

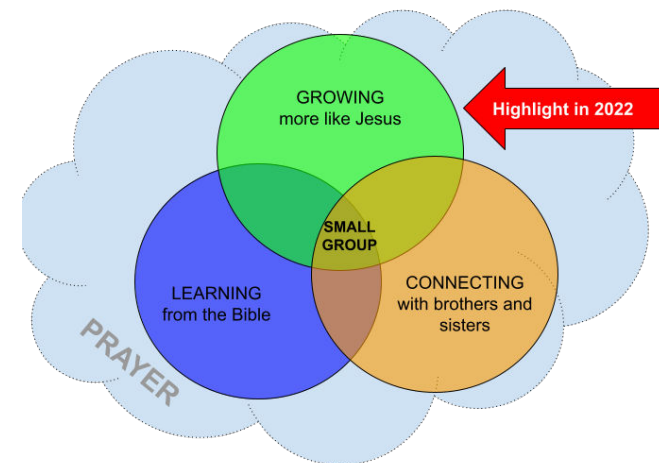
# Study: Transformed by Jesus' love

## Introducing spiritual growth

At All Saints our small groups have several goals.

- One is **rich connection with other believers** - developing the kind of supportive relationships that don't tend to arise from a big gathering on Sundays.
- Another is a **regular diet of God's word** - persistently opening the Bible and helping each other grapple with its meaning and implications.
- Wrapped around all this is **prayer** - responding to what God has said to us, and upholding each other through the challenges of life.

These are all important and valuable things. But in 2022 we want to particularly highlight a further goal, which overlaps with the others: **growing more like Jesus**. Without neglecting the other goals, we want to give some prominence and intentionality to the goal of "being transformed by Jesus' love".



1. **Share with the group:** When the idea of spiritual growth is mentioned, how does it make you feel? Choose an option below or add your own.

Excitement	Guilt	Longing	Cynicism
Nervousness	Determination	Fear	Shame
Confidence	Panic	Hope	Weariness

*In this study we're going to explore what the Bible says about how spiritual growth works. It's dangerous to try to grow without understanding how true biblical growth works. We're going to look at the Bible's teaching about the **context** for growth, the **necessity** of growth, the **power source** for growth, and the **process** of growth.*

2. **Discuss:** What are some things in the physical world that grow? What makes them grow?

## The context for spiritual growth: God's gift of new life

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 

3. **Discuss:** When thinking about spiritual growth, what mistakes does this passage help us to avoid? Are you prone to making these mistakes?

*Growing in our faithfulness and obedience to God is a process that flows out of God's gracious saving work. We don't seek spiritual growth in order to be accepted by God. (That would be impossible, since we were spiritually dead!) Rather, we seek spiritual growth because he has saved us from our sins and adopted us as his children.*

## The necessity of spiritual growth: Biblical exhortations

Read the following verses aloud:

### 1 Timothy 4:15

Practise these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

### 2 Peter 3:18

grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### Philippians 1:9

it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment

### 1 Peter 2:2


Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation

4. **Discuss:** What theme is common to these passages?

5. When thinking about spiritual growth, what mistake do these passages help us to avoid? Are you prone to making this kind of mistake?

*The Christian life is not simply about "getting in" and "hanging on", important as those things are. Ongoing transformation of our lives is an essential part of belonging to Jesus. And this collection of exhortations in the New Testament shows that we have an active role to play in the process - we don't just sit back and wait for God to change us automatically.*

## The power for spiritual growth: Union with Christ

Read John 15:1-17 

6. **Discuss:** When thinking about spiritual growth, what mistakes does this passage help us to avoid? Are you prone to making these mistakes?

*Our only power for change comes from our connection to Jesus. As soon as we start relying on our own willpower, we've gone off track. Routines, goals and resolutions may have their place, but "just try harder" is never the recipe for true growth. The power for growth lies not in us but in Christ, and it's through our union with him by faith that his transformational power flows into us.*

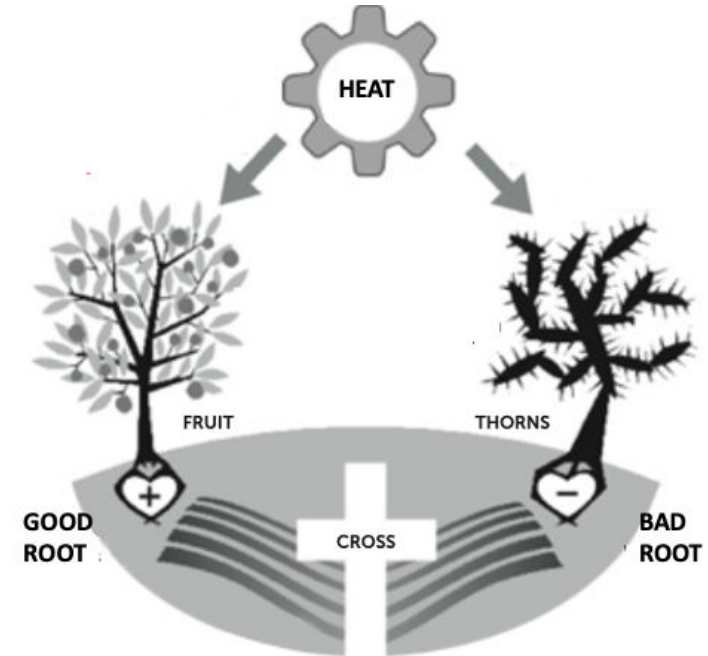


## The process of spiritual growth: Fruit and roots...

Read Luke 6:43-45:

Jesus said: "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

*Authors such as Paul Tripp, Timothy Lane and Tim Chester have developed a helpful model to illustrate the biblical picture of how people change, which encompasses the principle Jesus speaks about in Luke 6.*



To explain this model briefly:<sup>1</sup>

- **Heat** represents the life circumstances we find ourselves in, including challenges and temptations.
- **Thorns** represent ungodly behaviours (eg the works of the flesh in Gal 5:19).
- **Bad Roots** represent the underlying cause of ungodly behaviours – false beliefs or disordered desires hidden in our hearts.
- **The Cross** represents Jesus' incursion into our world and our lives, taking away our guilt and adopting us into God's family as his brothers and sisters. Through Christ we have comfort, cleansing, and the power to change.
- **Fruit** represents godly behaviours amidst the heat of life (eg the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23)
- **Good Roots** represent the true beliefs and well-ordered desires that underly godly living and flow from our new identity in Christ.

*When we seek after spiritual growth, we must not take a superficial approach which simply cuts off the thorns and tugs on the leaves in the hope of producing fruit. We'll need to look beneath the surface. We'll need to discover and get rid of the bad roots that are producing the thorns - false beliefs or disordered desires – and replace them with good roots in order to bear good fruit in our lives. As we've seen, the power to do this comes from our union with Christ who died for us on the cross.*

7. **Discuss:** Think again about the feeling you shared in question 1. In light of what we've read about growth in the Bible during this study, do you still feel the same way? What has changed, or supported, the feeling you chose?

## Next steps from here

*See the next page for homework over the next few weeks. The goal is for each group member to identify and share with the group a **growth area** - an area in which to seek growth during the year. Hopefully in a few weeks, your group will have assembled a list with a growth area for each member.*

*As you study the Bible together this year, keep an eye out for **growth fuel** that is relevant to your growth area or someone else's growth area. It might be a key truth to hold onto, a false belief to get rid of, or something about God's character or actions that helps re-order our desires in a relevant way. Not every passage you study will have fuel for every growth area, but see what you find.*

*From term 2 onwards, there will be a chance for a short **growth review** for one person each week – discussing what you've learned, considering what progress you have made or haven't seen yet, and having the group pray for your growth area.*

*We're not aiming for quick fixes, overnight results or perfect outcomes, but under God we hope that by supporting each other in a way that's intentional but not overbearing, we can spur one another on to grow more and more like Jesus.*

**Finish by praying for this project** – bringing to God any concerns and anxieties about the task, asking him for discernment as we find growth areas, asking him to give growth this year.

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<sup>1</sup> Diagram originally from Tim Lane & Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*, New Growth Press 2008. Further developed in the course *Introduction to Biblical Counselling* delivered by Biblical Counselling Australia 2016.

# Homework: Finding a growth area

As we begin to highlight spiritual growth in our small groups this year, over the next few weeks you are encouraged to prayerfully discern an area for growth in 2022 and share it with your group. This might take some time and contemplation.

## A prayer to pray: Psalm 139:23-24

“Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.”

## Questions to contemplate:

1. What **heat** do you face in your life?
2. What **thorns** do you notice?
3. What **fruit** is missing?

## Some possible growth areas to consider:

HANDS - *This year I'll seek after growth in an area of obedience/service:*

- Generosity to the poor
- Partnership in global mission
- Sharing the gospel with people around me
- Wise stewardship of my money
- Generosity to the people around me
- ...

HEART - *This year I'll seek after growth in my desires and attitudes:*

- Loving God
  - Thankful appreciation of all his gifts
  - Enjoying listening to him via the scriptures
  - Enjoying talking to him in prayer
- Loving God's people
- Loving the lost
- Showing love to a particular person/group or in a particular context
- ...

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT cover the hands and the heart:

- love
- joy
- peace/peaceableness
- patience/forbearance
- kindness
- goodness/generosity
- faithfulness
- gentleness
- self-control

OR: SOMETHING UNDER THE SURFACE

*Spiritual growth is not just about amassing more knowledge. But you might realise there is a particular area of Christian understanding that you need to get clear on in order to move forward with trusting and serving Jesus. You could decide to seek growth in a particular area of understanding this year:*

- What does it really mean for God to be sovereign, or 'in control'?
- What is the Old Testament all about? Was God just nasty back then?
- What is heaven really like? Is it really worth it?
- If I'm saved by grace, why does obedience matter?
- If I'm saved by my own faith, why does belonging to a church matter?
- ...

**Some general guidelines:**

- Choose an area you are comfortable to **share** with your small group
- Choose something that is **big enough** to work on through the year
- Avoid the evangelical **cliches** of “read my Bible and pray more”. Try to think of a growth area which will either cause you to pray and read more, or which will result from prayer and Bible reading.
- You don’t need to diagnose “bad roots” and prescribe remedies straight away. The task for now is just to work out an area where there’s room for growth.

Over the next few weeks, your group leader will invite you to share your growth area with the group. (This isn’t so they can solve it for you on the spot!)

Through the rest of the year, as your group studies the scriptures together, you will keep an eye out for **gospel fuel** that helps each member of the group grow in your chosen areas.