

First published in *The Guardian* (Charlottetown, PE), August 2013.

Five Keys to Christian Growth

Jack C. Whytock

Since 2013 is the 200th anniversary year of the birth of David Livingstone, the famous missions explorer to central Africa, I am drawn to a story from his youth. He wanted a Bible, but his father made young David work for it. David was told to memorize all of Psalm 119 – yes the whole thing, all 176 verses – the longest psalm in the Bible. On two successive evenings, he recited it twice, and he received his Bible. What is it about Psalm 119 that is unique? Well, it is about the Scriptures as a guide to a Christian's growth. In the final section of Psalm 119, which is arranged by the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, we come to Taw, verses 169-176. There are five key thoughts which make for Christian growth found here..

First, you must become a *student* of the word (verse 169). A student with desire to seek for knowledge and understanding. Students grow and develop over time. We do not start with calculus in grade one. The keys are attitude, desire, pace and source. Christian growth requires one to be a student, a learner of the Word with regularity. Be with God's people every week in the Word.

Second, you must become a *suppliant*, a person of prayer (verses 170,173). Growing Christians discover the life of prayer. Prayer is crying out, beseeching the Lord amidst the struggles of life. If you struggle with prayer, quote back the promises of Scripture to God and you will begin to grow in prayer.

Third, you must come to value Christian *song* (verses 171, 172). Enter into singing yourself; do not just be content to be a spectator. Praise is your attitude of thanksgiving. That, friend, helps you to grow because it demands that your heart see what you have been blessed with. Also, praise or song focuses you off yourself and to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Praise feeds the soul just as it exalts the Lord.

Fourth, you must see and admit that often we are *straying sheep* (verse 176). As believers, we are not perfect but fall short of the mark laid before us. Confess the shortcomings and sins – take them to the Lord, and the Lord will receive you to go forward for Christ. Christian growth demands the humility of confession and fresh experiences of grace.

Fifth, a growing Christian sees themselves always as only a *servant* (verse 176). This is our identity as believers. We are to serve the Lord and others first. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Specifically state how you are serving.

Psalm 119 is an amazing psalm for Christian growth. David Livingstone's father knew what he was doing. Walk through the five "S's" and examine your growth patterns.

Rev. Dr. Jack Whytock is the director of Haddington House Trust, Charlottetown and a professor in theological colleges in Africa