

Developing healthy spiritual growth

‘No one I know has a greater command of teaching practical godliness and experiential Christianity than Joel Beeke. Drawing upon Paul’s prayer for the believers in Colossae, Beeke utilizes his exceptional exegetical abilities to lay open this text of Scripture, showing its primary relevance for the daily life of every believer. In so doing, this work will promote greater growth in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and deepen your spiritual life so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (Col. 1:10). This book should be a staple in your personal library regarding what constitutes genuine growth in biblical, reformed spirituality.’

**Dr Steven J. Lawson**  
**Senior Pastor, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church**  
**Mobile, Alabama**

‘With his customary precision and clarity, Joel Beeke takes us through a remarkable study of what it means to grow spiritually. He shows that such growth is a fundamental element of the life of faith, and that it impacts every area of life. A careful reading of these Bible-saturated pages, full of practical wisdom and good counsel, will help God’s people to live their lives before God’s face, for the good of God’s church, and in a Christ-glorifying manner.’

**Iain D. Campbell**  
**Minister of Point Free Church, Isle of Lewis, Scotland**

‘It is easy for Christians to be lopsided. Many stress doctrine at the expense of practice, and others pit experience against doctrine. *Developing Healthy Spiritual Growth* integrates growing in knowledge, practice, and experience into a biblically balanced and practical process of growing in grace. This book stands out by wedding doctrines such as communion with the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit, and the threefold office of Christ with Puritan-like application and heart-piercing and heart-warming expressions. This book will help you develop a well-rounded Christian life.’

**Ryan McGraw**  
**Pastor of First Orthodox Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunnyvale, California**

‘My kids can’t wait to grow taller. It’s amusing to see them measure themselves painstakingly to detect the fractions of inches they may have grown in a few weeks, while refusing to eat the things that will help them grow. Combining knowledge of the Scriptures, the soul, and our spiritual heritage, Joel Beeke serves up a feast of growing foods. Better yet, here is a mouth-watering cookbook for all who would “grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18).’

**Dr Jerry Bilkes**  
**Professor of New Testament**  
**Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan**

# Developing healthy spiritual growth

Knowledge, practice  
and experience

Joel R. Beeke



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*For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulnes; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins*

(Colossians 1:9-14).

## Preface

**B**iblical, Reformed spirituality and an accompanying need for personal spiritual growth has fallen on hard times. At a recent ministers' conference for the Free Reformed Churches in Ontario, I was asked to address the question of spiritual growth in terms of knowledge, practice and experience. I chose to do so using Colossians 1:9-14 as my background.

Since this book was originally given as addresses to ministers, I have retained some of the applications given directly to them. Those applications, however, are usually applicable to all believers in one way or another.

After the conference, some of the ministers present offered some valuable suggestions and asked me to publish these addresses. I am grateful for Graham Hind and Evangelical

Press's willingness to do so, and pray that God may use them to promote spiritual growth in his people.

Many thanks to Paul Smalley, Phyllis TenElshof, and Ray Lanning for their invaluable assistance on this manuscript. And, as always, many thanks to my remarkable wife, Mary, and dear children, for their generosity in allowing me the many hours that a writing ministry demands.

**Joel R. Beeke**



# 1

## Spiritual growth in knowledge

*For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God  
(Colossians 1:9-10).*

**B**y today's standards, the ancient city of Colossae was a place of no great importance. Centuries before Christ, Colossae had been a large and flourishing center of commerce and textile manufacturing, located on the main highway running east to west through Phrygia. In Roman times, however, the highway was relocated to the north, leaving Colossae off the beaten path. Years of economic decline had reduced the city to a small town scraping by in the shadow of Laodicea, ten miles away. Around the time

Paul wrote to the Colossians, the area suffered a damaging earthquake. Accordingly, it might also be thought that a church planted in such unpromising circumstances would be of no great consequence or strategic importance in the larger context of the mission of the gospel to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

But when we read Paul's epistle, we see things in a very different light. In Colossians 1, Paul celebrates the conversion of 'the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae' with heartfelt unceasing thanks to God. Paul was thrilled that 'the word of the truth of the gospel' had come to the Colossians through the faithful ministry of Epaphras, and was bearing much fruit. He thanked God for the new believers' faith in Christ and their love for 'all the saints', both of which were a gift from God and marks of his grace at work among them. Many members of the infant church at Colossae had been soundly converted, by the grace of God, leaving the darkness of their unbelieving past behind, and embracing the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Clearly the particular circumstances of the church did not matter to Paul. The location of the church, and its temporal circumstances, were of no interest to him. He was not concerned about numbers or budgets or programs. What mattered was, the gospel was being preached, and the Lord Jesus was gathering his church in Colossae. God had honored his Word. God had used his faithful servant. A good foundation had been laid, and the Colossian believers

had begun well. That is something to celebrate, something to give thanks to God for.

But Paul went on to say that he prayed constantly that what God had begun in the believers at Colossae would continue, and increase in depth and scope, filling them with the knowledge of God's will, inclining them and empowering them 'to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing', more and more. Paul rejoiced in the beginning they had made, but he also longed for spiritual growth. So should we.

What is spiritual growth? Spiritual growth is the development of the believer's faith and life in learning to know, trust and honor the Triune God intellectually and experientially, which issues in the Spirit's graces exercised in conformity to Christ through practical Christian living. By this growth a deeper insight is also gained into spiritual liberty.

There is a saying: 'The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement.'<sup>2</sup> Certainly that is true of our spiritual lives. We must not be satisfied to say that we have been born again, but pray that the child of our new birth would grow into a mature man. Spiritual growth should be as natural to believers as physical growth is to children. Regardless of the number of people involved, or the social or strategic importance of the church, God's will for all his children is that they grow up to maturity in Christ.