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Transformative Christian
Leadership Series

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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with **RUPERT LOYD, JR.**

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Scripture references in this book are from *The Message* version. Why? According to the brilliant translator, Eugene Peterson, it's not meant to be a scholarly study Bible. It's meant to be a life-learning, engaging Bible that helps you to appropriate God's teaching to everyday life. God's plan is to effectively change your life through the divine power of His Word.

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Introduction

As Bob was leaving the worship area, he saw his friend Nick.

“Hey, Nick, it’s good to see you. Wasn’t that a good message the preacher gave?”

Every week, thousands of pastors spend millions of hours preparing to share God’s powerful Word with those in worship. Thank God for faithful pastors who apply Scripture to our everyday lives!

Without a doubt, the Word of God—preached and applied—is a valuable infusion for spiritual growth. And, for many Christ-followers, those messages are supplemented through the week with Bible classes and personal study of the Scripture. For many others, the weekly sermon is their *only* regular contact with biblical input.

Is that you? *What is God saying to you, and what are you going to do about it?*

The followers of Jesus are called the *disciples*. The concept is not a theoretical label. It is a word closely related to the idea of *discipline*.

In your Christian walk, have you—at one time—decided to daily read a portion of Scripture, only to slip away from the discipline sometime later? And then, one day, you get a spiritual nudge and wonder, “How did I accidentally abandon that routine?”

Guess what? That unintentional departure can occur even with pastors. Don't forget, the enemy attends your church—not to worship the one true God, but to disrupt.

Spiritual growth is a subtle, yet powerful, battle. Jesus nudges you: “You should attend that Bible class,” and the enemy says, “If you leave right after worship, you can beat the other Christians in town and get a seat at your favorite restaurant.” Or you get busy, abandon your daily Bible reading, and—three weeks later—realize you “got out of the habit.”

Actually, it's not a habit. It is a discipline. You know, as in the word “disciple.” The challenge about a *bad* habit—not growing spiritually on a daily basis—is that it becomes the blueprint for spiritual drift.

Someone once said, “It takes guts to leave ruts.” Yet, it is more helpful to ask the Lord to give you the strength—and *discipline*—to let the Holy Spirit lead you to intentionally grow in your faith.

Pray. Grow through Scripture reading. Jesus said it so well: “Seek first the Kingdom of God...” (Matthew 6:33 NKJV). If you drift from spiritual growth, don't focus on your drift. Thank God that He got your attention! Ask for spiritual discipline. Invite a fellow Christian to keep you accountable. And mine the supernatural benefits of spiritual growth.

The Lens of Harvest: Prioritizing God's Mission Over Good Ideas

(1) There is a large harvest and fewer workers to get it done. This is not an occasional issue. It is the way of life in ministry. There is always more work to do. (The same is true for farmers, business owners, and many other occupations.) "That's the truth of the saying, 'This one sows, that one harvests'" (John 4:37).

This is the triage principle and signals intentional decision-making with a bias for the low-hanging fruit.

(2) God is primarily focused on the harvest. Jesus was once asked, when he agreed to eat with Zacchaeus the tax collector, "What are You doing here?" He answered, "For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost" (Luke 19:10).

(3) This leads to the lens principle. With which lens do you practice triage and, in fact, eliminate activities that don't fit? There is the "good ideas" lens. There is the "we've always done this" lens. There is the "many in our church want to do this" lens. There is the "the church down the road does this" lens. There is the "we did this at the last church I went to" lens. There is the "rich and big financial giver suggested we do it" lens. And, finally, or first, there is God's lens, the biblical lens.

Ask yourself: Why did Jesus come? Why did He die on the cross? What big idea drove the early church to do what they

did? What did Jesus commission us to do? When you get to heaven, you want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21 NIV). What will be the lens by which that statement will, or will not, be spoken over you? How many meetings you attended? How many potluck dinners? Rummage sales?

There are good things to do, and there are God things to do. What is it we must do? In John 15, Jesus once again speaks of the harvest. The Father cuts off branches—churches, Christians, programs, activities—that don’t produce fruit. He prunes others. Why? So that they will produce more fruit. John 15:16 defines this: “I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won’t spoil.”

Teachable Hearts: The Role of Humility in Spiritual Growth

What do these issues have in common?

1. Some Christians attend worship but never participate in a Bible class or a small group Bible study or read their Bible regularly.
2. Some church staff, including pastors, act like they are experts on everything related to the faith.
3. Some denominational leaders act like their brand of Christianity has all the answers, and everyone else—every other denomination—is inferior to their understanding of Scripture.

The common thread? Arrogance! Humility is a big deal in the Kingdom of God. Jesus was incredibly humble, in spite of the fact that He was—and is—the King of the universe!

In 1 Corinthians 8:1-2, Paul addresses the issue of eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. In this context, he focuses on the issue of arrogance. He says, “We sometimes tend to think we know all we need to know to answer these kinds of questions—*but* sometimes our humble hearts can help us more than our proud minds.”

It seems there are some know-it-alls in every church. However, real wisdom comes from humility. Why is genuine humility so important?

When you are genuinely humble, you are teachable. You haven't "arrived," and you know it. You see life and learning as a lifelong journey. Learning is a dimension of spiritual growth. Think about this: Many congregations are declining. Many of these churches will die. One of the greatest factors, when it comes to church vitality, is the level of spiritual growth among the members. Healthy churches are full of spiritually hungry Christians eager to learn. It's not a program. It's a lifestyle. In plateaued and declining churches, large numbers of people are biblically illiterate. The preaching may be great, but the depth of knowledge from Scripture is low. Why? Sermons are never enough!

Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 8:7, "...knowing isn't everything. If it becomes everything, some people end up as know-it-alls who treat others as know-nothings." In Christianity, an academic know-it-all is someone who has stopped feeding the soul. Arrogance is a disaster!

Faith Renewed: From Ritual to Genuine Relationship

“I’ve been a Christian for fifty years,” the man boasted from across the table. However, as the interview continued, it became clear that his spiritual maturity was questionable. His understanding of salvation was based on works. His view of the mission of the church? “To provide a place of fellowship for Christians.”

Think about this from a causative level: “Do you attend church regularly?” “Are you involved in one of your church’s Bible study groups?” What would you say if someone asked you: “Do you read the Bible?” Would you respond, “I’m not really a Bible student. But I enjoy the pastor’s sermons”?

Some Christians have been around the church fifty years. Yet, they remain a 1-year-old baby Christian, repeated fifty times! They have a “fuzzy faith.” Actually, it might not be *faith*, but *religion*—a cultural way of life without a personal relationship with Jesus.

How would you respond to this question: “If you died right now, are you certain you would be with Jesus?” Would you say, “Well, I hope so. After all, I’ve been a member of this church and supported it financially—for decades”?

In Paul’s letter to the Colossian Christians, he paints a picture of vibrant faith. In chapter 1, he thanks God for their “steady

faith in Christ, our Jesus, and the love you continuously extend to all Christians. The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept taut by hope” (verses 3-5).

Paul continues, writing that they “get it”—the Gospel message. Their white-hot faith has not diminished or weakened. The fruit of their faith is abundant. Their faith is growing stronger. They continue to mature in the faith, and they are always hungry for more of God (verses 5-8).

Some Christians identify their faith as an event: “I was baptized,” “I became a member thirty years ago,” “I’ve been on the church board for twenty years.”

All of that is important, but a living faith is a process. It is a lifestyle of growth. It is a journey of discipleship much more than belonging to an institution; it’s a lifelong adventure of spiritual growth. Yet, if it isn’t, it becomes a stagnant ritual. What about you? Has your faith grown stale?

Faith in New Clothes: Renewing the Church for Today's World

Throughout history, Christians have fought the spiritual cycle. Some win. Yet, honestly, most lose.

The New Testament is the story of the rapid expansion of the Christian Church throughout much of the Mediterranean world. Today, most of that world is secular. At the time of the Reformation, Europe was “refreshed” with a new vibrance for Christianity. Lives were changed, churches came alive, and mighty cathedrals were built. Today, many of those cathedrals are part tourist attraction, part museum.

In this century, many North American churches are in decline. Yet the momentum is very alive in parts of Africa, South America, and the “underground” movement in China. When Christianity loses its might, what happens?

Actually, it's complicated! But one clear contribution to the decline cycle is that the packaging becomes routine, then no longer useful. In the process, the human tendency is to make the form “sacred.” What happens? The faith loses its freshness because the world changes, even though the biblical substance doesn't. However, delivery systems must change. It's an easy and common slip: worshipping the forms, even if we keep the substance.

You would think we'd get this, because Jesus clearly demonstrated it. His brilliant summary: New wine needs new wineskins (Matthew 9:17). A child can get that, but Christian adults often struggle. Why?

We like comfort. We form a “lazy” perspective. We like it the way we've always done it. We get in a rut. And the only difference between a rut and a grave is the width, length, and how long you're in it. We make the living faith a dead has-been because we slip into worshipping traditions.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia, “But now that you know the real God—or rather since God knows you—how can you possibly subject yourselves again to those tin gods? For that is exactly what you do when you are intimidated into scrupulously observing all the traditions...” (Galatians 4:8-11).

Jesus became flesh—the Greek word for “meat”—a human/God simultaneously. Why would God do that? He packaged Himself in a form that fit the people He touched. As God, He could have looked like Billy Graham, or the Hulk, or a Martian, because God can do any of that. But form is important. It makes people recognize God is *real*, in the “now.”

The “now” changes. So, the form must change. The “now” continually changes—so the form must change—so the substance doesn't. The truth, Jesus, is eternal. He must never change. But if you put Him in old clothes, old forms, you lose the incarnation. Then you lose the Church. Then you lose the nation.

Why would any Christian in their right spiritual mind do that?

Beyond the Sermon: Nurturing a Vibrant Discipleship Culture

Ever think of church as a greenhouse? Church is supposed to be where people grow up in faith, are equipped for ministry, and multiply others by discipling.

In the context of Ephesians 4, Paul clearly shows how Christians grow into discipleship. There are unique gifts given to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Their primary role? To equip God's people for the work of ministry.

This discipling process is growth in Bible knowledge, but also training in the ministry, on the job, according to your spiritual gifts. It's the discipling process. It's the normal, expected growth process. It is a maturing process to learn the whole truth about Jesus as well.

Yet, it's not simply an academic exercise. It is for a purpose: to tell others about Christ, to be mature witnesses. This is the biblical blueprint for a healthy, growing church.

So, why do many churches settle for less? How did the new normal become: "Listen to the preached message"? That's a start, but not the end.

There is a *fable* believed by most Christians—and, likely, their pastors. It goes like this: "You make disciples through good sermons." But you can't! No one can disciple a crowd, not even

Jesus. Jesus disciplined twelve men, 24/7, and even He lost one after three years!

Sermons are to nurture people who are disciples—those who have been disciplined.

What is the result in the *fable* approach? The result is weak churches that don't come anywhere near their potential to reach their communities for Christ and make disciples.

The end product is weak, unhealthy churches that are greatly impotent to effectively reach their corner of the world for Jesus.

In Ephesians 4, following the section about equipping people for ministry, Paul says, in verse 14 and following, we are to “grow up.” Why? So we know who we are and what we are called to do—and become proficient in our personal mission. We grow up so we aren't infants distracted by human programs and gimmicks. In many churches, numerous Christians need to grow up a lot.

What is the result when Christians in your church grow in discipleship? Your church grows—and you all become effective and proficient missionaries to those in your social networks. You reach those who don't yet know Jesus.

But that's not all! When you get discipleship right and get outreach right, something miraculous occurs in your church. Your church grows and experiences a new environment: an atmosphere of love!

Faith Fitness: Diagnosing and Enhancing Spiritual Health

Do you like diagnostic questions? If you wonder about your health—and you're feeling sick—you visit a doctor. The physician asks you questions. It is a technique called "diagnostic inquiry," intended to discover your relative level of health and uncover any issues.

When you want to discover the *real* relative state of your *spiritual* health, there is an excellent diagnostic question that reveals the level of your faith in Jesus Christ. It's been used by many church leaders for years: "How certain are you that if you died right now, you'd go to be with Jesus?" A second question is about where you place your hope for salvation. Is it Jesus Christ? Is it your membership at the church? Is it your good works? That question goes like this: "Suppose you died tonight and stood before God and He asked you, "Why should I let you into heaven?" What would you say?"

When our Church Doctors diagnose the health and vitality of congregations, we ask these questions—and many others—using an anonymous survey given to everyone in attendance at a church service.

This is nothing new. Long before, in Christian history, the Apostle Peter asked these types of questions, using categories of quality, maturing faith. In 2 Peter 1:3-11, He lists certain "qualities" that measure Christian maturity in your "experience

of our Master Jesus.” He adds, “Without these qualities you can’t see what’s right before you, oblivious that your old sinful life has been wiped off the books” (verse 9).

What is Peter getting at? It is your personal certainty of salvation. What is the issue behind that issue? It is your spiritual maturity. Why is that so important for you and for those in your church? Spiritual maturity reflects the health, vitality, and *mission potential* of your congregation. You see, there are large numbers of “baby” Christians who have been church members for thirty, forty, or fifty years. They have just grown one year in faith—thirty, forty, or fifty times! They may even be active members of the church. They might sit on decision-making boards or committees. However, their maturity reflects lack of growth in biblical teaching and understanding. What happens? These people, without consciousness of their role—and without knowledge of others around them—subtly sap the power and potential of the mission of your church to effectively impact unbelievers. The result? Your church becomes spiritually anemic, aging, and—very likely—slowly dying.

This is a complex issue, because if your community is growing, new people might be coming to your church. But without the depth and growth of spiritual maturity, decline will eventually occur. It is absolutely predictable.

So, what are the qualities of spiritual growth and maturity, according to Peter? First, he talks about spiritual growth “building on what you’ve been given, complementing your *basic faith*” (2 Peter 1:5, emphasis mine). This reflects the biblical injunction to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

Second, Peter then adds some signs of that growth: “good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate

patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love” (2 Peter 1:5-9).

What is the issue behind this issue? The big question is this: Why don't most congregations track these issues? Why do churches, full of people who get regular checkups from their family doctors, never participate in a spiritual health checkup?

The answer is the same reason that those at Church Doctor Ministries train and equip specialists to be “Church Doctors.” That’s not just a cute name. It has profound meaning that is very biblical.

Most Christians see their congregations as organizations. In fact, just about all denominations do the same! This is in spite of the fact that every metaphor used in the New Testament to describe the church calls it a *living organism*. The enemy of Christ and His Church—your church—your enemy—has subtly changed our paradigm from living organism to organization. That lens changes everything. It leads to subtle impotence for mission. So many Christians structure and operate like organizations—even though we frequently give contradictory lip service to the concept: “Jesus Christ, head of His body, the church.” We talk about the organism in teaching and preaching yet operate as an organization! We suffer from a fatal disconnect. We operate organizationally.

Get back to Scripture, get back to the body life, reinvent your church, get healthy, and impact your world!

Growing in Grace: Embracing Continuous Spiritual Development

Many Christians seem to look at their faith as an event. “I was baptized in the church.” “I became a member of the church.” “We were married at the church.” “We attend worship regularly.” What is missing?

The Scripture says that faith is a lifelong process: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18 NIV).

When you talk to some Christians about spiritual growth, they often respond, “I hear a good message preached by our pastor every seven days.” So, what is that? Growth for fifteen to thirty minutes a week? That’s like eating a bowl of cereal one day a week and nothing else. When you ask some Christians to turn to Ephesians 2, they can’t find it with both hands!

So, how seriously do you take God at His Word—Scripture?

Some Christians are, literally, spiritually anemic. A preached message, even a Bible class, once a week is a good start. However, who misses a meal? Who eats only once or twice a week?

When it comes to feeding on the Word of God, some Christians are undernourished. The Apostle Paul relates to this concern using the metaphor of an athlete training to win. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, he says, “You’ve all been to the stadium and seen the

athletes race. Everyone runs; only one wins.” Then he gives instructions to every follower of Jesus: “Run to win.” That requires training hard—and training regularly.

Sometimes a church can have some anemic Christians. They know Jesus. They are going to die and go to heaven, but they are no earthly good to win: to win the world for Jesus. What is the result? There are churches that end up not playing to “win.” They are playing not to lose. They are cautious, hanging on to worn-out approaches, afraid to try anything new—anything uncomfortable. They are unwilling to change or risk. Why? People are spiritually weak. They are like malnourished, untrained, unfit athletes walking onto the field—the mission field—every day, knowing they are to win the world, but they don’t know how. Why would you be surprised if your church is not growing?

Beyond Ourselves: Breaking Free from a Self-Centered Church

Why are Christians, churches, even whole denominations so often focused on themselves? Why is it so hard to work together? Why do so many believers miss the big picture of God's global mission?

We live in a “me-centered” world: iPad, Myspace, iPhone—me, me, me. It's called “self-absorption”—being self-centered. Many local churches live in their own world, preoccupied with everyday life *inside* the church. So much effort, energy, and resources are directed toward “us.”

This is—at least in part—a theological issue. In Romans 8, Paul says that, in Christ and with the Holy Spirit, we are liberated from self-centeredness. The Spirit of life in Christ liberates us from sin and the tyranny of self-centeredness.

Clearly, it's not all about us and what we do. Church people work harder and harder to accomplish—what? As churches decline, we turn up the effort even more! But Paul says, in Romans 8:4, “instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us.” How clear can it get? Move your focus from all you do to all God has done for you. It's not about what you DO. That's the law. The Gospel says this: It's not what you do, but who you are in Christ.

In Romans 8:5-8, it says, “Those who trust God’s action in them find that God’s Spirit is in them.... Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God.”

This is radical, but true! If we Christians focused on making “disciples” and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would BE the church 24/7. The church will grow like wildfire when we focus on Christ. He builds His church through us. Selfishness kills the church! Perhaps we do too much and become too little.

From Childish to Childlike: Growing Up in Faith

There's a big difference between *childlike* faith and *childish* faith. When we are born into this world, we are self-centered, selfish creatures! As a baby, if you're hungry at 3 a.m. or have the discomfort of a wet diaper, you are going to scream until you get relief. You are clueless about waking your exhausted parents. Life is all about YOU! It is a survival mechanism for infants, and that is good.

As Christians, we call ourselves “the children of God.” Why? God is our Father! And childlike faith makes sense. Yet, sometimes we act like selfish babies. Paul describes the Christians at Corinth that way in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. The apostle is frustrated—like a parent who has a child who won't grow up!

What is the issue? The new believers are focused on what makes them feel good, what makes them important. It is childish behavior. They are playing a political game, some saying, “I'm for Paul,” and others saying, “We're for Apollos.” It's called “church politics.”

Paul says they're acting like babies at the nipple. Nipple Christians come in all sizes and all ages. They are “religious” consumers, rather than spiritual disciples. They focus on their own importance—they think they know better than their leaders, perhaps even better than God. They are nipple Christians. You

might say, “They suck!” And they suck the life out of a church! They suck the spiritual life out of other believers. Yes, Paul is frustrated!

The issue is biblical, spiritual growth. They show up for the “great sermon” like consumers at a religious nipple. Growing up in faith is not on their agenda. They suck at faith. God is looking for mature disciples. Without them, mission sucks, the church sucks, and outsiders believe that Christianity sucks. Do you really want to represent this awesome faith that way? Then grow up! Feed on the Word! Take nourishment from Scripture.

From Knowledge to Wisdom: Combating Biblical Illiteracy in the Faith

Ever hear the saying, “A little knowledge is dangerous?” With the rise of the Internet, beyond all the blessings, there is a curse. You might call it “citizen journalism.” It is the declaration of opinion: reporting information without the serious work of determining the facts. It makes you wonder: Are we smart enough to develop technology, yet lack the wisdom to use it properly?

At the tail end of his dictated letter to the Romans, Paul gives counsel. In Romans 16:17-20, he warns about those who take biblical truth out of context and provide spiritual tidbits strung together to support their presuppositions. With their display of biblical illiteracy, they make trouble for the body of Christ.

You can’t practice medicine or law, teach school, or be in law enforcement unless you “know your stuff.” You must learn a lot, show proficiency in your work at a serious level, and—to keep up—continue to learn in this changing world.

Sadly, this is not so with every Christian. Some church members know just enough about the Bible to be *dangerous*. The Apostle Paul knows this. He has seen it and deals with it in his letter to the Romans.

Some Christians have been members of the church for forty years. Yet, they have one year of biblical knowledge, repeated

forty times! They aren't bad people. They love Jesus like a little child. However, spiritually they never grow up! They have heard hundreds of great preaching messages but can't find Ephesians with two hands.

Then, some emotional event occurs—a stress that comes along in the church. These people unleash their mouths with their relative ignorance. This leads to severe trouble in the church.

Some churches actually put biblically infant Christians on decision-making teams. Everything is smooth until an inevitable challenge must be faced. Then there is division among Christians. It seems no one addresses the issue behind the issue: division, based on biblical or unbiblical presuppositions.

Paul is harsh about people who quote Scripture selectively from a position of ignorance. He says they are troublemakers. He warns, “Be alert!” In his depth of knowledge about God, Paul says, in effect, “Watch out for these people.” He even goes so far as to say that Satan is involved and calls it “smooth-talking evil.” Paul declares that, as Christians, we should “enjoy the best of Jesus!”

If you want a healthy life for God and a healthy church for Jesus, stay on task: Learn all you can, every day, for the rest of your life. Become a never-ending Scripture expert. When you get into a tight spot, go by Scripture and Scripture alone. There is no other guidebook in the church of Jesus Christ.

Lost and Found: The Call to Spiritual Maturity and Mission

The parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32 is a great story about God, Christians, and our purpose.

It's really important to recognize that the attitude of the runaway son turned into repentance. Repentance is a change of direction. The attitude of the father also changed. His attitude changed from mourning for his lost son to celebration!

The attitude of the other son, the repentant son's brother, is clear: "What about me?"

We see this a lot in churches. When we focus on outreach, the faithful say, "What about me?"

That's interesting because mission is a focus on the lost. Whether we're using the imagery of the lost son, the lost coin, or whatever else, it's very clear: Lost people matter to God. This is a Kingdom culture issue. This is the DNA of attitude.

In Philippians 2, Paul reminds those at the church in Philippi—and us—that we should consider others more important than ourselves. The issue is maturity over ego. Sadly, you don't have to look far to find egocentric Christians. But what is the real issue?

Self-centered believers are immature Christians. They are just like little children who are, by nature, egocentric. Yet, little

children who never mature properly end up being childish adults with the attitude: What about me?

Some churches have many baby Christians. They are always saying, "What about me?" The real issue is about maturing in the faith. It is about spiritual formation. The issue is discipleship. No wonder Jesus called us to be disciples who make disciples.

The Decline of Morality: What Happens When We Ignore God

What do you think about the dark side of society? Are you one of those who is concerned about our future?

Not to be overly negative, but do you see this from the news media: rampant evil, people grabbing and grasping at everything to find happiness, vicious backstabbing, envy, killing, bickering, or cheating?

How about those who are mean-spirited, venomous people who bash God? What about bullies, loudmouthed windbags who invent new ways to wreck lives?

What about people who leave morals and abandon respect for their parents so they can get, and go, their own way? Consider those who act stupidly, not using their intelligence, or those who are slimy and cruel. What about those who ignore God, even when they know better? Isn't it like they are spitting in God's face? Is it like they don't care? In fact, they flaunt their lifestyle. And some of these people are rewarded by society with the money they make.

Does any of this resemble those here and there in society? If so, you should know that I just followed—very closely—what the Apostle Paul said about those in the Roman Empire in Romans 1:28-32.

And, of course, you know what happened: the fall of Rome, recorded in history books.

What happened? Paul says, “Since they didn’t bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose” (Romans 1:18). If that doesn’t scare the hell (literally) out of you, you need to check your pulse. Because that’s when God allows people to scare the hell out of society—literally. Are you listening? What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

Conclusion

Spiritual growth requires intentionality. Take a moment to evaluate your current engagement with Scripture—are you consistently feeding your faith, or have you unintentionally drifted? If your spiritual disciplines have lapsed, don't dwell on the failure; instead, thank God for drawing your attention back to Him. His grace is there for you. Begin again today with a renewed commitment. Set a time each day, even if it's brief, to read Scripture and pray. Consider joining a Bible study or finding a reading plan that keeps you accountable. Small, consistent steps will strengthen your faith and deepen your relationship with Christ.

Accountability is another key in maintaining spiritual discipline. Find a trusted friend or mentor who can encourage you in your walk with Christ. Share your commitment with them and invite them to check in on your progress. Likewise, be intentional about attending worship and engaging with God's Word beyond Sunday morning. Seek out opportunities for discipleship, whether through a class, a study group, or simply discussing Scripture with fellow believers. By prioritizing spiritual discipline, you will not only grow in your faith but will also encourage others to do the same.

Questions for Discussion

This chapter highlights the importance of biblical teaching and personal spiritual disciplines. How does regular exposure to Scripture—both in worship and personal study—impact spiritual growth?

The concept of being a disciple is closely tied to discipline. What are some common reasons people drift away from spiritual disciplines, and how can they reestablish those practices?

The passage mentions that “the enemy attends your church” with the intent to disrupt spiritual growth. In what ways do distractions or subtle temptations hinder consistent engagement with Scripture and spiritual disciplines?



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Is it starting to feel
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①

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③

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②

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④

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About the Authors



Dr. Kent R. Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries. He believes that God has called him to help Christians and their churches become more effective for the Great Commission, to reach unbelievers and to make them disciples of Jesus Christ. Dr. Hunter is the author of more than 40 books. He has consulted more than 1,800 churches from 80 denominations, as well as nondenominational and independent churches. He developed the SEND Movement, which trains congregational members to become missionaries to those who are unchurched in their social networks. Kent writes the bimonthly Church Doctor Report, found on www.churchdoctor.org. Kent lives on a tree farm in northeast Indiana with his wife, Janet. Kent and Janet have two grown children, Laura and Jon.



Dr. Rupert Loyd Jr. has a BA in history from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, an MDiv from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, and a PhD in leadership from Union University in Cincinnati. He has over 40 years of pastoral experience in both urban and suburban churches, including multiethnic, multi-congregational churches. Throughout his career, he has maintained a presence in both the church and the academy. Dr. Loyd currently teaches graduate and undergraduate classes in the College of Business and Leadership at Lourdes University, and he holds the post of lead pastor at Marketplace Community Church in Toledo, Ohio.