developed through *the Holy Spirit’s control of our spirit* and are called the *fruit of the Spirit*. List these qualities in the order they are mentioned.

- a f
- b g
- c h
- d i
- e

20 Through the Spirit’s anointing, Jesus received gifts for His human ministry. Read Acts 10:38 again. When God poured out the Holy Spirit upon Jesus, what did Jesus do?

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When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will do the work of Jesus in us. What a promise!

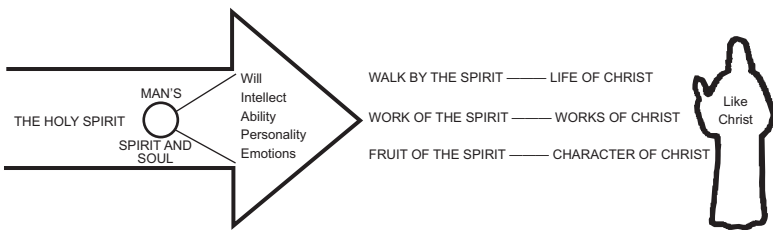
Application

21 Read John 14:12–14. How does Jesus compare what those who believe in Him will do with what He is doing (v. 12)?

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Galatians 5:25 says, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Another aspect of control is the daily control of our lives, the continual surrender of our will. This is called *walking by the Spirit*. It is the way Jesus lived daily in His human experience. We, too, can walk by the Spirit. Study the illustration below.



Many other things which help us grow will be dealt with in Chapter 6, but one is important for us to understand now: *We are born into a spiritual family which is provided by God for our help.*

Application

22 Read Ephesians 4:7–16. Christ placed people as gifts to minister to mankind in various ways (v. 11). What was the purpose of the work of these ministers (v. 12)?

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We must surrender our inner man—personality, intellect, ability, and will or choice—to the Holy Spirit if He, the Helper, is to make us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. In His likeness,

we fulfill God's desire for us. We will also fulfill our basic need for direction toward our spiritual goal.

self-test

TRUE-FALSE. Write **T** in the blank space if the statement is true. Write **F** if it is false. Then, change the FALSE statements to make them true.

-1 Time has nothing to do with the believer's maturity.
Time has
-2 We must will to rid ourselves of obstacles to spiritual progress.
We must will to rid ourselves
-3 A believer who receives only the milk of the Word will grow faster than one who receives solid food.
A believer who receives only the milk of the Word will
.....
-4 The only source of complete knowledge about a man is his parents.
The only source of complete knowledge about a man is his
.....
-5 Galatians 5:25 implies that it is possible to live in the Spirit without allowing Him to control our lives.
Galatians 5:25 implies that it is

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Circle the correct answer for each question.

- 6 The writer to the Hebrew Christians criticized their slowness to understand by telling them there had been enough time for them to
 - a) be teachers.
 - b) build churches.
 - c) have families.

SHORT ANSWER. Write the answer to the question on the lines provided.

7 List at least four of the nine personal qualities of a life controlled by the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23.

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Before you continue your study with Lesson 5, be sure to complete your unit student report for Unit 1 and return the answer sheet to your GU instructor.
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answers to the study questions

- 1 Lack of spiritual progress they should have made during the time they had known God
- 12 Spirit.
- 2 God
- 13 a His Spirit
b God's Spirit
c That person's own spirit
d His Spirit
- 3 a) Satan
- 14 Through God's pouring out the Holy Spirit and power upon Him
- 4 Trouble
- 15 a Forever
b In us
- 5 character, hope
- 16 b) all that He had told them.
- 6 Because they were slow to understand
- 17 In order to send the Holy Spirit to them
- 7 not fail.
- 18 Human nature and the Spirit
- 8 Be careful or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and anxiety.
Be always on the watch.
Pray.
- 19 a Love
b Joy
c Peace
d Patience
e Kindness
f Goodness
g Faithfulness
h Gentleness
i Self-control

- 9 Your answers may vary a little but should be similar to these:
- a We must *will to grow up* in every way to Christ.
 - b To your knowledge you must *will to add self-control*.
 - c Now that I am a man, I have *willed to have no more use for childish ways*.
 - d We shall all *will to come together* to that oneness in our faith.
- 20 He went everywhere doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.
- 10 c) anticipation of future joy.
- 21 By saying they will do what He is doing and greater
- 11 Because they were not ready for the solid food of advanced Bible teaching
- 22 To prepare God's people for Christian service

For Your Notes





Progress in Christian Maturity

Lessons

- 5 Motivations Toward Growth
- 6 Elements That Build Christian Maturity
- 7 Foundational Truths and Beyond