

# MATURING CHRISTIANS

IN THE WORD

## Using the Bible Studies (Part 2: Teaching New Christians)

The next five-lesson series is for new and growing Christians. Each study encourages the new Christian to trust God for growth, but also to take responsibility and do his part. Spiritual growth will not happen accidentally. While many factors are involved in spiritual growth, none is more important than the desire to grow through regular study of God's Word.

These lessons are best used with individuals or small groups. (See "Conducting the Bible Studies," beginning on page 10.) They may also be useful as a sermon series or a classroom study. While there are many topics that the new Christian will need to consider, these lessons are specially designed to fan the flames of growth and encourage an even greater hunger and thirst for righteousness. Each lesson title builds on the phrase "Now that I have decided to follow Jesus."

Lesson 1, "I Can Have a Great Commitment to Growth," points out the possibility of spiritual growth, resources for growth, and the actions needed to grow and mature.

Lesson 2, "I Can Have a Great Relationship

With God," reminds new Christians to whom they belong. It emphasizes the importance of spiritual focus and shows how a growing relationship with God can help in overcoming sin.

Lesson 3, "I Can Have a Great Relationship With the Church," stresses the need for participation in the Lord's church. It explains the importance of attending worship services, following church leaders, and serving in the body.

Lesson 4, "I Can Have a Great Prayer Life," is about the new Christian's communication with God. It encourages the student to pray and offers practical suggestions for a strong prayer life.

Lesson 5, "I Can Have a Great Bible Study," shows the need for commitment to regular Bible study. The actions and attitudes necessary to abide in God's Word are discussed in depth.

Each lesson in this series of studies is designed to be copied on the front and back of a single sheet of paper. You have permission to photocopy these lessons so that each student can have his own worksheets. If you are unable to do so, have students write their answers on any available paper.

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### NOTES ON LESSON 1: I CAN HAVE A GREAT COMMITMENT TO GROWTH

(Also see "I Can Have a Great Commitment to Growth" and "Answer Guide for Teachers")

Part 1 of the "Using the Bible To Teach the Bible" series places great emphasis on baptism—and correctly so. It is important, however, for the new Christian not to say, "Now that I have been baptized, I have done all that I need to do." This first lesson for new Christians emphasizes continued spiritual growth. As the teacher, avoid *telling* biblical truths to new converts; instead, help them

to become students of God's Word.

#### Opening Questions

*Hebrews 5:11-14* and *2 Peter 1:1-8*. Hebrews 5 warns of the possibility of becoming complacent and failing to grow. The Christians addressed in that passage had not grown—not because they lacked time or opportunity, but because of spiri-

tual laziness. God provides everything we need for life and godliness, but we must make the effort to grow. Second Peter 1:1–8 encourages Christians (not just new Christians) to apply all diligence in adding what some call “the Christian graces.” A powerful promise is made to those who develop these qualities: They will be neither useless nor unfruitful, and they will never stumble. The rest of this lesson presents three challenges to those who want to grow. As you consider these challenges with your students, ask open questions to help them understand the biblical concepts and apply them to their own lives. Use additional Scriptures as you see the need.

### **Challenge #1: Trust God To Do His Part**

*Ephesians 1:15–19* through *1 Corinthians 15:9, 10*. As we look at the changes and growth needed in our lives, our shortcomings may seem overwhelming. However, these passages identify the help that God is willing to give to those who seek to grow in Christ. It is comforting to know that Christians are God’s field, His building, and His fellow-workers. What a great privilege it is to be partners with God! Grace, properly understood, encourages hard work (*1 Corinthians 15:9*).

### **Challenge #2: Plan (Decide) To Grow**

*Philippians 3:7–15*. Even the apostle Paul expressed a personal need for growth. He had a holy hunger for a more intimate relationship with Christ. While he had made tremendous progress, he wanted to be more like Jesus. He was willing to give up everything else to accomplish this.

If a Christian plans to grow, several characteristics will be evident in his efforts to live the Christian life. He will concentrate on specifics to avoid running aimlessly. Saying “I want to be more like Jesus” is good. Asking “How can I be more like Jesus?” is even better. Encourage students to consider specific areas of their lives they need to change in order to be more like Jesus.

The growing Christian is one who is pushing himself to grow. Some translations use the words “straining” and “pressing” in *Philippians 3:12, 13*. Share appropriate incidents from your own life to illustrate striving for growth. Students need to understand that growth is a lifelong process.

Satan tries to convince us that our efforts are useless. The devil is a liar (*John 8:44*). God always tells the truth, and His Word promises that we *can* grow and mature. Encourage new Christians by mentioning areas of growth you see in their lives.

*Hebrews 5:14* gives another essential: Maturity comes to those who train their senses to discern good and evil.

### **Challenge #3: Eliminate the Obstacles**

*John 12:24* through *Hebrews 10:24, 25*. Jesus likened His death (*John 12:24*) to a grain of wheat, which must die and be planted in the ground before it can bear fruit. In order to live for Jesus, we must die to self. Selfishness chokes out growth and progress. It is necessary to beware of negative influences in our lives. Lack of growth can often be attributed to the failure to “die” to sin.

Those committed to growth must forget the past and keep their eyes on the prize. Satan wants new Christians to be looking backward to former lifestyles instead of looking forward to the prize (heaven). Holding on to past sins, grudges, and memories of the “pleasures of sin” will distract the Christian’s attention from heaven and the abundant life (*John 10:10*) that Jesus offers.

*Hebrews 12:1, 2* declares that those who want to overcome sin must fix their eyes on Jesus and throw off sins, sinful relationships, and habits that entangle us. That may include certain friends, since bad company corrupts good morals (*1 Corinthians 15:33*). Some of the greatest obstacles new Christians must overcome are presented by non-Christian friends and family members who would lead them back into sin.

Unconfessed sin causes great spiritual problems. *James 5:16* encourages honest acknowledgment of sins. New Christians will need to be encouraged to deal openly with sins. Often, when they sin, new converts become greatly discouraged and the devil causes them to question their salvation. It is crucial that they realize the forgiveness that is theirs as they confess their sins to God and ask for the prayers of other Christians.

As obstacles are eliminated, faithful worship with the church will provide great encouragement toward love and good deeds. God wants every Christian to assemble faithfully with His church. New believers should understand that they need to assemble with the saints not only to be encouraged, but also so that they can encourage others (*Hebrews 10:24, 25*).

### **Summary & Application**

Review the major concepts from this lesson with the students. Ask them to tell you what they have learned. Especially, encourage them to put forth the effort required to study and grow. ❖